

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Environmental Services
May 5, 2022

Report of the Commissioner of Public Works

Regional Greening Strategy Refinement and 2021 Achievements

1. Recommendations

1. Council adopt the refined Regional Greening Strategy
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

2. Summary

This report seeks adoption of a refined Regional Greening Strategy (Greening Strategy) and presents a refined approach for delivering key priorities over the next 10 years. The refined Greening Strategy is presented in Attachment 1. This report also provides Council with an update on activities and significant Greening Strategy achievements for 2021.

Key Points:

- The Greening Strategy is an evolving program that adapts to deliver on-the-ground action to achieve the Region's natural environment priorities
- First adopted in 2001, and last refined in 2012, the Greening Strategy has supported planting over 1.7 million trees and securing 1,518 hectares of land for conservation
- In 2021, the Greening Strategy resulted in planting of 92,154 trees and shrubs, securing 142 hectares of land for conservation, inspiring and informing residents through 57 events and leveraged \$2.8 million in external funding
- To ensure it meets changing needs of the Region's diverse communities and environmental challenges, the Greening Strategy was identified for a 10-year review and refinement

- Public and stakeholders communicated strong support for the Greening Strategy as well as a desire to take action at the individual and community levels to create a healthy natural environment
- The refined Greening Strategy commits to continuing and expanding core programs, developing new partnerships and piloting new programs to offer residents more opportunities to get involved

3. Background

Greening Strategy contributes to creating and maintaining sustainable natural environments and communities

Since its adoption in 2001 and refinement in 2012, the Greening Strategy has been used as a tool to implement the York Region Official Plan vision for a Sustainable Natural Environment. Delivery is achieved through partnerships and on-the-ground actions that protect and enhance the natural environment and the Regional Greenlands System. Actions result in the protection and enhancement of natural features including forests, wetlands and grasslands (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Key Strategies and Plans Deliver on Regional Official Plan Objectives



Green infrastructure, including trees, forests and other natural features, provide an array of environmental and health benefits to residents such as cleaning air and water, providing shade and cooling our communities, reducing stormwater runoff and removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Benefits of the Natural Environment



Twenty years of successful Greening Strategy implementation demonstrate on-the-ground results

Delivered through four action areas, Environmental Land Protection and Preservation, Enhancement and Rehabilitation, Stewardship and Education, and Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge, the Greening Strategy has supported planting more than 1.7 million trees and shrubs and securing 1,518 hectares of lands for conservation. Over the past 20 years, a Regional investment of \$19 million has secured \$108 million in conservation lands through land securement partnerships, donations from landowners, and funding secured through grants.

Innovative actions implemented through the Greening Strategy have been recognized through numerous awards including:

- 2021 York Region designation as a Tree City of the World by the Arbour Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- 2019 Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Excellence in Conservation
- 2019 Green World Awards (Silver) for Environmental Best Practices

The Greening Strategy remains a key delivery mechanism for achieving Region canopy and woodland cover targets.

4. Analysis

Greening Strategy continues to adapt and deliver through challenging COVID-19 circumstances

In 2021, Greening Strategy programs and implementation partners continued to adapt to challenges posed by COVID-19. Programming evolved to meet deliverables and provide residents with options to meet their needs while aligning with COVID-19 public health measures.

Greening Strategy partners operated by adapting their programming to ensure safe and effective practices, including digital and socially distanced outcomes. These actions resulted in over 92,000 trees and shrubs being planted, including creation of 36 hectares of woodland. Outreach events remained lower than normal with 57 events delivered (Table 1). Additional outcomes included the planting of 3,520 pollinator friendly plants and distribution of 2,170 pollinator friendly seed packets.

Table 1
Greening Strategy 2021 Achievements

Action Area	Goal	Target (Minimum)	2021 Achievement
Enhancement and Rehabilitation	Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on both public and private lands	Plant 70,000 trees and shrubs	92,154 trees and shrubs planted
Environmental Land Protection and Preservation	Restore linkages and protect core natural areas including forests, wetlands and significant habitat	Increasing area (hectares) of environmental lands secured	142 hectares of environmental land secured
Stewardship and Education	Educate residents about the value of the natural environment and provide opportunities to connect with nature and inspire action	100 outreach events Engage 50,000 residents	57 outreach events Over 50,000 residents engaged
Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge	Share knowledge, demonstrate leadership and be innovative in protecting the natural environment	Host four technical regional forums Present at two science and technology forums	20 forums hosted with agencies and local municipalities 18 presentations at science and technology forums

York Region was the 2021 recipient of Susan Wiecek Forestry Education Award

In February 2022, York Region received the 2021 Susan Wiecek Forestry Education Award. The award, issued by Forests Ontario, is presented to individuals or organizations for outstanding contributions to forestry education in Ontario. In the past six years, over 250,000 residents have been engaged through 1,100 events hosted by York Region. During COVID-19, Discover Your Forest Kits were created reaching over 1,330 residents.

With funding support from Infrastructure Canada, the Region acquired 142-hectare property to expand the York Regional Forest

In 2019, York Region was approved for \$10 million in funding through Infrastructure Canada's Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) to implement a natural infrastructure project. The project will result in over 400,000 trees and shrubs being planted across the Region, including establishing 100 hectares of new woodland by 2027.

In 2021, the Region secured 142 hectares of land with approximately 82 hectares available for tree planting. The Region leveraged DMAF funding towards the purchase of the property. In addition to establishing new woodlands and protecting existing woodlands, the property will be operated as a York Regional Forest tract, increasing access to green space for residents.

Greening Strategy identified for a 10-year review and refinement in 2021

With 2021 marking the 20-year anniversary of the Greening Strategy and 10 years since the last refinement, the Greening Strategy was reviewed to ensure it meets the changing needs of the Region's diverse communities and environmental challenges. The review ensures our Greening Strategy remains consistent with new and updated Corporate documents such as Vision, draft Regional Official Plan and draft Climate Change Action Plan.

Consultation with the public, staff and stakeholders was key to informing the refined Greening Strategy. A public survey was completed in the fall of 2021, with 935 responses received. Stakeholders were consulted multiple times, including a workshop with representatives from 22 organizations such as local municipalities, conservation authorities, school boards and other organizations. Public and stakeholder input provided insights on the importance of the Greening Strategy and identified opportunities to improve delivery of on-the-ground actions.

Refined Strategy commits to continued delivery of award-winning programs with opportunities to expand activities through new innovative partnerships

The Greening Strategy refinement process confirmed that Action Areas and associated programs remain relevant, effective and supported by the public and stakeholders. The refined Greening Strategy retains these Action Areas and looks to expand on the success of existing programs by increasing access and capacity (Attachment 1).

The refined Greening Strategy includes continuing emphasis on tree planting and expanding programming to support restoration and enhancement of other types of natural features including wetlands, prairies, hedgerows, as well as pollinator habitat and invasive species management. The Greening Strategy also demonstrates commitment to ongoing collaboration with the agricultural community and related organizations to promote and deliver programs.

Partnerships will continue to be the primary delivery mechanism for the Greening Strategy, allowing the Region to effectively implement programs and efficiently use available funding. Partnerships leverage expertise and additional funding, which often matches or surpasses the investment made by the Region. Actions in the refined Greening Strategy focus on exploring new partnerships with municipalities, school boards, libraries, businesses and non-profit organizations.

Greening Strategy leverages innovative and digital technology to deliver on corporate Vision and Strategic Plan

The refined Greening Strategy continues to support the Region's vision for a sustainable environment and healthy communities and Official Plan policies including a Sustainable Natural Environment, Complete Communities and Agricultural System. The policy review identified that our Greening Strategy remains aligned with key Regional priorities. The Greening Strategy continues to contribute to the Region's 2051 canopy cover target of 40% and woodland cover target of 25%, demonstrating the Region's commitment to on-the-ground action. These actions are supported through innovative digital approaches, including the development and implementation of a tree planting prioritization tool, to identify priority areas to increase canopy cover, and the use of LiDAR to improve accuracy in canopy cover assessments and improved planning for York Regional Forest trails.

Actions in the refined Greening Strategy are also vital to implementation of the draft York Region Climate Change Action Plan, aiding in achieving outcomes under the four priority action areas. Greening Strategy actions, including tree planting and natural feature enhancement, provide numerous benefits that support climate change mitigation including carbon sequestration, regulating climate, improving air quality and enhancing water storage. These actions support creating more resilient communities, that can adapt to and manage the impacts of climate change.

Public and stakeholder consultation demonstrates strong interest in protecting and improving the natural environment

Throughout the fall of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, staff completed multiple stakeholder consultations and a public survey to understand changing needs of residents and partners. Through this engagement, strong support for the Greening Strategy and a desire for York Region to continue and expand programs was communicated.

Stakeholders from local municipalities, environmental organizations and conservation authorities provided feedback on the Greening Strategy. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of the Greening Strategy in achieving on-the-ground actions, as well as delivery

of climate change initiatives. Stakeholder identified the key role the Greening Strategy plays in creating beneficial networks that support partners in implementing more on-the-ground actions.

The public survey gauged current levels of understanding and awareness of the Greening Strategy, perceived importance of the natural environment, and feedback on the Region's role in protecting and restoring the natural environment. Respondents overwhelmingly believe York Region should invest in protecting and enhancing the natural environment with 96% of respondents indicating this activity is very important.

The survey also showed a high level of interest from respondents in participating in a variety of programs offered through the Greening Strategy, including tree planting and educational events. All existing action areas continue to be valued by respondents with a strong desire to see more tree planting, opportunities to learn about and experience the natural environment, and securing land for conservation.

Areas cited as new opportunities for the Greening Strategy included better promotion of the Greening Strategy and programs, native tree and plant sales, fruit tree planting initiatives, and restoration of a variety of habitat types.

Agricultural community consulted to identify partnership opportunities

Agricultural land in York Region plays a significant role in protecting and restoring environmental features, functions and corridors. A workshop was held in early 2022 with the agricultural community to discuss the role agriculture lands play in meeting Greening Strategy objectives and opportunities to collaborate on initiatives in the future.

Key outcomes from this meeting include:

- Recognizing the role of agriculture lands in protecting natural heritage features, creating linkages between natural areas, providing habitat for wildlife and helping to mitigate climate change
- Collaborating to promote program and funding opportunities to farmers for natural feature protection and enhancement
- Partner with agriculture organizations to recognize the important role agricultural lands play through existing natural environment programming and events

The Region is committed to ongoing dialogue and collaboration with the agriculture community on Greening Strategy initiatives.

Region will pilot programs that give residents more options to get involved

Residents communicated a desire for more opportunities to participate in Greening Strategy programming. The refined Greening Strategy proposes a series of actions to support increased awareness of the Strategy and opportunities to get involved. Pilot programs to increase involvement include a Region-wide native tree and plant sale, exploring

opportunities to support and promote fruit trees and expanding educational opportunities to experience the natural environment.

5. Financial

Through partnerships, the Greening Strategy leverages in-kind resources and external funding for each action area. In 2021, \$1,940,000 was approved in the operating budget for the Greening Strategy, including \$795,500 for environmental land purchases (Table 2). The remaining \$1,144,500 supports operating programs and partnerships including large scale reforestation, backyard tree planting, outdoor education, and land securement agreements. In 2021, program partners leveraged an additional \$433,000 in funding for program delivery and the Region leveraged \$2.4 million in funding for land securement and urban tree planting from Infrastructure Canada’s Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. Over the past 20 years, a Regional investment of \$19 million has secured \$108 million in conservation lands through leveraging additional funding and land donations.

Table 2
Greening Strategy 2021 Operating Budget Overview

Program	2021 Expenditures*	2022 Budget
Environmental Land Purchases	\$795,500	\$806,000
Greening Strategy Implementation	\$1,144,500	\$1,309,000
Total Operating Budget	\$1,940,000	\$2,115,000

*actual 2021 expenditures

To implement the refined Greening Strategy and deliver on residents’ desire for more opportunities to contribute to the natural environment, an annual operating budget increase of \$50,000 per year over four years is required. This additional funding will be requested through the Region’s multi-year budget process. Staff will continue to seek opportunities to leverage external funding to support Greening Strategy delivery.

Land prices continue to increase throughout the Region limiting our ability to secure conservation lands within existing budgets. The Region is experiencing an increased demand for public green space. Staff will explore funding opportunities to address market pressures and increasing demand and bring forward requests for additional funding for conservation land securement through the multi-year budget process.

6. Local Impact

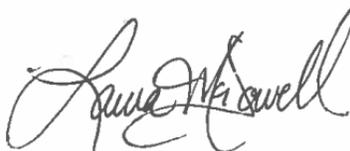
Through Greening Strategy programs, local municipalities and residents take action to protect and enhance the Region's natural environment. Local municipalities and non-government organizations have benefited directly from the Greening Strategy through on-the-ground actions or direct support for their programs. The refined Greening Strategy ensures that actions and programs remain relevant and beneficial to Regional and local municipal strategic priorities. Program delivery will continue to provide local municipalities and residents with opportunities to enhance and experience the natural environment.

7. Conclusion

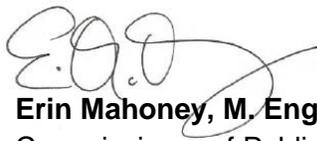
The Regional Greening Strategy has been an innovative and impactful means to protect and enhance the Region's natural environment over the past 20 years. Through implementation of the Greening Strategy, over 1.7 million trees and shrubs have been planted and 1,518 hectares of conservation lands secured. Through this refinement process, Region residents have re-affirmed the critical role the Greening Strategy plays in protecting the natural environment and creating healthy, livable communities. The refined Greening Strategy positions York Region as leader in developing and implementing innovative and collaborative natural environment programs that deliver measure results.

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April 13, 2022
Attachments (1)
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MARCH 2022

ATTACHMENT 1

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK GREENING STRATEGY

STEPS TO A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT





Family fun in the forest

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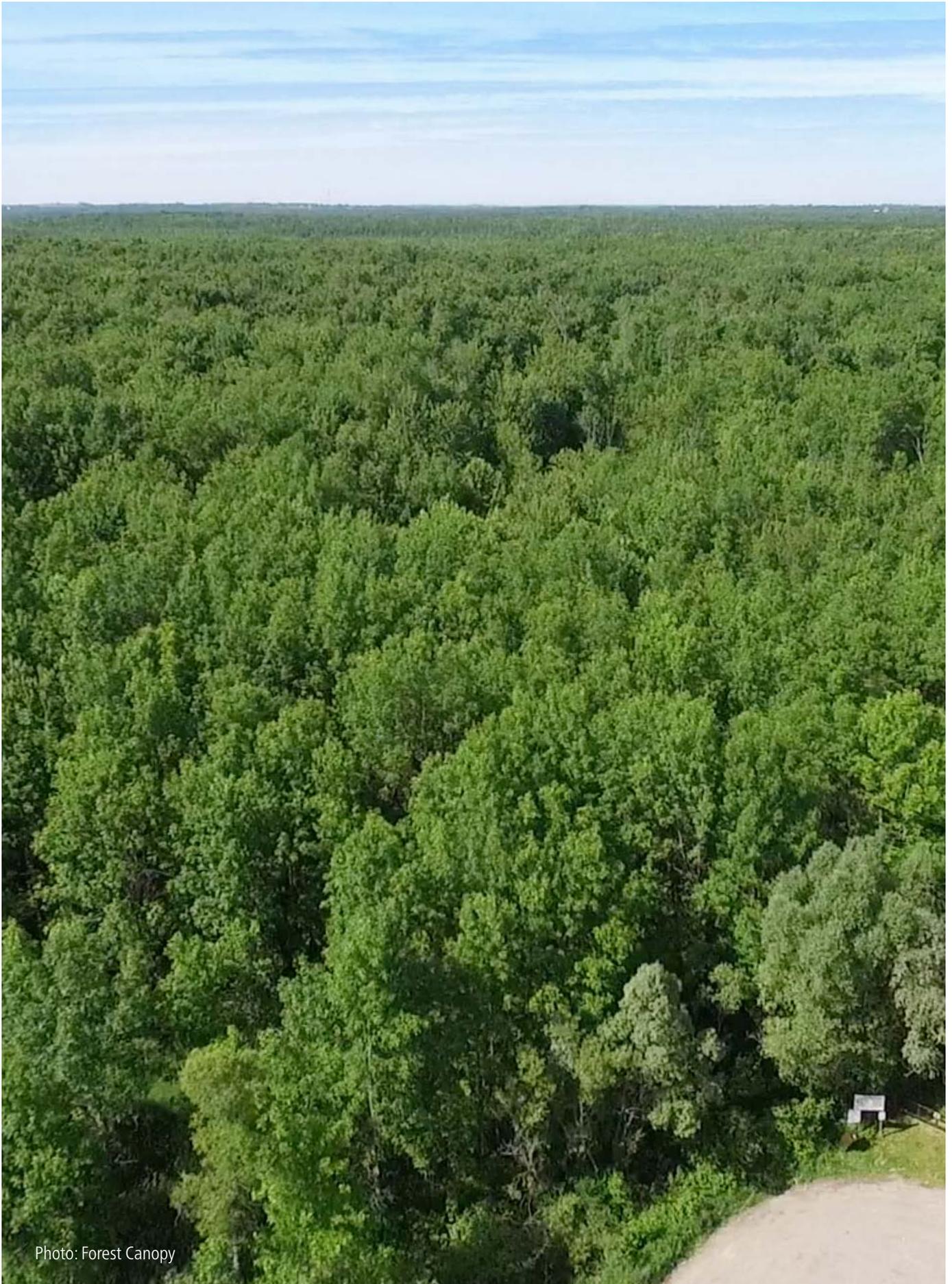


Photo: Forest Canopy

THE GREENING STRATEGY: STEPS TO A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT

York Region's Greening Strategy puts into action the Region's commitment to a healthier, more resilient natural environment.

Caring for and enhancing all green spaces across York Region -- from backyards to forests and everything in between -- is important to build healthy communities that support residents' physical and mental well-being. Trees and other natural features act as green infrastructure, which has been identified as a critical aspect of creating sustainable and resilient communities by using natural processes and plants to help purify air and water. Leveraging

nature this way is much less costly than building infrastructure for the same purpose.

Healthy green spaces also benefit birds, pollinators, other wildlife in the face of pressures from growth and climate change. Meadows and prairies dotted with wildflowers are especially important for native bees and butterflies. Wetlands are home to many diverse life forms, feeding and sheltering at least one third of all at-risk species across North America. Large areas of woodland are essential to the survival of deep-forest birds like the colourful cerulean warbler, which is a threatened species in Ontario.

First approved by Regional Council in 2001, the Greening Strategy has since been refined to reflect evolving policy direction as well as emerging priorities. This newest refinement continues to focus on protecting and preserving important green spaces, enhancing and rehabilitating natural features throughout the Region, inspiring and educating the community, and embracing innovation while sharing knowledge.

As well as continuing programs to increase the tree cover in the Region, the refined Strategy gives more thought to how meadows, prairie, wetlands, hedgerows, other rural lands and naturalized urban areas can contribute to ecosystem and community health.

Another important strand in this update is broader community involvement. This includes acknowledging and embracing the heritage of the Indigenous peoples who were the first to live here, and a commitment to engage with First Nations and Indigenous communities through involvement in implementation of the Strategy. It also means committing to engage often and meaningfully with the Region's agricultural community, which has long had an important stewardship role. Finally, it means recognizing that public green spaces should be accessible to everyone in the Region and should feel welcoming to all who want to enjoy them.

BENEFITS OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



Enhanced air and water quality



Reduced flooding risks



Opportunities to be physically active in nature



Healthy and sustainable communities



Improved mental health outcomes



A legacy for future generations



Climate change mitigation



Habitat for wildlife



Photos: Maple Tree Canopy, Outdoor Education, Photo Contest - Pale Green Weevil, Bendor and Graves tall grass prairie

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE GREENING STRATEGY

The Greening Strategy enacts policies set out in several key Regional documents, including the Region's Vision and Strategic Plan, the Regional Official Plan, and the draft Climate Change Action Plan. The guidance in those documents focuses the Strategy on supporting healthy, sustainable and connected green spaces. An important focus for the Region is the Greenland System, which includes ecologically important areas like the York Regional Forest. To nurture a wide range of life forms, the Region needs to provide and protect these areas, and also encourage residents and others to provide a wide range of habitats in all settings.

The Greening Strategy is one element of a wide range of

programs and plans across Regional government that contribute to a more sustainable environment, such as the draft Climate Change Action Plan and the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy. There are important linkages between the Greening Strategy and other plans, especially the Water and Wastewater Master Plan, which also advocates for greater use of green infrastructure. In addition, the Greening Strategy is connected to the Regional Official Plan and the Transportation Master Plan, both of which envision a Region of more compact growth in which active and eco-friendly transportation options are more widely available, especially by using trails and paths in green spaces.

The Greening Strategy supports the draft Climate Change Action Plan:

- Encouraging and funding the planting of trees and shrubs is the most cost-effective means of capturing carbon across the Region to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Protecting and enhancing wetlands, ponds and grasslands also enables storage of large amounts of carbon.
- In addition, these natural assets and areas help prevent floods by absorbing heavy rain and snowmelt, an increasingly important role as climate change triggers more extreme weather.
- Encouraging greater use of green infrastructure by government, businesses and homeowners reduces the need for built infrastructure and the energy it uses.
- Promoting plantings, especially of native species, on as many different types of land as possible nurtures native pollinators, birds and other wildlife as climate change makes them more vulnerable to threats.



THE GREENING STRATEGY DEPENDS ON EVERYONE GETTING INVOLVED

More than ever, achieving the goals of the Greening Strategy will depend on working together. Providing more habitat in more settings, including private land, helps biodiversity. Biodiversity is critical because the more different life forms that an ecosystem includes, the more resiliency that ecosystem has against pressures from climate change, urbanization and invasive species.

This means that everyone can play a role -- gardeners, businesses, farmers, home builders, schoolkids and community organizations, as well as municipal and other levels of government. While protected areas within the Greenland Systems are critical, a rich and diverse natural environment also depends on leveraging the land around homes, businesses, schools and other institutions, as well as agricultural land that is not actively planted with crops. Biodivcanada, Canada's biodiversity clearing house, notes that backyard and neighbourhood habitats are crucial in holding together an increasingly fragmented natural landscape.

The Region will also continue to work with partner organizations to maximize impacts. By partnering, the Region is able to leverage more funding for Greening Strategy goals -- in some cases, resulting in five times the Region's own investment. This can include the partner's own funding as well as funds from other levels of government, such as Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts program for land securement

Photo: Spring Forest Festival tree planting

Farming plays a key stewardship role

The agriculture industry is a vital and thriving part of York Region's economy, and the Region is home to some of the most productive farmland in Ontario. Farmers have long been at the forefront of protecting land, air and water and continue to have a strong stewardship role in York Region. This is reflected in the Region's Vision, which notes that the agricultural sector contributes to natural habitat and acts as a carbon sink.

In addition to producing food, local farmlands help to mitigate climate change and create important habitat linkages allowing our wildlife to travel between forests and fields. In addition to fields, farmlands also often contain key natural heritage features such as wetlands, streams, woodlands and trees that are protected and cared for by farmers.

While the Region has developed an Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy to support the industry, the Greening Strategy includes actions to partner with farmers to support this stewardship and recognize the role of farmlands in meeting Greening Strategy goals.



‘Amazing program’ delivered through LEAF partnership

York Region supports a program for planting trees on homeowner’s yards that’s delivered by a non-profit known as LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests). The program offers full service and do-it-yourself options for planting. As a homeowner from Newmarket put it: “A big, beautiful tree that supports our local wildlife, cools my porch, and beautifies my home... delivered to my door with mulch! What more could you ask for? This is an amazing program with prices that can’t be beat and unique trees that can be hard to source. Thanks to the Town of Newmarket and York Region for subsidizing and prioritizing our urban canopy cover. Our native trees are an important part of solving our climate and biodiversity crisis.”

Naturalizing one York Region property adds 18,000 trees

York Region always looks at opportunities to naturalize its own properties. An example is the water resource recovery facility on Doane Road between Centre Street and the York-Durham Line. Through partnerships with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and community plantings, more than 18,000 tree seedlings were planted on the site between 2015 and 2018.



Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre certified as ‘living building’

In 2018 the unique and inspiring Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre in the York Regional Forest became the first building in Canada and only the twenty-first in the world to be certified under the Living Building Challenge. The certification assesses a building’s performance from the perspectives of site, water, energy, health, materials, equity and beauty. The building previously received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Platinum certification. Its innovative features include all-wood construction using Forest Stewardship Council certified or recycled wood; solar panels, LEDs, heat pumps, and triple-glazed windows that allow the building to generate more energy than it uses; and water supply from rain and snow melt.

Photos: Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre, Bendor and Graves Reforestation



ACHIEVEMENTS



‘Discover Your Forest’ kits met the challenge of lockdowns

When in-person events had to be put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff responded by creating a quarterly Discover Your Forest Kit. These kits included the Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest and self-guided activities developed by partners like Forests Ontario, LEAF, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. In total, more than 1,000 kits were distributed, reaching over 3,000 participants.

Grow Your Legacy: before and after

The Grow Your Legacy Program supports largescale tree-planting projects to create or expand woodlands on private and public lands. This program is implemented through partnerships with the two conservation authorities active in York Region, Toronto and Region for the Lake Ontario watershed and Lake Simcoe Region for the Lake Simcoe/Lake Huron watershed. They work directly with landowners to plan and carry out tree planting. The program is funded by the Region, landowner and other sources.

Photo: Monarch butterfly on a cup plant at the Bendor and Graves prairie

New property will grow the Forest and trail system

In 2021, York Region secured a 142-hectare (350-acre) property in the Town of East Gwillimbury to expand the York Regional Forest. Plans included increasing woodland cover through tree planting on 82 hectares and promoting outdoor recreation by adding trails.



ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE THE INCEPTION OF THE GREENING STRATEGY


1,700,000 +
trees and shrubs planted


149,000+
Participants in Region and partner-led Greening Strategy Programs



York Region was recognized in 2021 as a Tree City of the World by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and The Arbour Day Foundation


1,518 Hectares
(almost 3,800 acres)
Lands secured by York Region and partners


\$108,000,000
Value of lands secured for conservation

REFINED GREENING STRATEGY RESPONDS TO RESIDENTS' INPUT

To help shape the refined Greening Strategy, a public survey was carried out in the fall of 2021. The goals included learning how much residents know about the Greening Strategy, asking for their opinions on existing programs and finding out what they view as important in the next 10 years.

The survey found that:

- 96% of respondents believe it is very important for York Region to invest in protecting and enhancing the natural environment
- More than half of respondents are interested in taking part in Greening Strategy programs
- Key areas in which the Region should take action through the Strategy are:
 - › Land Protection and Preservation: Securing land to protect existing natural features
 - › Enhancement and Rehabilitation: Naturalizing public lands
 - › Stewardship and education: Providing opportunities for residents and others to experience nature
 - › Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge: Working with local municipalities and organizations to develop coordinated programs and efforts
 - › While many respondents were familiar with specific programs, only 68% had heard of the Greening Strategy.

The results of the survey show the Region is on the right track and residents are very interested in getting involved. As a result, the major goals of the Greening Strategy remain the same, and this refinement provides more ways for residents to take part, commits to growing partnerships, aims to protect species at risk and pollinators throughout the landscape, and expands programs to enhance and rehabilitate habitats like wetlands. In addition, the Region will commit to raising awareness of the Greening Strategy and connecting residents to the programs that matter most to them.



Photos: Discover your forest kit - Social media post, L.E.A.F. National Tree Day Marita Park 2014, Enjoying time together in the forest. YR forest photo contest

GREENING STRATEGY ACTION AREAS

Environmental Land Protection and Preservation

A healthy, extensive and connected natural heritage system is essential for biodiversity, and public green spaces are important amenities that provide recreation opportunities and support the physical and mental well-being of residents. Connecting green spaces provides corridors that link larger areas and make it easier for trees and plants to thrive and for birds and other wildlife to find food and shelter.

Large protected natural areas help the Region mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change including reducing the risk of flooding, protecting source water, and facilitating species migration.

Goal: Protect and enhance natural areas and create and strengthen connections and corridors

Projects and Programs

- Partnerships to protect land for conservation
- Secure land to expand the York Regional Forest for public use

Actions

- Review and refine criteria for evaluating securement opportunities
- Review and refine agreements with current and new partners
- Seek opportunities to expand York Regional Forest through land securement



Community stewardship and education

York Region residents are clearly interested in how they can make the environment healthier and more sustainable. This includes understanding the value of the natural environment, how to plant and care for natural elements, and encouraging residents to take advantage of the mental and physical health benefits of green spaces.

Goal: Inspire stewardship and action through education and facilitating connections with nature

Projects and Programs

- Natures Classroom Program
- Events in the York Regional Forest
- In School Education Programs (Treebee and Envirothon)
- Promoting the benefits of trees to residents

Actions

- Refine Nature's Classroom Program based on results of Visitor Experience Plan for the York Regional Forest
- Explore opportunities to promote awareness of natural environment programs specific to agricultural properties
- Recognize role of agricultural lands in a healthy natural environment in educational programming
- Increase awareness and promote Greening Strategy, programs, and achievements
- Partner with new educational partners, such as libraries and local municipalities, to enhance community learning opportunities
- Develop Discover your Forest welcome kit for forest newcomers

Photo: Grow Your Legacy photo shoot

GREENING STRATEGY ACTION AREAS

Enhancement and Rehabilitation

Creating and improving natural features is critical to the health of our communities. Planting trees, shrubs and pollinator plants, restoring streams and wetlands, and establishing new forests, hedgerows and meadows ensure a sustainable environment for future generations. Enhancing the natural environment relies on partnerships with residents, schools, businesses, and others to strengthen the entire ecosystem across the Region. From a backyard tree or a school pollinator garden to a large forest, the benefits provided increase the quality of life for everyone in the Region.

Goal: Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on public and private lands.

Projects and Programs

- Grow Your Legacy Large Scale Tree Planting Program
- Backyard Tree Planting Program
- Community tree planting to naturalize public land
- Stream and Wetland Rehabilitation Program
- Schoolground Greening Program
- York Region Property Naturalization
- Greening Action Partnership Fund
- Supporting and promoting pollinator habitat

Actions

- Review and refine Grow Your Legacy partnership agreements and program criteria to increase planting
- Implement micro-grant funding program for community groups, schools, and organizations for natural environment enhancement and restoration projects
- Partner with local municipalities to refine Backyard Tree Planting Program and target priority areas
- Pilot a planting program partnership targeting Industrial, Commercial and Institutional lands
- Review and refine agreements for schoolground planting partnerships
- Work with existing conservation partners and agriculture communities to improve access to funding programs for farmlands
- Pilot a Region-wide native tree, shrub, and plant sale
- Review and refine stream, wetland and riparian rehabilitation program and explore opportunities to expand
- Explore new and innovative partnerships to plant trees, shrubs, and pollinator plants, including fruit trees



Photos: Sustainable timber harvest, Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre staff representative holding a snapping turtle - 2017 Spring Forest Festival - YR forest photo contest, Water in a low area on a cold winter day - YR forest photo contest, 2016 Envirothon

GREENING STRATEGY ACTION AREAS



Photos: Picking the best trees for street tree planting, 2016 Field Tour—street tree and horticulture, Structural soil installation on Donald Cousens Parkway Fall 2009, Accessible Trail in Hollidge Tract Ribbon cutting for opening of YRF first Accessible Trail-September 20, 2010

Innovation and knowledge

York Region continues to demonstrate leadership in the protection and promotion of the natural environment through its policies, programs and use of leading-edge approaches. Through inclusive forums and technical working groups, the Greening Strategy provides opportunities for York Region, its partners, and neighbouring Regions to share successes and challenges and learn from one another.

Goal: Seek and transfer knowledge and demonstrate leadership and innovation in the protection and promotion of the natural environment.

Projects and Programs

- Hosting forums and working groups to support Greening Strategy Objectives
- Working with public health to share knowledge and partnership opportunities
- Conducting forest studies in partnership with local municipalities
- Sharing knowledge through forums and workshops

Actions

- Work with partners to share best practices and consistent messaging to improve resident knowledge relating to the natural environment such as climate change, invasive species and other topics of interest
- Partner with research and education institutions to support innovation and build a body of knowledge in Natural Heritage and Forestry
- Explore opportunities to partner with First Nations, including incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into Greening Strategy Programs
- Expand and refine existing forum to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among local municipal environmental advisory committees
- Explore options to assess and report on biodiversity across the Region

ACTING ON THE GREENING STRATEGY

This refinement continues valuable activities and programs that have contributed to protection of more natural features in the Region, a healthier and larger tree cover, enhancement of other habitat types like prairie, and education and outreach to show more people the benefits of a closer connection to nature. In response to what residents would like to see, as well as emerging science, it expands on programs and efforts to encourage biodiversity, use land more sustainably, and prevent greenhouse gases from entering the environment.

These will be very important goals over the next 10 years, as the Region grows and urbanizes and the need to mitigate climate change impacts becomes more pressing. Healthier and more diverse natural features will also help residents, as well as native wildlife, better manage climate change impacts by reducing flood risks, providing summer cooling and winter shelter, and making York Region a more green and welcoming place.

With this refinement, the Region invites residents, businesses and others to become involved. To stay up to date on Greening Strategy programs and activities at york.ca/yrf

Photos: YR forest photo contest, Street Tree Survey curbside sign-October 2020, Spring Forest Festival, YR forest photo contest - editors choice





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