

Town, Region, TRCA support New Oak Ridges Moraine park proposal

King Township is 'ground zero' in the next phase of the battle to protect and preserve the Oak Ridges Moraine. This time, however, unlikely allies are racing to voice their support for a new, landmark park proposal.

The proposed reserve, dubbed the East Humber Headwaters Park, is to cover 500 acres of largely vacant land north of King Road, between Bathurst St. and Dufferin St. At its widest, the wedge-shaped property spans the entire width of the narrow corridor of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area between King City and Richmond Hill, and includes important headwaters of the Humber River flowing into Lake Ontario.

The vision for the site includes opening it to public access, with gradual restoration of the natural environment to reflect the native Oak Ridges Moraine habitat.

Local government and conservation leaders are vocal in their support.

'We're very excited about this unique opportunity to restore and protect such a critical and narrow natural linkage corridor on the Oak Ridges Moraine,' said John Mackenzie, CEO of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, which has committed its support to the proposal. 'With the support and leadership of the Province, in partnership with the Region, we're going to be able to create something truly special for King and all of York Region.'

The board of TRCA, and the councils of King Township, York Region and the City of Toronto have all passed resolutions in recent weeks supporting for the project.

Some important steps remain, including securing the support of the Ontario Government. To bring the land into public ownership, supporters are calling for the property, which has been in the same family for nearly 80 years, to be exchanged for less ecologically-sensitive development lands owned by the Province.

This is very similar to the tried-and-tested approach that was used to create the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve in 2004. The proposed park would similarly protect the vital watershed and provide a significantly enhanced connection for wildlife in the Oak Ridges Moraine.

'It's a game changer,' according to Debbe Crandall, former executive director of the Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition, and an instrumental voice in the successful campaign to ensure the long-term protection of the Moraine. 'The opportunity to fully protect and restore a property like this, located at a vital pinch point in the Moraine, is pivotal to making the long-term vision of a healthy and vital Oak Ridges Moraine a reality. It's a chance to create an ecological crown jewel for the residents of King and all of the central GTA.'