

Pertinent Excerpts from the Ontario Government Engagement Proposal

OPPORTUNITY

The collaborative nature of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System initiative has allowed the partners to do more together than they would have been able to do alone. However, the long-term sustainability of the ecopark system requires support and resources that exceed what the partners are able to contribute. The partners are therefore looking to senior levels of government for support and welcome their participation in the initiative. By supporting and investing in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System, the government of Ontario can deliver the significant benefits of urban greenspace and biodiversity conservation at a fraction of the cost of establishing a new provincial park, and without incurring an ongoing liability. The partners will also be seeking support and investment from the federal government.

This document outlines potential elements of provincial engagement, including:

- 1) Partnership in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- 2) Legislative recognition and support of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- 3) Financial support

1) Partnership in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System collaborative is governed by the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (provided in Appendix B), which was signed by the nine partner agencies in June 2013. The partners invite the Government of Ontario to consider becoming a party to this agreement, or to a revised version of the agreement to be negotiated among the partners and the Government of Ontario.

As a partner, the Government of Ontario may choose to designate some of its properties as Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System lands, convey surplus properties to one or more of the other partner agencies, and/or work with the partners on ecological stewardship projects on Crown properties, for instance within Hydro One corridors. The Government of Ontario may also collaborate on joint initiatives such as wildlife ecology and management, First Nations engagement, health promotion through outdoor recreation and access to nature, tourism promotion, and economic development.

2) Legislative recognition and support

The partners believe that legislative recognition of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System would signal its environmental and cultural significance and advance it as a priority for funding. Legislative recognition could be in the form of new special purpose legislation.

Additionally, new legislation or changes to existing legislation could enhance the partners' ability to create regulations where needed to achieve ecopark system objectives. Suggested contents of special purpose legislation are provided in Appendix A.

Recognition could also occur within existing legislation or plans, for example as Rouge Park is recognized in the Greenbelt Plan (s. 3.2.6). The 2015 review of the Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Growth Plan may offer opportunities for recognition of the significance of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System and enhanced protection of its natural and cultural heritage.

3) Financial support

Since 2006, the partners have secured more than \$1 million to develop and then implement the vision for the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System. In June 2013, the partners committed to provide core operating funding for the first three years of implementation of the ecopark system, with any additional needed funds to come from other sources.

The vast majority of grant funds raised to date have been provided by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the partners are grateful for this support. However, foundations and grant programs typically fund projects rather than on-going programs, and are not a guaranteed source of revenue. The long-term financial sustainability of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System requires secure and long-term sources of funding.

Table 3 below provides an estimate of the funds needed to implement the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System over the long term.

Table 3: Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Long-term Financial Requirements	
Capital costs:	
Land securement ^a	\$ 30,000,000
Total capital^b	\$ 30,000,000
Ongoing costs (annual):	
Land stewardship and management	\$ 1,000,000
Community engagement & communications	\$ 80,000
Private landowner engagement	\$ 70,000
Administration	\$ 100,000
Total annual	\$ 1,250,000
<i>Required endowment to yield \$1,250,000 per year:</i>	<i>\$ 25,000,000</i>

- a. This is the estimated cost of conserving an additional 550 hectares of greenspace through purchase by the partner agencies. These lands are considered to be critical to the ecological sustainability of existing protected areas.
- b. The partners anticipate additional future capital costs to create, replace and maintain built infrastructure, but the magnitude and nature of these costs are not known at this time.

Conclusion

The partners believe that the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System represents a sound investment in the environmental, social and economic health of the Hamilton-Burlington region and the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The estimates of the economic benefits of parks and open space in other parts of Ontario referred to above suggest that an investment of \$55 million in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System will yield benefits of at least that magnitude on an annual basis in the form of clean air and water, healthy residents and lower health care costs, high livability, and attraction for tourism and economic development.

As a partner and/or investor in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System, the government of Ontario may deliver these benefits to Ontarians without needing to establish and operate a new provincial park or conservation reserve. Indeed, the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System may represent a new kind of provincial park – for instance, Ontario’s first Urban Biosphere Park.

SUGGESTED CONTENTS OF SPECIAL PURPOSE LEGISLATION FOR THE COOTES TO ESCARPMENT ECOPARK SYSTEM

1. Purpose

- a. Recognize and facilitate implementation of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- b. Recognize the mission, vision and objectives from Cootes to Escarpment Park System

Conservation and Land Management Strategy (2009):

- i. Vision: Our vision for the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is that it will be known internationally as a protected, permanent and connected natural lands sanctuary from the Harbour to the Escarpment that promotes ecosystem and human health within Ontario’s Greenbelt.
- ii. Mission: Our mission will be to collaboratively continue preserving and enhancing the natural lands using a sustainable approach that balances natural ecosystem health with responsible human appreciation and activities to achieve the vision.
- iii. Objectives: The objectives further define the vision and mission statements and identify the main components necessary to ensure the integrity and health of the EcoPark System and its environs.

1. Natural Heritage Objective: To protect, restore and enhance the ecological system by ensuring the health and diversity of species, habitats and natural processes forever. This includes consideration of linkages through urban areas and natural lands beyond the boundaries of the Park System.
2. Recreation Objective: To provide opportunities for appropriate passive recreation that support active living while maintaining the biological and physical integrity of the lands.
3. Cultural Heritage Objective: To identify, protect and preserve cultural heritage features for their valuable reflection of the historical use and occupancy of the area.
4. Interpretation Objective: To provide educational opportunities that promote knowledge, understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural values, environmental sensitivity and significance, and the associated conservation needs.
5. Management Objective: To manage the public lands through partner collaboration to ensure all Cootes to Escarpment Park System objectives are achieved. The owners of the park lands will promote responsible stewardship of the lands and of adjacent private lands through ongoing community involvement in park planning and management.

2. Recognition

- a. EcoPark system has natural and cultural heritage that is significant at local, provincial, national and international levels
- b. EcoPark system provides ecosystem services and ecologically sustainable education, research and outdoor recreation opportunities
- c. Protection of this natural and cultural heritage critical due to urbanization of the area
- d. For these reasons, park system is recognized as Ontario's first urban biosphere park [terminology is to be subject of discussion with Ministry responsible for Act]
- e. For these reasons, park system is designated as a priority for funding under government of Ontario programs for protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage and related recreation and education programs.

3. Designation

- a. Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System comprises natural lands, open space and cultural heritage sites owned and/or managed by the Partners as defined in the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (2013) and identified under regulation to this Act.

- b. The geographic area of the EcoPark System is as indicated on Figure 1 of the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (2013) and may be amended from time by the Governing Council.
- c. New lands may be brought into EcoPark System with approval by the Governing Council when acquired by one of the partners through purchase, donation or conservation easement.

4. Management and governance

- a. Management and governance of EcoPark System as defined in the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (2013)
- b. New Partners may be brought into park system with approval by the Governing Council.

5. Powers

- a. Partners may make regulations for application on their lands within the EcoPark System concerning:
 - i. Management, protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage
 - ii. User access and fees and permitted activities
 - iii. Penalties for non-compliance