

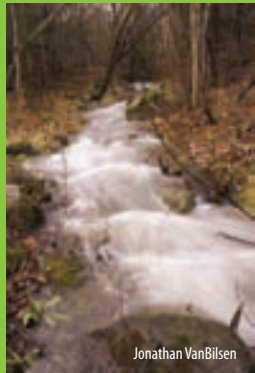
THE OAK RIDGES MORaine FOUNDATION

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THE OAK RIDGES MORaine

A ONE OF A KIND
ECOLOGICAL
Jewel

HELP US CONTINUE
TO MAKE IT
SHINE



Most rivers and streams that flow through the communities of the Greater Toronto Area are sustained by water supplied by the headwaters of the **Oak Ridges Moraine**.

THE OAK RIDGES MORaine

FEW NATURAL FEATURES AFFECT THE LIVES OF MORE ONTARIO RESIDENTS THAN THE OAK RIDGES MORaine.

And as the province recognized in 2002, when it created the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, few are more deserving of our protection and care.

Large aquifers within the rolling 160-kilometre sand and gravel formation supply 600 million litres of clean water to as many as 250,000 people in towns, villages and farms on or adjacent to the Moraine. Most rivers and streams that flow through the communities of the Greater Toronto Area are sustained by water supplied by the headwaters of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Millions more people from Toronto and surrounding cities experience the Moraine through recreational activities such as hiking, cycling, birding, skiing, fishing or golf.

It's a one-of-a-kind ecological jewel.

The Moraine holds the headwaters for 65 streams that drain into Lake Ontario, Lake Simcoe or the Kawartha Lake System. It supports animals as large as white-tailed deer and as rare and mysterious as Jefferson salamanders and a myriad of smaller creatures such as dragonflies, butterflies and tiger beetles. Each spring and fall, its deep interior forests and patchwork of fields—including provincially rare savanna and tallgrass Prairie habitats—provide food and shelter for hundreds of species of migrating birds.

In all, scientists have recorded nearly 500 at-risk plant and animal species on the Moraine—a level of biodiversity that makes it one of the province’s most important repositories of natural diversity.

YET TODAY, DESPITE THE ADOPTION OF AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED CONSERVATION PLAN, THE FUTURE OF THE OAK RIDGES MORaine REMAINS UNCERTAIN.

In 2015, the province is required to conduct its first mandated review of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. The countdown to that process has begun. And it is taking place at a delicate time. While much progress has been made since 2002 in the plan’s adoption and execution among the 32 municipalities with jurisdiction over a part of the Moraine, there’s a great deal more to do—both on the land (restoring vegetation, raising water quality, protecting critical habitat) and in provincial and municipal offices charged with implementing the Plan and/or monitoring and reporting on its results.

Meanwhile, many of the same development pressures—for housing, transportation and infrastructure, aggregate extraction and processing—that made the plan necessary in the first place are intensifying. **Any loss of momentum, weakening of new planning rules or backsliding on achievements could threaten the Moraine’s delicate ecology and hydrology anew, and put a decade’s worth of protection work in jeopardy.**



In many ways, **Measuring Success** is a culmination of the work done by the Foundation since the government created it in 2002.

THE OAK RIDGES MORaine

NO SINGLE AGENCY SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE PLAN OR FOR THE MORaine.

While that's by government design, at a time like this it's a problem. Recognizing this emerging crisis, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation—the nearest thing there is to a Voice of the Moraine—commissioned, and is now proud to have published, the *Measuring Success* reports.

Two years in the making, the eight-volume study documents where we are with the Plan on the Moraine—successes, shortcomings, what's working, what isn't—and provides the government and other stakeholders with recommended actions and the data needed to plot a course that ensures its successful implementation and realization.

In many ways, *Measuring Success* is a culmination of the work done by the Foundation since the government created it in 2002. At that time, the province gave the Foundation \$15 million in funding and a mandate to support the Conservation Plan and other Moraine activities. The Foundation's work since has focused on five key areas: **public education and awareness, research, land stewardship, land acquisition and support for the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail.**

The reports are a direct outgrowth of the Foundation's research mandate. And it was created to fill a gaping need: before the government can conduct an informed and effective Plan review in 2015, all parties require an accurate assessment and record of where things stand.



It bears repeating. With a full review due in just four years, no other group has gathered this data or done this analysis.

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Together, the reports measure “success” on the Moraine in three different but essential dimensions:

1. Condition of the Moraine environment, from a watershed perspective and also in terms of plants, animals and ecology.
2. Rate of progress on implementation of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan at municipal and provincial levels and among area stakeholders.
3. Extent of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation’s achievements in its five core focus areas.

It bears repeating. With a full review due in just four years, no other group has gathered this data or done this analysis.

On the environmental front, this means many of the results compiled for Measuring Success are original, baseline information.

In fact, a key step for scientists doing the project’s environmental work was to identify the right performance indicators—obtainable, verifiable, relevant markers, such as water quality or amount of natural vegetation, that could be studied by future researchers to assess changes through time. Without tracking such indicators—21 potential indicators were identified—it will be impossible to measure the plan’s effectiveness in protecting and enhancing the Moraine’s ecological and hydrological health through time.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS REVEAL?

Overall, the eight reports tell a story of a Moraine that is holding its own in terms of its environmental health, particularly with respect to its base of natural vegetation and cover. Likewise, when it comes to adoption and acceptance of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan by governments, residents, businesses and other stakeholders, the results are generally good. The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation also scores high, both in terms of qualitative stakeholder feedback, as well as quantitative results: through 2010, it had leveraged that original \$15 million funding into \$50-million worth of research, trails, education, land securement and restoration.

Some gaps were expected. The Conservation Plan was enacted only nine years ago, after all. No one thought that by now it would be fully integrated into the regional municipal fabric. Likewise, environmental restoration is a long-term effort, land securement takes time and money, and education and outreach are ongoing.

But there are also some deficiencies of serious concern. More details are available in our summary of the eight reports and the reports themselves. **However, these are the five areas of greatest need:**

Ecological and Hydrological Health

Results in Measuring Success point to numerous areas where significant environmental improvement is necessary. Only one-third of all stream corridors meet the ecological target of 75% natural vegetation coverage, for example. Likewise, stream conditions are well below target standards on a number of indicators: fish community health, benthic community health, phosphorus loading and E. Coli levels. Meanwhile, rare prairie grassland and Savannah habitats, present in small quantities on the Moraine, are under constant threat as is habitat for interior forest species and species-at-risk.

Monitoring and Policy Development

Notwithstanding the 21 performance indicators identified in our reports, there are still no formally agreed upon performance indicators to use in evaluating the effectiveness of the Plan. Likewise, there are policy gaps that have been identified by stakeholders, yet to date no one has addressed them.

Land Restoration and Stewardship

The Moraine is 90% privately owned. In order for the Plan to meet its objectives, the involvement of private landowners is necessary. One of the Foundation's major successes was its ability to work with landowners and stakeholders in delivering the Caring for the Moraine Project. This project helped to restore more than 1,000 acres on the Moraine through tree planting, stream rehabilitation, wetland enhancement and other projects aimed at improving the ecological and hydrological health of the Moraine. Continued non-regulatory work is necessary to complement the regulatory aspects of the Plan.

Land Securement

Only 8.5%, or 16,450 hectares, of the Moraine is secured to protect natural habitats and important features. Yet public polling and stakeholder surveys for Measuring Success found strong support for more extensive and active securement.

Education and Outreach

Many programs and initiatives have helped spread knowledge and understanding of the Moraine environment and the plan's critical importance to its ongoing health. The Foundation, for example, has contacted more than 85,000 landowners and helped instruct 6,000 area school children on the importance of water and wildlife protection. But much more work is needed, particularly on the importance of groundwater.



The Oak Ridge Moraine Foundation has emerged as not only the most logical choice, but the best-equipped agency for the job.

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THE OTHER QUESTION THIS LISTING OF PRIORITIES RAISES IS WHO OR WHAT WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ADDRESSING THEM IN THE FUTURE?

The Oak Ridge Moraine Foundation has emerged as not only the most logical choice, but the best-equipped agency for the job. No other body in the mix is able to or willing to speak or act for the Moraine in as many arenas of planning, politics, community relations, ecological research, restoration and land securement.

Above, we noted the Foundation had leveraged its initial \$15 million in funding into \$50-million worth of work. **Top-line results there include:**

- 430,000 trees planted on 289 hectares
- 310 hectares of prairie restored
- 18 kilometres of streams restored
- 2,259 hectares of new conservation lands secured
- 104 kilometres of trail added to the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail

The Foundation has also earned the backing of the vast majority of stakeholder groups that it works with on the Moraine. In surveys done as part of Measuring Success, more than 80% of those stakeholders said the Foundation had provided positive to very-positive contributions to the Moraine and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Those stakeholders also recommended that the Foundation do more to promote its work as well as its successes and achievements. Likewise, they suggested the Foundation should take an even greater leadership role in partnering with stakeholders and in continuing to drive progress on the non-regulatory aspects of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Hence, we're appealing to the government and the community to help make this a reality. The biggest hurdle: funding. The Foundation's \$15-million funding will be exhausted next year. Despite an impressive track record and enthusiastic stakeholder support, without a new injection of capital, the Foundation won't just be unable to step into a greater leadership role, it will cease to operate.

The timing is critical—not just for the Foundation, but for the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan itself. Not only is there lots of work to be done, but also the loss of the Foundation would leave the Plan headed toward the provincial review without the support of its chief advocate.

Given the challenges ahead, the loss of the Foundation's support represents almost as big a threat to the Moraine as the pressure of new development itself.

In the short window of time that's still available, we urge the government to recognize this opportunity to commit to new funding and a new mandate for the Foundation—and in the process, put the Plan on solid ground.

THE MORAINES ARE AN INVALUABLE NATURAL ASSET FOR THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO.

For the sake of the millions of people and thousands of species that directly depend on it for their livelihood, their water, their well-being, it deserves an advocate to work on its behalf and to ensure its continued protection.

