

# Central Cataraqui Region Natural Heritage Study

## Executive Summary

August 2006

### *Introduction*

The Central Cataraqui Regional Natural Heritage Study (CCRNHS) has been undertaken to identify a system of natural features and areas, including wetlands, woodlands, valleylands and significant wildlife areas. The findings will assist in updating official plan policies for the City of Kingston and Loyalist Township. The study area includes all urban and rural lands located within the municipal boundaries of the two municipalities.

The purposes of this study are:

1. to identify a 'broad-brush' system of features and areas that supports biodiversity within the City of Kingston and Loyalist Township, with attention to the surrounding area, and
2. to suggest ways in which each municipality, in consultation and partnership with the community, might develop a strategy to protect and enhance the habitats and biological diversity of that system.

Examples of natural features and areas include: wetlands, fish habitat, woodlands, habitat of endangered species and threatened species, and areas of natural and scientific interest.

The natural heritage study is a good news story. Unlike many areas of southern Ontario, there are relatively healthy natural communities still intact in the Loyalist and Kingston area. Natural corridors form a web of landforms and habitats that are important for a diverse wildlife community. Benefits to the local community include a healthy environment in which to live, the protection of precious water resources, and attractions for the local tourism industry. An array of natural heritage features allows for recreational activities such as hiking and walking.

### *Background*

The study is necessary to ensure that local planning documents are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), which outlines the Province's interests in land use and development. The PPS requires planning authorities to protect significant natural heritage features and areas by restricting development and site alteration, and by demonstrating that the features and ecological function of the areas will not be harmed. This is done normally through the preparation of an environmental impact assessment by a qualified individual.

Loyalist Township has a recently approved Official Plan (2000). It includes mapping and policies for selected natural heritage areas previously studied at the time of Official Plan preparation. However, it must now consider other features. The council is looking to review and update the Plan. For the City of Kingston, the present study will form an important component of the forthcoming consolidated Official Plan. The City currently uses three different Official Plans (former City of Kingston, Township of Kingston and Pittsburgh Township).

The CCRNHS study was managed by a Technical Steering Committee that was responsible for administering the preparation and completion of the study. The committee consisted of staff representatives from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of Natural Resources, and from each municipality and the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority.

A Public Advisory Committee was created to provide input from local environmental groups, woodlot owners, the farm and development communities, as well as the general public. These representatives provided valuable local knowledge and advice on other available information and resources necessary to satisfactorily complete the study.

Two public information sessions were held over the course of the study. The initial round of public open houses was coordinated to receive input on draft findings and options. The second round was coordinated to gather feedback on a set of draft recommendations.

#### *Which natural areas are most important?*

Existing information about natural heritage features and areas was gathered and mapped. A set of criteria was then developed, and applied to the data collected, to assess the significance of certain features and areas.

The next step was to verify the available information by conducting field checks. In most situations these checks did not require entering onto private lands. Permission was obtained from landowners prior to accessing private property.

Maps and recommendations for land use planning and stewardship activities that would maintain and enhance the Central Cataraqui Region natural heritage system were prepared and presented to the community and each of the municipalities.

#### *Implications for Land Use Planning and Stewardship*

Completion of this study will help both municipalities to make informed decisions on the natural heritage components of the Provincial Policy Statement.

Suggestions for Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments are provided in this report for consideration by the municipalities as part of the implementation process. This report suggests additional municipal planning and implementation tools, including a woodland conservation by-law, a municipal fill/site alteration by-law and landscaping guidelines, which should be further researched as part of the Implementation phase.

The study is not just about land use planning. Stewardship, education, and restoration of impaired habitats are also important components.

This study provides information needed to identify priority locations for stewardship and rehabilitation efforts, including acquisition of title or easement to a property, development of property management guidelines, and implementation of land-based rehabilitation projects.

The municipalities are encouraged to work with other government and non-profit agencies, and the community to identify and undertake stewardship and restoration projects. Ongoing data collection and monitoring will be important to ensure the success of a natural heritage strategy.