



November 29, 2023

The Hon. Andrea Khanjin
Minister
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
College Park 5th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Khanjin:

Re: ERO 091-7733 - Amendment to Ontario Regulation 316/07 under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006 to create a recreational class provincial park in the Township of Uxbridge

In response to ERO 019-7733, we thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and submit the following for your consideration.

As a local watershed management organization, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (Conservation Authority) is dedicated to conserving, restoring and managing the Lake Simcoe watershed. Through collaboration, our mission is to protect and restore the Lake Simcoe watershed with innovative research, policy and action. We congratulate the Province of Ontario for engaging with community partners and stakeholders to establish a new Urban Provincial Park in the Township of Uxbridge that will maintain and expand protection of critical natural heritage features in the headwaters of Uxbridge Brook, while providing opportunities for passive recreation, education, and scientific research that contribute to watershed health.

Since 2000, the Conservation Authority has managed Durham Regional Forest on behalf of the Regional Municipality of Durham. Afforestation activities began at the forest in the 1930s with objectives that included restoring forest cover across a landscape that had been degraded following land use development. Almost a century later and following best forest management practices, the re-established woodland cover not only protects headwater recharge areas for watercourses and groundwater systems that flow to Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario, but also connects forest and natural heritage systems across the landscape, provides habitat for resident and migrating wildlife, and supports climate change mitigation through Carbon sequestration and storage. Bringing together individual property parcels to coordinate

management objectives for the protection of ecosystems and promotion of biodiversity in southern Ontario's greenspaces will ensure that this legacy of landscape-level restoration may continue.

Located within a 40-minute drive of Canada's largest urban population, Durham Regional Forest and the surrounding public lands have become a destination for visitors from within and well-beyond Uxbridge Township. The public lands support passive recreational activities year-round, provide an outdoor classroom for students of all ages to learn about the natural environment, and are a research site for studies of wildlife, climate change and other subjects. As people seek opportunities to engage with the world around us, the use of forest trails, parking lots and other infrastructure continues to increase. Impacts to the forest have included trail widening, invasive species introduction, and conflict amongst users arising from visitor density.

Developing and implementing a Park Management Plan and establishing new infrastructure to welcome Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park visitors, while expanding the amount of land available for public use beyond the Regional Forest and other public lands, will ensure that all Ontarians may access and enjoy the area, while managing impacts to the natural features they protect.

We recommend that the following considerations be made when establishing the new park:

- Establishment of infrastructure that accommodates visitor use while protecting sensitive natural heritage features. This should include the identification of habitat zones where trail development or other uses are not permitted.
- The conifer plantations established to arrest soil erosion and re-establish forest cover require periodic thinning to continue development towards natural forest conditions, increased biodiversity and climate resilience. Benefits also include improved safety for forest visitors as hazardous trees are removed. Land management activities should include the development and implementation of forest management practices in accordance with Provincial silvicultural guidelines.
- Recreational activities permitted should be consistent with the protection of the natural features and existing passive uses. Motorized vehicles should be prohibited along trails unless required for property management activities.
- The level of interest, dedicated support and active engagement of the local community and stakeholder groups in Uxbridge is tremendous. We believe it would be in the Province's best interest to continue to collaborate with community partners to inform property management planning and infrastructure development.
- Existing trail user groups and the Uxbridge Township Trails Committee should they be engaged would be very helpful in the development of land management plans.

Infrastructure to support visitor experience, such as wayfinding and other signage, could be developed in coordination with the managers of surrounding public lands. Consistency across properties will help to mitigate risk and promote an enjoyable and safe experience for visitors.

- The proposed provincial park sits within an important source water protection area atop the Oak Ridges Moraine. Park development activities should be developed to protect and enhance this critical resource.
- The collection of public landholdings adjacent to and surrounding the proposed provincial park provide important trail connections east to west along the Oak Ridges Moraine, and north to south from Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario. As an important trail hub within the Trail Capital of Canada, Provincial Park development should seek opportunities to enhance, expand and promote these connections.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority remains committed to working with the Province and other community partners towards the development and establishment of the new Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Baldwin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rob Baldwin
Chief Administrative Officer