

HIGH CONSENSUS: DEEP CONCERNS

Report on a Sustainable Planning Survey of
Ontario's Environmental Stewardship Community



**WaterScape is a project of the
Ontario Headwaters Institute**

August, 2019



Executive Summary

The Ontario Headwaters Institute conducted a survey for its WaterScape project over the summer of 2019 in order to identify the environmental stewardship community's commitment to sustainable planning and its perception of recent environmental policy and program initiatives of the Ontario Government.

This report shares survey results, observations about the dueling perspectives of the environmental stewardship community and the provincial government, offers two recommendations to each of these groups, and its conclusion urges that they address the chasm of mistrust that exists between them.

- The key results from the survey demonstrate that Ontario's environmental stewardship community has:

- **High consensus** on key aspects of sustainable planning on a range of complex issues, from aggregates and agriculture through biodiversity and climate change to land use planning and watershed management; and,
- **Deep concerns** about the provincial government's cutbacks to environmental programs, its business-as-usual economic approach, and its lack of meaningful engagement with civil society.

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- Observations about dueling perspectives describe;
 - An environmental stewardship community focused on sustainable planning, robust environmental protection, meaningful consultation, and transitioning Ontario to a 21st century economy; and,
 - An Ontario government that sees environmental protection as red tape, seems to favour a business-as-usual economic approach, and has significantly curtailed public consultation on numerous initiatives.
- The report provides two recommendations for each for the environmental stewardship community and the Ontario government: that the former continue to champion sustainable planning and seek more resources to do so, and that the government adhere to the trust and transparency principle in its draft environmental plan, which should also be amended to address sustainable planning and practices across all ministries.

The report's conclusion urges the environmental stewardship community and the Government of Ontario to address the chasm of mistrust that exists between them. For our part, the OHI will seek to facilitate a Summit for a Sustainable Ontario.

Introduction

- WaterScape began as a collaborative effort of the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), the Ontario Environment Network (OEN), and the Ontario Headwaters Institute (OHI), operating from January through June 2018.
- WaterScape's purpose at that time was to engage Ontarians in a provincial initiative called Protecting Water for Future Generations: Growing the Greenbelt in the Outer Ring;
- Key accomplishments included holding 6 regional meetings in collaboration with 11 meeting partners that involved about 150 participants; a set of [Proceedings](#); and a [Submission](#) endorsed by more than 140 organizations and individuals.
- Two events in June, 2018, led to this project, as described overleaf: a meeting after which the Ontario Headwaters Institute assumed a co-ordinating role for WaterScape and the election of a new Ontario government.

Acknowledgements

- The OHI thanks the Canada Summer Jobs program for the funding that allowed us to hire a staff person to deliver this survey and report.
- We thank CELA, the OEN, and many of the 11 regional partners for input on the survey, as well as for help in distributing the invitation to fill out the survey. We also thank the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance and the Great Lakes Network for further assistance distributing the invitation.
- Finally, we thank Anum Khan, the summer staff member who helped design the survey, ensured the selection of a digital platform to facilitate responses and the tabulation of answers, and helped with this report and its release. She bears a lot of responsibility for the success of the survey and none for any short-comings in this report, which lie with the Ontario Headwaters Institute.



Project Description

- An initial WaterScape collaborative ran from January to June 2018, engaging Ontarians in a provincial initiative called Protecting Water for Future Generations: Growing the Greenbelt in the Outer Ring, which addressed the protection of regional water supplies in the more populated areas of south-central Ontario through amended land use planning that would add new areas to the Greenbelt.
- Following a meeting in June of that year, the OHI assumed a co-ordinating role for an on-going WaterScape project by providing web space; committing to maintain close relations with CELA, the OEN, the 11 regional partners, and others who expressed a desire to remain involved; and by offering to seek funding for further collaborative efforts.
- Also in June, 2018, Ontario elected a new government which subsequently announced a number of initiatives that would change much of the province's environmental policy landscape, particularly for aggregates, endangered species, forestry, land use planning, and watershed management – all key aspects of sustainable planning.
- As these policy directions were released, the Ontario Headwaters Institute perceived a role for the WaterScape project to identify and bridge any gaps between the priorities of the environmental stewardship community and the emerging policy directions of the new Ontario government.

The term *environmental stewardship community* refers to a broad range of organizations that may become involved in environmental and conservation issues. This includes environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), whether unincorporated, incorporated, and with or without charitable status; conservation organizations, agricultural organizations, energy and complete community groups, and First Nations; and groups such as scouts, guides, churches, service clubs, and community associations that may at times get involved in ecological issues.

- In early 2019, the OHI applied for a grant to the Canada Summer Jobs program to hire a staff member whose responsibilities were to help update the contact list, establish a website and social media presence for WaterScape, help to design a Sustainable Planning survey, ensure the selection of a digital platform to facilitate responses and the tabulation of answers, and help with this report and its release.
- Following early tasks, invitations to participate in a survey on sustainable planning, with 27 questions targeting 12 subject areas, were sent to 400 e-mail addresses and generated 128 completed surveys - a 32% response rate.
- Responses are depicted in table found in the next section, followed by a summary of the responses, observations on the dueling perspectives of the environmental stewardship community and the provincial government, and a series of recommendations to address the gaps in those perspectives.
- The detailed results are also shown in pie charts that can be found at www.waterscape.ca and at www.ontarioheadwaters.ca/waterscape/.

Responses to the Survey: High Consensus and Deep Concerns

Question		High Consensus	Deep Concern
Land Use Planning, Watershed Management, and Climate Change			
3*	Do you support the identification and protection of areas of ecological and hydrological significance as a key element in a framework approach to land use planning?	99.2 %	
4	Do you think that Ontario does enough to protect Ontario's natural heritage, inland waters, and prime agricultural lands?		96.9 %
5	If the framework approach mentioned above identifies habitats of ecological and hydrological significance in areas experiencing increasing development, would you support their inclusion in a Greenbelt or similar special planning area?	95.3 %	
6	Do you think the Province is doing enough to regulate and monitor the placement of fill (excess soil from excavation/construction sites) on third party lands?		78.9 %
7	Current practices allow the application of raw sewage and bio-solids on third party land, particularly agricultural lands. Do you think the Province is adequately safeguarding land and water with respect to these applications?		67.7 %
8	Do you agree that using the watershed as the "ecologically meaningful scale for planning", as described in the Provincial Policy Statement, should be retained in forthcoming amendments to the Statement?	86.6 %	
9	A recent amendment to the Conservation Authorities Act deleted their historic role for the conservation of natural resources and watershed management from their core mandate. Do you agree with this revised mandate?		96.9%
10	In the housing action plan, Ontario has announced that it will be developing a provincial regulation to replace certain development guidelines in each of the province's 36 conservation authorities. Do you see a need for public participation in the granting of permits under this proposed provincial regulation?	75.6%	
11	For the same anticipated regulation as described in question 10, do you see a need for provincial oversight and/or an appeal process for permits granted under this new regulation?	71%	
12	Do you agree that the potential for increased flooding as Ontario's climate changes needs to be addressed through a sustainability lens that includes both watershed-wide forests and wetlands?	92.1%	
13	Do you agree that Ontario should transition its existing systems-based approaches for land use planning and watershed management to embrace Integrated Watershed Management, incorporating inter-agency collaboration and cumulative monitoring while also including considerations for biodiversity, climate change, and public health?	82.5%	

* Questions 1 and 2 asked respondents to clarify the nature of their involvement in the survey. They are omitted in this table but available in the detailed results mentioned on page 3.

Question		High Consensus	Deep Concern
Water Quality and Public Health			
14	Do you perceive a need for increased provincial involvement in efforts to eliminate boil water advisories and persistent drinking water quality problems across Ontario?	94.5%	
15	Do you support the expansion of drinking water source protection to areas not yet implemented under the Clean Water Act, 2006?	94.5%	
16	Do you support the implementation of the municipal water sustainability plans, targets, and performance indicators as described but not established under the Water Opportunities Act, 2010?	83.3%	
17	Do you support increased efforts by the Province to better protect water quality by lowering the releases of carcinogens, other toxic chemicals (persistent, bio-accumulative, and endocrine disrupting substances), excess nutrients, and the release of raw or inadequately treated sewage from industrial, agricultural, and municipal sources?	97.7%	
18	Do you support a requirement for public notification of sewage spills, including combined sewage overflow (CSO) events, in all municipalities?	99.2%	

Natural Heritage, Biodiversity, Endangered Species, Agriculture, & Aggregates			
19	Do you think that Ontario should develop a provincial document similar to the federal guideline How Much Habitat is Enough in order to establish targets to protect the ecological and hydrological integrity of Ontario's watersheds?	89.1%	
20	Do you think the Province is doing enough for biodiversity, such as protecting 17% of Ontario's lands and fresh waters in accordance with Canada's commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity, protecting and restoring wetlands, and taking action against invasive species?		93.8%
21	Do you agree with the direction of changes to the Endangered Species Act, and in particular the provision allowing development applicants to pay a fee rather than implement measures to protect an endangered species?		97.7%
22	Are you concerned about the reduction of environmental permitting and oversight in the aggregate review, as well as the absence of meaningful public consultation on this file?	95.3%	
23	Do you support the expansion of provincial efforts to help transition Ontario toward sustainable agriculture, including support for local food, family farming, best management practices to reduce the impact of agriculture on receiving waters, and tax credits for areas such as wetlands or other areas in natural heritage?	89.8%	
24	Duplicate to Q 23: removed from results	NA	NA

Question		High Consensus	Deep Concern
Protecting and Expanding the Greenbelt			
25	Do you support efforts to add areas to the Greenbelt based on Recommendation 71 in Planning for Health, Prosperity and Growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe: 2015-2041, including important surface water areas, key headwater areas, groundwater recharge areas, highly vulnerable aquifers, and areas where stress on groundwater is evident?	95.3%	
26	Do you support the designation of new greenbelt lands that are not contiguous to the existing Greenbelt?	90.6%	
27	Do you support the addition of the Bluebelt, as proposed by the Oak Ridges Moraine Partnership, to the Greenbelt?	80%	
28	Do you support public consultation on expanding the Greenbelt and/or extending some of its enhanced aspects of environmental protection to other areas of Ontario, such as across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and in the Ring of Fire?	95.3%	
29	Do you have confidence in the Province's commitment to protect the Greenbelt?		61.7%

A Final Question			
30	The Ontario Headwaters Institute has applied for funding to build WaterScape into an on-going collaborative effort. If we obtain the funding, would you be interested in participating in such an effort?	65.6%	

Summary of Survey Responses

The results of the Sustainable Planning Needs Assessment survey shows that Ontario's environmental stewardship community has:

- **High consensus** on key aspects of sustainable planning on a range of complex issues, from aggregates and agriculture through biodiversity and climate change to land use planning and watershed management; and,
- **Deep concerns** about the provincial government's cutbacks of environmental programs, its business-as-usual economic approach, and its lack of meaningful engagement with civil society.

The responses also show significant interest in participating in an on-going WaterScape project, with what the OHI considers healthy reservations based on the nature and governance of such a collaborative effort.

Observations on Dueling Perspectives

Ontario's environmental stewardship community:

- Sees sustainable planning and practices as tools to preserve not just global ecosystem norms related to the climate, hydrologic cycle, and biodiversity but to also safeguard regional ecological integrity, public health, and economic stability;
- Has a solid track record of constructive input that has helped shape robust environmental policy and program direction in numerous arenas, from the international, bi-national, and national, to the provincial, regional, municipal, and sectoral;
 - Key global successes include efforts on acid rain, atmospheric nuclear testing, biodiversity, climate change, ozone-depleting substances, and saving the whales; and,
 - Regional successes run from helping to invent the Blue Box, shift agriculture and forestry to more sustainable practices, protect species and habitats, protect the Great Lakes and remediate its Areas of Concern, establish Biosphere reserves in Ontario, protect the Oak Ridges Moraine, and end the use of herbicides for cosmetic purposes;
- Is not opposed to business or development but understands that business-as-usual means that we will continue to exceed the capacity of the planet to provide the ecological goods and services we need; and,
- Believes that it has a lot to offer to the current government but is frustrated at the lack of detail in and meaningful consultation around key environmental initiatives.

For its part, the Ontario government has:

- Repeatedly castigated environmental policies and programs as costly red tape;
- Moved to significantly reduce various environmental policies and programs with little evidence of either their harm to the economy or how a proposed new direction will meet claims of continued environmental protection;
- Appeared to favour business-as-usual economic approaches, especially related to aggregates, endangered species, forestry, land use planning, and watershed management;
- Replaced meaningful consultation with website surveys and restricted the participation of the environmental stewardship community in meetings; and,
- Articulated a false narrative that “Preserving and Protecting our Environment for Future Generations: A Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan” is official Ontario policy and not a draft document.

Clearly, as the global climate, biodiversity, and economic crises gather momentum, Ontario needs to bridge the gaps in these perspectives, tapping the wisdom and experience of the environmental stewardship community as much as that of the business community and work to establish an economy for the 21st century that ensures sustainable development: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Recommendations to Bridge the Gaps

1. The environmental stewardship community should continue to champion the adoption of policies, at all levels of government and across all sectors, to help protect the planet's climate, hydrologic cycles, and its bio-diversity, and to promote sustainable planning and practices to help shift Ontario to a 21st century economy.
2. The OHI and its partners should seek the resources necessary to make the WaterScape project an on-going collaborative on sustainable planning, with efforts to attract broader participation from all sectors of society.
3. The Ontario government should commit to the Trust and Transparency principle in its draft environmental plan by conducting meaningful consultations and providing more information on many of its initiatives.
4. The Ontario government's draft environmental plan needs to be amended to address sustainable planning and practices, across all ministries, and not just cite the need to improve the capacity of the sustainable finance sector to become a global leader.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ontario Headwaters Institute urges the environmental stewardship community and the Government of Ontario to address the chasm of mistrust that exists between them and build bridges.

For our part, the OHI will seek to facilitate a Summit for a Sustainable Ontario.

For further information, please contact

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