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Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MORaine WATCH: KEEPING AN EYE ON THE MORaine

Recently when asked what we can do to help the environment, Dr. Suzuki said: “I think as individuals we absolutely have to get involved in the political process if we’re going to deal with this. We cannot do it as just individuals doing our thing. We need the government to act and the way that we do that is we’ve got to put it on the agenda.”

And now, thanks to a new manual produced by the Monitoring the Moraine (MTM) project partners, residents living on or close to the Oak Ridges Moraine can effectively get involved in the municipal decision making process about the moraine’s future. *Moraine Watch: A Guide to Monitoring Municipal Land Use Planning on the Oak Ridges Moraine* is a how-to guide for community members to monitor development applications and the performance of their municipal government on moraine-related planning.

The manual includes the Moraine Watch Checklist – a step-by-step worksheet for evaluating planning applications, as well as detailed background information on land-use planning and legislation relevant to the moraine. This worksheet can also be accessed separately for use in monitoring specific development applications.

“Ideally, with this manual, we will be able to assess conformity to the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan early enough so that where there are gaps we can try to influence design and/or influence the approval process,” says Debbie Schaefer, Chair of Concerned Citizens of King Township. “I don’t expect to spontaneously debate with a planner about the validity of a structure in relation to a water course; but by using the manual and following the checklist I expect to have more of an influence as my objections will be linked directly to the corresponding sections and subsections of the Plan.”

Enacted in 2002, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) aims to protect the moraine’s ecological and hydrological features. Despite being a provincial land use plan, it is implemented by municipalities through official plans and zoning by-laws amended to conform to the ORMCP. Because there is no legislated provincial oversight to monitor municipal performance, citizens must be the ‘eyes on the moraine’ to ensure municipal conformity.

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Several workshops have been held on the moraine to introduce the manual to interested community members and to familiarize users with how to use the Moraine Watch Checklist for evaluating development applications. These workshops will continue as interest in the Moraine Watch initiative spreads. 2008 will also bring the arrival of the Moraine Watch Tracking System; a web-based service to track, display and archive development activity and monitoring data on an online map of the Oak Ridges Moraine. This system will serve to connect monitoring groups and publicize activities and results.

The Moraine Watch Manual is available on the MTM website (www.monitoringthemoraine.ca). Hard copies or more information can be obtained by contacting Debbe Crandall, Executive Director, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition at 905-880-3465 or dcrandall@stormcoalition.org, Visit STORM's website at www.stormcoalition.org.

MTM is a collaborative project between Citizens' Environment Watch (CEW), STORM, and Centre for Community Mapping (COMAP). It is designed to engage and sustain community volunteers in science, stewardship, monitoring and decision-making on the Oak Ridges Moraine.