

# The Oak Ridges Moraine

## Another Water Crisis in the Making?

"Human beings seem to have forgotten their biological roots. We are animals with an absolute need for clean air, water, and soil. In our mistaken belief that we no longer depend on nature's services, we have used air, water and soil, as toxic dumps or development opportunities. It is suicidal.

The fight to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine is a profound philosophical issue, a call to re-learn our need for a diverse, vibrant world which is the ultimate source of our survival and livelihood. We can't afford to lose it."

*David Suzuki*

Earthroots and STORM Coalition are engaged in a fight that effects us all. The Oak Ridges Moraine is a vital watershed and is essential to the preservation of local freshwater supplies. We must support these groups if we want to have any wild spaces left in Southern Ontario for future generations.

*Maude Barlow*

Volunteer National Chairperson  
The Council of Canadians



### THE OAK RIDGES MORaine ANOTHER WATER CRISIS IN THE MAKING?

**Water is at the very core of our being and is vital to our whole body.**

**Let us not take our clean water for granted.**

The Oak Ridges Moraine, a 160 kilometre long ridge of sand and gravel hills running along the northern part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), is the source of drinking water for over 250,000 people, and forms the headwaters for over 65 rivers and streams. The Moraine is the wellspring for critical habitat (wetlands, kettle lakes and kettle bogs and natural and planted forests) for many species of animals already stressed by the changing landscape of southern Ontario.

The water of the Moraine is the lifeblood of both the GTA to the south and watersheds to the north.

Since the 1980s, the urban population of the GTA has begun to advance northward, attracted to the wide vistas, rolling hills and verdant forests of the Moraine. The impact of urban sprawl is al-

ready evident in the number of fields and forests converted to urban malls and subdivisions, the headwater streams entombed beneath pavement, our historic villages and hamlets made redundant by strip malls, and the bumper to bumper traffic jams.

This, however, is not our first incursion onto Moraine lands. By the late 1860s, widespread clearing of trees by settlers had created sand dunes and dried soils on the ridges. Rain, no longer able to soak into stable soils, eroded and clogged streams and flooded lowlands near Lake Ontario. This ecological mayhem was a major factor in the economic recession that hit the Oak Ridges Mo-



raine in the late 1800s. Local populations steadily declined for almost 100 years until the economic and building boom beginning in the 1980s and continuing to the present.

In the 1940s a massive reforestation programme was launched in an attempt to rejuvenate the Oak Ridges Moraine. As the new forests grew, the rivers and streams began to flow freely again, the water table rebounded and flooding diminished. It was hoped at that time that a harsh lesson had been learned and public policies improved to protect the fragile Moraine ecosystem.

Perhaps not. Today, the Oak Ridges Moraine is once again under threat - at an unprecedented scale. Where in the past the settlers used axes and saws to slowly clear the land, today they have bulldozers and earthmovers to quickly level the hills and valleys. Where before the locals relied on groundwater and rivers for water, today they can import it from miles away. And where in the past we were merely unaware, today we have no such excuse. We are often misguided by impetuous arrogance. Arrogance in that we *know* that what we do will forever change the hills and valleys, contaminate the groundwater and redirect waters from their natural course. And yet, we *think* that we can control the impacts of widespread development and leave the Moraine as good as, or better, than before.

Today's settlers may wreak far greater devastation on the Moraine than did their forebearers a hundred years ago. Will there be a way back?

A comprehensive planning framework headed by the provincial government is needed immediately to stop this piecemeal attack on the Moraine. A temporary halt to any further encroachments would give provincial ministries, municipalities and conservation authorities the time to assess the damage already done and to prepare a plan for the future. Up to this point, the provincial government has not listened to our demands. We have seen a water crisis in Ontario already. Do we need another one on the Oak Ridges Moraine before the government will act?

We must have a louder voice. Please add your voice to ours in calling for the province to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine before it's too late.



# Oak Ridges Moraine Action

## What You can Do to Make a Difference

- Telephone Premier Mike Harris at (416) 325-1941 and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at (416) 585-7000. State that:
  - you are opposed to urban development on the Oak Ridges Moraine.
  - you are concerned about the quality and supply of your drinking water.
  - you want this irreplaceable area protected for its wildlife habitat and natural beauty.
  - you want the government to adopt STORM and Earthroots' Action Plan
  - the provincial government must take the lead on a keeping urban sprawl in check and protecting our water.
  - recent polling has shown that 89% of resident voters on the Moraine are in favour of protecting the natural areas and farmlands of the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- Write to your own MPP and give him or her a copy of the letter you write to the Premier. If you live on or near the Moraine, seek a meeting with your MPP to press for positive action. The contact information for your MPP can be obtained by calling (416) 326-6300.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper with your concerns about over-development of the Moraine and the threat to your drinking water.
- Join the thousands of people who have signed STORM's Position Paper (please call our office for a copy or download from our website) which will be forwarded onto the Premier.
- Spread the word! Encourage your friends, neighbours, and colleagues to speak up for the Moraine's rivers, bogs, forests and wildlife.
- Ask Earthroots to send you a Save the Oak Ridges Moraine poster to put in your window to show community solidarity and to encourage public discussion.
- Support Earthroots and STORM's campaigns to protect the Moraine by volunteering your time. Contact both groups about a variety of volunteer opportunities.

Letters, which become part of the public record, can also be sent, faxed, or emailed to:

Premier Mike Harris  
Main Legislative Building  
Room 281  
Queens Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1  
Fax: (416) 325-3745  
webprem@gov.on.ca

and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
777 Bay St., 17<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2E5  
Fax: (416) 585-6470  
mininfo@mah.gov.on.ca

## Our Action Plan to Protect the Moraine

Here are some practical, realistic solutions to the crisis on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Our conservation action plan calls for:

- Formal endorsement by the provincial government of the 1994 *Oak Ridges Moraine Strategy For the Greater Toronto Area*, thereby reasserting provincial interest in the Moraine.
- A temporary freeze on all development applications, official plan and zoning bylaw amendments, to allow time for a land use plan to be developed.
- Preparation and implementation of a land use plan for the Moraine. This plan will provide a cohesive vision, strong protection policies that clearly state where development can take place.
- Implementation of multi-regional groundwater management strategy.
- Establishment of a Land Acquisition Plan whereby discussions between all stakeholders including the public, private, charitable and NGO sectors are initiated to help resolve land ownership conflicts.

To volunteer or for more information:



STORM Coalition

**A non-profit organization founded in 1989 to promote legislated protection of the entire Oak Ridges Moraine through public education and outreach. STORM is a coalition of 25 member groups.**

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**A non-profit, grassroots, environmental organization dedicated to protecting wilderness, wildlife and watersheds through research, education and action.**

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