

## Grey County Natural Heritage Systems Study

### Technical Advisory Committee Meeting #1

Wednesday, February 25, 2015

### Seminar Room

Present: David Stephenson, Katharina Walton, Suzanne Robinson, Judy Rhodes-Munk, Dave Featherstone, Erik Downing, Andy Sorensen, Liz Buckton, Scott Taylor, Sarah Morrison, Alisha Buitenhuis, and Monica Scribner (recording secretary)

### Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves to the group.

### Presentation by Natural Resource Solutions Inc.

The County retained Natural Resource Solutions Inc. to do the Natural Heritage System Study. David Stephenson & Katharina Walton presented.

The purpose of the study is to identify the natural heritage system within the County in a manner which looks at the linkages between individual heritage features. The study will be completed consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) taking into account local knowledge and environmental expertise. Crucial to this study will be utilizing a “made in Grey” approach which also considers resource use and economic development.

Five base maps were developed in advance of the Technical Advisory Committee Meeting. The study will include significant features as identified under the PPS or linkages between features. Soliciting public input to date has included sending mail outs in the local tax bills, to increase awareness of this study. Two public open house sessions will be held at the end March; Owen Sound and Durham each with the same presentation. The opportunity to meet with individual stakeholder groups will also be available on these dates.

## Discussion

### *Review of NHS approach and criteria*

## NHS Components - Data Sources and Omissions

- It's important that the County and Conservation Authorities work well together.
- Big Head River and Sydenham River are missing from Map 5.
- NHS items that are difficult to map: significant valley lands, significant wildlife habitat and habitat of endangered and threatened species. Previous studies have been done, in the form of development specific Environmental Impact Studies (EIS). However there is no central repository for these EIS's at this time.
- There are a few different approaches used by other municipalities to map significant valley lands. The lack of reliable contour and elevation mapping could be an impediment here.
- Ontario Greenway system shows large forest areas, priority stewardship areas and linkages.
- Great Lakes Conservation Blueprint for Biodiversity shows terrestrial and aquatic protected areas.
- Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) area does not encompass all the natural features.

## Creating the NHS

- The scale is County wide with some large areas that are over 1000 hectares.
- Landscape context is 40% forest coverage with significant tourism and recreation.
- Determining the criteria for linkages will be difficult. It is however important to keep in mind that even if a linkage or feature does not get identified on the map, it does not mean that it does not or will not continue to exist. In the end the study will set balanced criteria, but cannot be 'everything to everyone'.
- The scale used when determining significant areas is important and can make a big difference when looking at significant features.
- We have a great amount of features in our area; the policy side is the tough part. We want to keep the science as strong as possible which will keep the study defensible.

- We want to ensure policy is consistent for mapped features and restoration areas. There is a 'Best Practices Guide to Natural Heritage Systems Planning' from Ontario Nature book available to view.

## Discussion:

- Grey Sauble Conservation Authority regulated layer will have a valley land component. Other related features are flood plains and slopes, however, not all conservation authorities within Grey County have the same level of regulation, waterline and elevation mapping.
- Worked agricultural lands as well as pasture lands are also valuable to the overall Natural Heritage System.
- Interpreting slopes is difficult based on rough contours of aerial photography. We have to be careful here as we don't want to be mapping 'ditches' within the significant valley lands.
- The regulated areas may already encompass the majority of the significant valley lands.
- Should be simple to put a layer on top of regulated areas that are not green.
- Saugeen Valley County Authority currently does not have regulation mapping for all watershed areas. They have one layer that could be worked from; they are hoping is complete in the spring.

## *Water Features*

Some water courses are missing from the map for water features. There is a need to capture the main river tributaries; Bighead, Beaver, Sydenham, Pottawatomi, Saugeen including Rocky Saugeen, South Saugeen, etc. GSCA watershed has many water courses that flow into Georgian Bay. Depending on the scale used this could include other smaller systems like Indian River, St. Vincent, Kiefer Creek and Waterton Creek. Workman's Creek east of Meaford is partly covered on the map.

## *Additional Requirements*

- It would be helpful if NRSI could get the mapping from each Conservation Authority.
- The gradient would be an important component.
- The NEC may have topography that may help; depending on the size criteria.

- The adjacent lands policy has 120 m buffer which is a consideration for down the road at the EIS stage. We need clarity of where the boundaries are and refine them.
- GSCA has digital layers and a digital elevation model is in process.

Email Katharina with any further ideas later as they arise.

### *Significant Wildlife Habitat and Species at Risk*

- NRSI does not have data for significant wildlife habitat and such a map would be impossible to create. Going forward the County needs to exercise due diligence when looking at properties.
- Bulking up cores and linkages, mapping would go a long way towards the protection of significant wildlife habitat. Need to say in policy that mapping is not all inclusive. Can utilize these features to enhance the system.
- MNR is developing a habitat matrix which is specific to Grey County which should assist in flagging potential wildlife habitat. Doesn't mean that agricultural uses can't continue. Suzanne will send the list to the Conservation Authorities and the County.
- Karst areas are mapped but you need to look at the specific site; as the mapping is in precise and used more as a flagging tool.
- Grey County has had questions on both layers for accuracy. When looking at a property, use due diligence and use it as a flag.

To summarize, we cannot say that even if we incorporate some habitat that we have incorporated, all significant wildlife habitats, we must still use due diligence. There will be overlap with habitats for species at risk with significant wildlife habitats.

- Community mapping: Natural Heritage Information Centre is going through a process that in the near future they will be populating where the large raptor wintering areas are. It's new information for them but Suzanne can look at the data they have and may be able to access that information for us. It brings some of the cultural meadow habitats into the picture and gets back to the scale of mapping. Grey County doesn't stand out as having large raptor wintering areas because of all the large forest areas.
- We need to keep the study as scientific as possible but we know there will be manipulation in the policies and the implementation. The data sensitivities around species at risk also need to be recognized and some simply cannot be shown on public maps.

- Grey County will present our findings in the fall to council. Council can then receive the study. At the time of the Official Plan Amendment to implement the mapping and the policy there could be some flexibility allowed and some 'manipulation' of the results, depending on feedback received.
- We need to be careful with how we represent the significant wildlife habitat.
- The science will be there, need to decide if NHS policies or feature policies will be used. With species at risk, there is sensitivity of locations.
- Some areas have been studied; some haven't been studied or reported so it won't be inclusive. Barn swallows, etc. that are on farms will be hard to identify. County Official Plan has EIS checks and balances that work together to balance protection, resource use and development. We need to determine species information and with limitations of the info reported, how much detail we need to include. Updated their Grey County species at risk data.
- NRSI will likely exclude man made structures.
- There have been American badger sightings but they are hard to positively identify and cannot be shown on a public map.

## Other- Questions and Data Gaps

Let NRSI know:

- Should mapping for drinking water source protection areas be included?
- Any site specific areas to check out during the spring aerial flight and/or the spring drive of Grey County?
- Any additional information they may need?
- Should agricultural, aggregate areas, existing licensed areas, recreation areas and/or tourist areas be mapped?
- Any new quarries coming?
- Approved license map layer to be forwarded to NRSI (MNR will have a layer of license bound)
- Let them know of 'hot spots' to view from land or air (Conservation Authorities can look at and help)
- Do we need to be aware of any approved developments which should then be excluded from significant feature mapping i.e. if they already have their development approvals.

There are lots of map layers so Katharina will be going through them all.

-SVCA has data available for soils and recharge areas. Should they be put in as a different map layer? Should Drinking Water Source Protection mapping be included here? In the end the group concluded likely not.

ANSI: generally just rely on existing provincial mapping here.

We need to remember that it's a County level system. Perhaps in the future each municipality will have their own lower tier system which feeds into the County wide system. Each municipality can capture details within their local area.

-Are there subsets of the County to require more detail or treatment cognizant work?

-We look at bigger picture for non-settlement areas and are cognizant that settlement and recreation areas are where we will see our biggest development pressures.

-Are there shoreline issues?

-We need to be cognizant of different types of wetlands. An identified coastal wetland may not be same as an inland wetland.

-MNRF and CA wetlands have been mapped.

-Maps are updated by Andy, Erik and Dave at the Conversation Authorities often.

## Next Steps

The two public meeting dates will be announced to councillors if they wish to attend and stakeholders can talk with the consultants on March 31/15.

The next TAC meeting (#2) is not arranged yet but looking at possibly June or July.

Application of the draft criteria is available and the preliminary NHS for review and comment.

Adjourned at 11:40 am