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Media Release

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For immediate release

OAK RIDGES MORaine CONSERVATION PLAN ON TRACK

Municipal governments are doing a good job implementing the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP), according to a report prepared by STORM (Save the Oak Ridges Moraine) Coalition, Citizens' Environment Watch (CEW) and Centre for Community Mapping (COMAP). The report, which grades the progress made by upper and lower-tier municipalities, as well as that by the province, is the first of an annual series of report cards intended to highlight the successes and challenges of ORMCP implementation. It is designed and maintained by the Monitoring the Moraine (MTM) project, a partnership between CEW, STORM and COMAP.

The ORMCP, passed in 2002, is a conservation-based provincial plan heralded as a victory by the environmental community and general public. It is unique because municipalities implement the policies through the adoption and approval of official plans and zoning by-laws amended to conform to the ORMCP. The provision of technical support, mapping, guidance and final approvals of municipal conformity are the responsibility of the provincial government.

While it is clear that the Ontario government is committed to the ORMCP, it is not clear that sufficient provincial resources and support were provided to municipalities in order for them to fulfill their obligations. "I think it is safe to assume that the province may have underestimated the complexity of the undertaking," says Debbe Crandall, Executive Director of STORM. "However, the province is to be commended for its commitment and willingness to negotiate with municipalities in areas of conflict between the ORMCP and local approaches."

"Both the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and the Ministry of Environment (MOE) have provided comprehensive technical paper drafts that deal with a variety of topics such as the identification of key natural heritage and hydrologic features and significant wildlife habitat. But those papers are still in draft form," adds Nathan Fahey, STORM's Program Coordinator. "The province needs to immediately finalize these reports and provide sample tree-cutting and site alteration by-laws so that the municipalities can effectively protect the moraine."

Areas of concern regarding municipal responsibility include the passage of site alteration or fill by-laws, which are inconsistent across the moraine. While municipalities need to improve their performance on wellhead protection, the report authors are pleased with the progress being made in groundwater studies and watershed planning.

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“Once all of these policies are in place we’ll be able to start working with community groups on water and forest monitoring,” said Sonia Dong, Program Director at CEW. “Over time, this will help to determine the effectiveness of the ORMCP policies.”

On the whole, municipal performance has been above average – 63% of lower-tier municipalities have met the deadline for official plan conformity. And while all 24 lower-tier municipalities have brought their zoning by-laws into conformity with the ORMCP, the province lags behind; only four have been approved.

While the report is critical of the lengthy time period taken for approvals, it does praise the province for its thorough and comprehensive reviews. It also praises the province for legislative amendments made to the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act* through the *Greenbelt Act*. “A number of problem areas were addressed and rectified in an expedient manner,” says Crandall.

While the MTM authors believe that the ORMCP is an effective and meaningful document, they do make a number of recommendations. For starters, the province should immediately allocate more staff and resources to finalize all approvals. In addition, the province must act to finalize the technical paper series prepared by MNR and MOE. The report also recommends that the province work with the MTM project and partners to adopt a monitoring framework that will allow for an independent evaluation of the implementation of the plan.

The Status Report of the Implementation of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan: Implications for the Greenbelt Plan is available online at www.monitoringthemoraine.ca