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Grey County Natural Heritage Systems Study  
Open House #2 – Owen Sound  
Thursday, December 10, 2015 – 6-8 p.m.  
Grey County Administration Building, Council Chambers

Presentation made by Katharina Walton (Natural Resource Solutions Inc., NRSI) and Lorelei Jones (Macaulay Shiomi Howson). David Stephenson (NRSI) also in attendance. Grey County staff in attendance were Sarah Morrison and Monica Scribner.

16 people attended the Open House. 6 maps were on display as hard copy posters for people to view as they came into the hall:

- Map All Natural Heritage Features
- Map of all natural heritage features (watercourses and waterbodies, significant valleylands, wetlands, provincially significant wetlands, woodlands, significant woodlands, Life Science ANSIs, deer yards and wintering areas)
- Map 5 Significant Natural Features, Core Areas, and Linkages
- Map of all significant features identified in the study (significant valleylands, wetlands  $\geq 2$ ha, provincially significant wetlands, significant woodlands, Life Science ANSIs, deer yards and wintering areas), along with the Core Areas and Linkages
- Map 6 Natural Heritage System
- Natural Heritage System shown (dark green), otop of significant natural features (light green), and aquatic features (watercourses and waterbodies; blue)
- Map 8 Increased Protection Policy Areas
- Areas with increased protection shown (i.e. NHS that does not coincide with a PSW or other protected property as per Map 9)
- Map 12 Newly Protected Areas

- NHS that does not coincide with a significant natural heritage feature, as per Map 5

#### Map 9 Natural Heritage System and Other Protected Areas

- Comparison between the NHS and lands already protected by a variety of agencies or in public ownership (Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy properties, Conservation Authority properties, Bruce Trail Conservancy properties, County Forest, Crown Land, Federal Land). NHS not covered by one of the additional layers are private lands.

Lorelei explained that the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) is part of the Provincial Planning Act. It needs to be considered as a whole and provides direction on planning matters in the province, including on natural heritage. The County's Official Plan needs to be consistent with the PPS and may be more restrictive. In the same way, municipal Official Plans need to be consistent with the County's Official Plan.

### Questions and Answers

How were the Linkages identified? Was it arbitrary or where other things such as wildlife movement considered?

The Linkages were delineated to ensure connection between Core Areas. They were delineated to follow significant natural features as much as possible, while minimizing the length of the linkage. Ontario Nature's Greenway Connection Routes were considered, as was the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's (MNR's) wildlife landscape connectivity analysis (Bowman and Cordes 2015, Koen et al. 2014). The Linkages identified in the NHS are not the only "linkages" wildlife will use. The other natural heritage features outside of the NHS, including significant valleylands, provide excellent linkage opportunities as well.

Some of the recommended policy is too watered down, some are too strict. Seems similar to what the MNR has done with the ESA. I was involved with the Big Picture project and the mapping is very poor; it should not be used for this study. I randomly looked at a known wildlife corridor in the southwest corner of the County and this movement corridor is not included in a Linkage.

The Big Picture 2000 project was taken into consideration, as in that it was a very large scale natural heritage system study completed by the province in southern Ontario. It factored into our background review, but mapping layers were not used in this study. Not all wildlife movement corridors are known or mapped, and certainly cannot all be included in the NHS on a County level scale. Wildlife movement will continue to occur through the protection of natural heritage features

and through site specific studies. Also see the response to the comment above regarding Linkages.

Where does the 300m dimension come from to identify deep interior areas? If you apply 120m to these, you are still within the natural feature. How does this make sense?

100m is the most common dimension used to identify interior habitat, usually used in the context for woodlands. 200m is cited in the identification of deep interior habitat. The 300m dimension was chosen specifically for Grey County as a way to identify the truly large natural areas, based on the characteristics of the County. The 300m dimension was used to identify the areas of deep interior area, but the Core Areas were actually delineated by the edge of the features. The 120m adjacent lands were added outside of this, i.e. outside the natural features.

Will the natural habitat within the Linkages increase over time?

Yes. It is recommended that development within the Linkages be restricted, so areas not currently natural may become so in the future. However, for the most part, Linkages already follow natural features, so are comprised of natural features already. This also makes the Linkages generally wider than 200m.

Are the significant valleylands 200m wide on either side of the river?

The valleylands were mapped as 200m wide corridors, centered on the river (total width of 200m; 100m on each side of river).

Where can I get a copy of the presentation?

The presentation will be posted on the project's website soon.

I live in an area that is inundated with gravel pit applications near the Saugeen River. Now that it is identified as a significant valleyland, what does this mean? 5 of the applications have been approved, and another 2 are pending.

Gravel pits come with their own rules, regulations and requirements for separate studies. The identification of the NHS is one added piece of the analysis that will be considered in applications, but it will not necessarily stop an aggregate application from being approved. It is unclear whether or not applications that have already been submitted would be impacted by new NHS policies as the supporting studies would have already included an analysis of the impact on the natural heritage features as currently identified in the Official Plan.

Why is Grey County only involved in identifying natural heritage features now?

Grey County has identified natural features before. The County undertook a study a few years ago to identify significant woodlands. The County also protects natural heritage features through its Official Plan. This current study is taking a Systems approach to natural heritage protection, which is direction clearly provided in the 2014 Provincial Policy Statement.

At the site specific level, how will the Core Areas and Linkages be refined? Who will do this?

The report will provide details. For instance, we recommend that woodlands be delineated as per the guidance provided by the MNRF in the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt Plan Technical documents. Significant valleylands will be delineated using the approach used in both the Middlesex and Huron Natural Heritage System Studies. Boundaries are typically identified by an environmental consultant working for a landowner, but can also be delineated by a Conservation Authority or municipality.

Why were certain areas identified as Core Areas and others not?

Significant effort went into the analysis, identification, and mapping of these areas. Not all the detail could be provided in the presentation as we wanted to keep it fairly brief. More detail will be provided in the report.

## **Comments**

I am very encouraged that the significant valleylands have been identified in the County. I have been fighting for years to get the Beatty Saugeen designated as a significant valleyland near Holstein.

General consensus at the meeting was support of the 200m width of linkages as a minimum. Some species require wider movement corridors.

Restoration areas should be considered. Likely areas include abandoned railways and some agricultural fields. Agricultural fields are being abandoned quite regularly in the County.

General consensus at the meeting was support to include the NHS in a Schedule of the Official Plan, but an amendment should not always be required. Don't make landowners have to go through Official Plan amendment to correct a mapping error.

Clearly define "essential infrastructure".

Clearly define "legally existing uses".

Identify what types of existing uses can be expanded in Linkages and Core Areas. Some businesses, such as greenhouses, can be very intensive. Would the building of additional, very large greenhouses be allowed in the NHS?

The Aggregate Resources Act works in parallel to the Planning Act. Keep this in mind.

Hedgerows should be protected in the County. Large corporate farms take hedgerows out, which is leading to erosion of land.

Need balanced approach as per Provincial Policy Statement.

The Grey County Official Plan should include policies on Environmental Impact Studies including when they are required and how they should be scoped.

An EIS can't be required unless a planning application is submitted and so Municipalities will need to use a Holding provision on the zoning which would only be lifted when an EIS was prepared and would therefore have to be done before a building permit was issued. Guidance should be provided on when an EIS could be scoped to provide some clarity. The Holding symbol is probably the least offensive approach.

The presentation and maps will be posted on the project's website.

Comments should be provided to Sarah Morrison by January 15, 2016.

Minutes prepared by Katharina Richter, NRSI.