

Natural Heritage Discussion Questions

Number	Questions	Response
1	<p>As required by the Growth Plan, the new Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan mapping and policies must be incorporated into the Regional Official Plan. Based on options outlined in the Natural Heritage Discussion paper, what is the best approach in incorporating the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan into the Regional Official Plan?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 13-20 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper (options appear in Section 3.3)</p>	<p>In section 3.3 of the Discussion Paper, three mapping options are presented to incorporate the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System (NHSGP) into the Regional Natural Heritage System (RNHS). These options would see the NHSGP 1) come into the RNHS as a separate entity, 2) harmonize with the GBNHS as one 'Provincial' NHS, or 3) become part of the designated RNHS.</p> <p>Option 2, harmonizing Greenbelt Natural Heritage System (GBNHS) and Growth Plan Natural Heritage System (NHSGP) presents the best direction for incorporating Growth Plan mapping into the ROP, promoting a more streamlined and user-friendly approach. This allows Provincial Plan systems to remain distinct from the RNHS, while avoiding a third separate system, which could cause confusion. This would also allow for the GBNHS to remain an overlay, avoiding unnecessary policy changes that would be required with Option 3.</p> <p>An overlay approach to mapping both the GBNHS and NHSGP would also be consistent with Growth Plan and Provincial Policy Statement policies.</p>
2	<p>Regional Natural Heritage System policies were last updated through Regional Official Plan Amendment 38. Are the current goals and objectives for the Regional Natural Heritage System policies still relevant/appropriate? How</p>	<p>The goals and objectives are still considered to be appropriate and relevant to the current Regional Natural Heritage System.</p>

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	<p>the can Regional Official Plan be revised further to address these goals and objectives?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 21-23 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	
3	<p>To ease the implementation of buffers and vegetation protection zones, should the Region include more detailed policies describing minimum standards?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see page 23-27 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>The current ROP definition for buffers implies case by case analysis for their application. The development of clear policies and supporting guidelines endorsed by the Region, the Local Municipalities and the Conservation Authorities is supported. The policies and guidelines should be science based and consider opportunities for variable buffers depending on the sensitivity of key features and the impacts associated with adjacent development. In addition, policies and guidelines should be context sensitive vis a vis infill/intensification areas and greenfield development and other legitimate planning considerations such as the development of complete communities.</p> <p>Additionally, Regional policies should not conflict with, or contradict, existing Conservation Authority policies on the application of buffers. Within their respective regulation areas, Conservation Authorities should be determining standards for buffers.</p>
4	<p>Given the policy direction provided by the Provincial Policy Statement and Provincial plans, how should policy and mapping address the relationship between natural heritage protection</p>	<p>In section 5.3 of the Discussion Paper, Option 2 (Figure 12 in the Discussion Paper) appears to achieve the best balance between the interests and objectives of the Natural Heritage and Agricultural Systems. Specifically, this option:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps all key features under one designation, maintaining what is already present in the Regional Natural Heritage System; • Would establish a Prime Agricultural designation as mandated by the

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	<p>and agriculture outside of the Urban Area or the Natural Heritage System?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 38-45 and of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper (options appear in Section 5.3) and/or pages 17-27 of the Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan; and,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would establish other components of the RNHS (e.g. linkage areas) as an overlay which would maintain protection of natural heritage, while providing some flexibility for existing agricultural operations in these areas to expand.
5	<p>The Greenbelt Plan 2017 and Growth Plan 2019 require municipalities to identify Water Resource Systems in Official Plans. Based on the two (2) options provided in the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper, how should the Water Resource System be incorporated into the ROP?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 46-48 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper (options</p>	<p>The proposed Water Resource System should be brought into the ROP as part of a unified section with the RNHS, as proposed in Option 1 in Section 6.3 of the Discussion Paper. This would provide regional policy that would recognize the integration and overlap between the two systems, and avoid the unnecessary duplication of policies.</p> <p>Although this option would consolidate everything under the RNHS, consideration should be given for mapping that identifies where the RNHS and WRS are separate, and where they overlap, in an effort to provide the user a better understanding of what components (NHS/WRS) are present and where.</p>

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	appear in Section 6.3).	
6	<p>Preserving natural heritage remains a key component of Halton's planning vision. Should Halton Region develop a Natural Heritage Strategy and what should be included in such a strategy?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 49-50 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>If a Natural Heritage Strategy is to be developed, its overall goals and objectives should align with those of the RNHS, while including objectives and a purpose that is clearly distinguishable from what is already being achieved by existing ROP policies. The strategy should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community awareness and the encouragement of stewardship practices; • Connecting with Climate Change initiatives/policies that would benefit the natural environment (e.g. low impact development, stormwater management upgrades); • Promoting water conservation practices; and, • Highlighting the benefits of the existing natural environment (e.g. vegetation as flood control, benefits of wetlands to water resources).
7	<p>Should the Regional Official Plan incorporate objectives and policies to support/recognize the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 53-54 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>This system exists outside of the Halton Hills boundary, and as such staff will not be providing a response.</p>
8	<p>The Regional Official Plan is required to conform to</p>	<p>Source Protection policies are largely present where drinking water is sourced and withdrawn (i.e. wellhead protection areas and intake protection zones). Currently these policies are created by the Conservation Authorities for specific</p>

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	<p>applicable Source Protection Plans and must be updated through this Regional Official Plan Review process. What is the best approach to address Drinking Water Source Protection policies and mapping?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 54-55 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>Source Protection Plan (SPP) areas.</p> <p>The ROP should implement SPP policies and mapping based on the geographic boundaries of the SPP areas. This will ensure proper conformity with each of the three Source Protection Plans currently in effect in Halton Region.</p>
9	<p>The Regional Official Plan is required to conform to the updated Natural Hazard policies in the PPS. What is the best approach to incorporate Natural Hazard policies and mapping?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 55-56 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>The Region and area municipalities should first consult with the Conservation Authorities (CAs) on their mapping and policies regarding natural hazards and flood plains. It should then be considered whether existing CA policies and mapping can be brought into the ROP. Given the CAs represent the interests of the Province on natural hazards, it is likely their policies would align with current Provincial legislation.</p> <p>The ROP should direct local municipalities to work with Conservation Authorities to map natural hazards in their Official Plans, which aligns with Option 3 presented in section 7.6 of the Discussion Paper. The Region should consider including these maps (when completed) as ROP Schedules so that natural hazards are present in all Official Plans to avoid any confusion, while bringing as much attention to these areas as possible.</p>
10	<p>How can Halton Region best support the protection and</p>	<p>The current means for identifying significant woodlands in ROP policies is largely limited to the size of the woodland. The quality of the woodland, including the presence and extent of non-native species and invasive tree</p>

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	<p>enhancement of significant woodlands through land use policy?</p> <p>For more information on this topic, please see pages 57-58 of the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper.</p>	<p>species needs to be incorporated into the ROP definition of significant woodlands and given due consideration in related policies.</p> <p>This issue has come to the forefront during the preparation of the Vision Georgetown Subwatershed Study as it relates to a 'black locust woodland' located on a former wayside pit. This woodland is proposed to be identified as a Special Study Area pending the completion of the Regional Official Plan review.</p>
11	<p>Are there any additional considerations or trends that Halton Region should review in terms of the Natural Heritage component of the Regional Official Plan Review?</p>	<p>When discussing 'refinements' to the RNHS, it should be noted this can also mean scaling back in certain areas. For example, where the system appears to cover areas of land that has been previously developed, or has already been cleared for development, this can be refined (scaled back) to better reflect the true extent of the RNHS.</p> <p>The impacts of refinements made to the RNHS within settlement areas need to be better communicated moving forward. Settlement areas are, for the most part, made up of lots that are much smaller than those in the Rural and Agricultural System, and the impacts of expanding the RNHS in these areas are likely to be more significant for landowners. Clear communication of restrictions tied to RNHS policies for lands within settlement areas should be a priority when consulting with the public on this component of the ROP.</p> <p>RNHS policies and guidelines should be science-based and consider opportunities for refining the system through the more detailed Subwatershed Studies undertaken in support of Secondary Plans and/or Environmental Impact Assessments and sound ecological practices. The identification and implementation of a truly sustainable system needs to be based on ground truthing and should consider opportunities such as reforestation that may result in a better ecological outcome than might otherwise be the case. In addition, NHS policies and guidelines should be context sensitive vis a vis infill/intensification areas and greenfield development and other legitimate planning considerations such as the development of complete communities.</p>

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General Questionnaire		
1	<p>The current Regional Official Plan aims to protect approximately 50% of the total area of Halton for Natural Heritage. Is this an appropriate goal to maintain? Are there other ways to measure how effective we are at protecting the environment?</p>	<p>Providing an estimate of land protected through the Regional Natural Heritage System is an effective measure for promoting the system's presence in Halton. This measure could be enhanced by providing percentage land areas within the RNHS that is key features and all other system components. This would complement the Region's mapping of the RNHS where key features and the rest of the system are separate layers.</p> <p>Measuring land area increases (or decreases) of significant woodlands, wetlands, or other key features should be taken into consideration in future mapping exercises.</p> <p>Additionally, showing natural heritage systems from Provincial Plans (i.e. Greenbelt and Growth Plan) as a percentage of the RNHS would be an effective way to measure the impacts of these systems in Halton, while also showing the extent to which the RNHS goes beyond Provincial systems.</p> <p>Mapping the RNHS and its system components, by municipality, would provide more clarity for the user on what features exist where. This would also provide a greater understanding of why the protections are there, and where they could potentially expand.</p> <p>Note: this question should refer to 50% as an outcome, as it is not a clearly defined goal or objective in the ROP.</p>
2	<p>Are there other policies or actions Halton can include in the Regional Official Plan Review to protect and enhance the Natural Heritage System?</p>	<p>One of the more significant changes to the RNHS through this review will be the implementation of the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System. The manner in which this is achieved should be consistent with Growth Plan policies and clearly identified within the ROP.</p> <p>The interpretation and classification of storm water management ponds in the NHS needs to be clarified moving forward. Currently, there are existing permissions to allow naturalized storm water management ponds within the</p>

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		Greenbelt Plan Protected Countryside Area subject to specific criteria. The Region should consider whether similar policies should be implemented in the Regional Official Plan.
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