

The Honourable Kathryn McGarry  
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Suite 6630, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Whitney Block  
99 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1W3

October 3, 2017

Dear Minister McGarry:

**Re: EBR 013-1014: Proposed Regional Natural Heritage System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe**

We, the undersigned, are very pleased to see that the government is moving ahead without delay to identify and protect a Regional Natural Heritage System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). In order to recover biodiversity and better prepare for the impacts of climate change, however, the proposed system should be amended to better account for regional variations, enhance landscape connectivity and more fully incorporate municipal and conservation authority expertise.

To update and finalize the Regional Natural Heritage System, we urge your ministry to:

- **Identify smaller core natural areas in heavily developed landscapes.** The ministry should identify and include small core natural areas (smaller than the proposed minimum of 100 hectares) where habitats are highly fragmented by roads and development and where there is little natural cover. In places like south Simcoe, Dufferin, Wellington, Waterloo, Brant and western Haldimand Counties, little forest, wetland and other natural cover remains and consequently even smaller features have high biodiversity value and merit inclusion in the Regional Natural Heritage System.
- **Adapt linkage width to best achieve connectivity while reflecting regional variation.** The proposed linkages should reflect regional variations across the GGH to promote connectivity and ecosystem function and enable wildlife movement. Linkages intended to support connectivity at the broader landscape level should be a minimum width of two kilometres. This is consistent with the Oak Ridges Moraine's east-west Natural Linkage Areas. To increase the number of linkages and build an extra layer of protection into the system, narrower linkages should be identified in highly fragmented areas (in addition to the proposed linkages at a minimum width of 500 metres).
- **Integrate other identified natural heritage systems into the Regional Natural Heritage System.** Many municipalities and conservation authorities have already identified natural heritage systems locally, and these data layers could greatly enhance the regional system, if incorporated. We recommend that the ministry make a formal request to all municipalities and conservation authorities in the GGH

to access and integrate their data into the final draft of the Regional Natural Heritage System. Integrating municipal natural heritage systems also provides consistency and avoids the confusion of having two different maps in official plans.

We urge your ministry to implement these three recommendations to help ensure that the Regional Natural Heritage System for the GGH will support environmental health, economic prosperity, and a high quality of life across the region for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to working closely with you and your staff to finalize the Regional Natural Heritage System for the GGH. Please direct replies to: Joyce Chau, Executive Director, EcoSpark, 601 Christie Street, Suite 174, Toronto, ON, M6G 4C7 ([joyce@ecospark.ca](mailto:joyce@ecospark.ca)).

Yours sincerely,

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