

Submission to:

Date Submitted: 12/30/2022

- The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
- The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- The Honourable Graydon Smith, Minister of Natural Resources
- The Honourable David Piccini, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

RE: Review of A Place to Grow and Provincial Policy Statement, ERO number 019-6177

This submission is a response to Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting number 019-6177, regarding Ontario's House Supply Action Plan 3.0, in which the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) is seeking input on the on how to create a streamlined province-wide land use planning policy framework that enables municipalities to approve housing faster and increase housing supply. Specifically, it proposes that the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and A Place to Grow be integrated into a new province-wide planning instrument.

Dougan & Associates Ecological Consulting & Design (D&A) is a well-established and award-winning ecological consulting and design firm based in Guelph, Ontario. For over four decades our firm has been providing ecologically driven design and natural heritage planning services to the public and private sectors, working primarily within Ontario's environmental planning and policy framework. Our firm has a strong working background in natural heritage planning based on the existing Planning Act, PPS, and other provincial plans (Niagara Escarpment Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan, Greenbelt Plan). For the past 25 years we have been intensively engaged in supporting municipalities in key growth areas of southern Ontario including Caledon, Guelph, Markham, Milton, Brampton, and Vaughan. We have worked extensively for public and private sector clients; our comments and recommendations reflect this history.

Based on our experience and science-focused background, we see areas where the current approvals process could be improved, as follows:

- the current environmental planning framework would be more efficient if the terminology and rules between the PPS, provincial plans and municipal plans were better harmonized in terms of definitions of landscape features and ecological functions.
- clarifying interpretation of standard impacts and their mitigation. For example, standardized buffer requirements and specifications would streamline approvals. The current site-by-site and discretionary approaches cause yield uncertainty for developers, unbalanced outcomes for natural resources, and often lead to plan resubmissions and in contentious cases, to hearings.
- Updated direction in guiding documents to address matters that are now better understood than previously, such as headwater feature assessment, and feature-based water balance assessment.

We do not believe that downloading more responsibilities for environmental planning onto municipalities will necessarily improve efficiencies and outcomes. In our decades of work with municipalities, we have found that despite the guiding resources made available by the Province, municipalities have not uniformly integrated the PPS-based systems approach that evolved between 1997 and 2020, while some have adopted more robust systems approaches with regional and local designations. As a result, municipal approaches to address wetlands, woodlands, rare habitats and significant wildlife habitat are generally uneven.

The more recent updated provincial plans (NEP, ORM, GBP) have built in more consistent standards. Where these are applicable, they require additional policy layers to be addressed in addition to local policies of the municipality. The Endangered Species Act is separate legislation with its own regulations, which in application sometimes represents a poor fit with the PPS-based systems approach, and which also triggers a separate approval process in which the municipality may not be consulted or even officially notified. Municipal roles in species at risk matters should be identified in policies. Our recent comments on OWES changes discussed the importance of an integrated approach to SAR within the PPS-based systems approach.

We are supportive of initiatives to improve availability and affordability of housing and strongly encourage development planning that integrates and adds to the immense value of Ontario's environmental resources. Despite the legacy of planning and policy that has evolved and been progressively refined since the early 1960's, current science clearly indicates that resources and biodiversity are continuing to decline, due to pressures placed by past development and climate change. Given the high stakes at present, streamlined provincial planning policies needs to move away from "either/or" tradeoffs; we must more aggressively pursue options proven to effectively protect and enhance environmental services locally, provincially and nationally.

If the current PPS and A Place to Grow framework are integrated into a new province-wide planning instrument, our recommendations are as follows:

1. **If the new policy tool is going to achieve improvement over the current policy framework, it should be developed with input from a wide range of experts, practitioners and stakeholders**, including those with expertise in environmental planning and natural heritage system management.
2. **Any changes in natural heritage terminology and systems approach used in the current PPS should be carefully considered; harmonizing terminology wherever possible will help make seamless the future policy application.** The existing PPS framework for natural heritage systems has importance because it reflects a strong science basis and is already entrenched in municipal policies, guidelines, and technical documents (e.g. municipal official plans and secondary plans, Natural Heritage Reference Manual, Significant Wildlife Habitat Technical Guide, Significant Wildlife Habitat Ecodistrict Guidelines, OWES, Ecological Land Classification System). Harmonization of terminology and definitions with that in other provincial plans would greatly assist policy application moving forward.

3. **The new policy tools should be based on clear accounting that identifies, protects and enhances the services provided by natural heritage systems for the long term.** Development should be a key tool to underwrite positive improvements to environmental quality and functions. This has typically been addressed through subwatershed studies and secondary plans, which we believe is still the most effective scale to determine boundaries for new development.
4. **The ERO posting outlines multiple goals for this new province-wide planning instrument, one of which is ‘*continuing to protect the environment*’.** We suggest that the new policy tools should aim higher, towards achieving overall ‘net gain’ of natural systems and their ecological functions. The Town of Milton has developed and applied standards in this regard for new greenfield development. To be progressive and aligned with current environmental knowledge and practice, new policy tools should also:
 - a) **Encourage and prioritize restoration of degraded ecological systems in a ‘net gain’ model;**
 - b) **Focus on environmental systems and ecological quality (health) of these systems, rather than individual features and functions;**
 - c) **Recognize and expand the critical roles that environmental systems play in climate change abatement, maintaining biodiversity, and sustaining robust ecological systems where Ontarians live and work, now and into the future.**

The ERO posting provides a list of possible core elements of this new policy, including: *“Natural Heritage – streamlined policy direction that applies across the province for Ontario’s natural heritage, empowering local decision making, and providing more options to reduce development impacts, including offsetting/compensation (Proposed Updates to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System)”*. We recognize that this is a general statement and is related to several other current ERO postings including Changes to the Conservation Authority Act (ERO 019-6141#), Changes to OWES (ERO 019-6160), and offsetting policy (ERO 019-6161). Please see our more detailed letters responding to each of the specific ERO postings.

We would be available to discuss the areas of concern presented in this submission.

Respectfully submitted,



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