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## Media Release

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### SYMPOSIUM HONOURS MORAINÉ PROTECTORS

The future ecological health of the Oak Ridges Moraine is in good hands, if the 2007 “Moraine For Life” award recipients are any indication. The awards, which honour outstanding efforts in preserving the ecological integrity of the moraine, were presented on Monday evening to winners ranging from a twelve-year-old girl to a retiree.

“The Oak Ridges Moraine is an icon”, said keynote speaker Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada. “An intensely ecological marvel” that is important to protect, she continued

Organized by the Monitoring the Moraine project partners (Citizens’ Environment Watch, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition and the Centre for Community Mapping) along with the Oak Ridges Moraine Symposium Planning Committee, there are four award categories to acknowledge community champions, municipal leadership, collaborative efforts and proactive approaches to protecting the moraine.

The gala event was a highlight of the two-day Oak Ridges Moraine Symposium held at the Radisson Hotel in Markham. “I am especially pleased that this year’s recipients span generations and represent the growing diversity of the moraine,” says Sonia Dong, acting executive director of Citizens’ Environment Watch. “People from all walks of life are really stepping up to the plate.”

The awards committee were so impressed with the efforts of twelve-year-old Michaela Halsey and retired schoolteacher Dorothy Izzard, they decided both were equally deserving of the Community Champion Award.

When Michaela, who hales from Roseneath saw invasive plant species taking over her own back yard, she took decisive action. Her campaign started with a drive to learn what she could do to fix the situation and sharing her newfound knowledge with others (children and adults alike) at any opportunity she could. She was the driving force behind a restoration project undertaken by her Scouts Canada group, which included eliminating the invasive species through a controlled burn, and planting seeds that are native to the area. The group also designed, built and erected birdhouses as a natural means of controlling insects at the site.

King Township resident Dorothy Izzard, has long been known for her support of the Oak Ridges Moraine. As co-founder of STORM (Save the Oak Ridges Moraine) Coalition, she was instrumental in starting the citizen movement that ultimately resulted in provincial legislation to protect the moraine. Also recognized for her generous land donation to the Nature Conservancy of Canada, she continues to be involved in the cultural and

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natural heritage of the township. This includes monitoring development and other such activities that could impact the moraine, while encouraging smart planning practices.

The award for Collaborative Efforts on the moraine went to Senator Homes, the developer of the “Dreamwood” residential subdivision located partially on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Through consultation with the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority and the City of Vaughan, Dreamwood will incorporate conservation efforts that go far beyond those specified in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. The result is the protection of an extensive natural heritage system through, among other activities, a planting project, the initiation of a wetland monitoring program and the creation of educational materials about the areas natural heritage features.

The Town of Richmond Hill is the 2007 recipient of the Municipal Leadership Award, demonstrated through its moraine-focused partnerships and efforts. The town was instrumental in the formation of the York Region Stewardship Program, which, to date, has engaged 980 volunteers from schools and community groups across Richmond Hill. These volunteers have planted over 3000 native trees and shrubs, and over 6000 wildflowers, as well as erected interpretive signs to acknowledge the unique landscape of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Through education and subsidized materials, the town also encourages residents to plant native trees, shrubs and wildflowers on their own property, and promotes ecologically sound lawn-care practices.

The Award for Pro-active Approaches on the moraine was presented to Bala Araniyasundaran, Laura McDowell, Adrian Coombs from York Region. They are responsible for the expansions and upgrades of municipal water and wastewater facilities. Rather than battling or ignoring residents who express environmental concerns about infrastructure projects, the trio initiated programmes that enable comprehensive public engagement to ensure open, meaningful and responsive opportunities for public input. They have also designed and implemented various training programs to ensure those involved with future infrastructure projects in York Region are sensitive to environmental concerns and well acquainted with the requirements of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. The result is stronger more effective relationships with stakeholders.

The accomplishments of the 2007 Moraine For Life Award recipients are inspiring examples of what can be achieved in protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine. “All of these people reflect the commitment of people across the entire moraine,” says Nathan Fahey, acting executive director of the Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition. “They represent volunteers, staff and organizations that go that extra mile to protect what's important to them.” In the end, it's actually the moraine that is the winner.