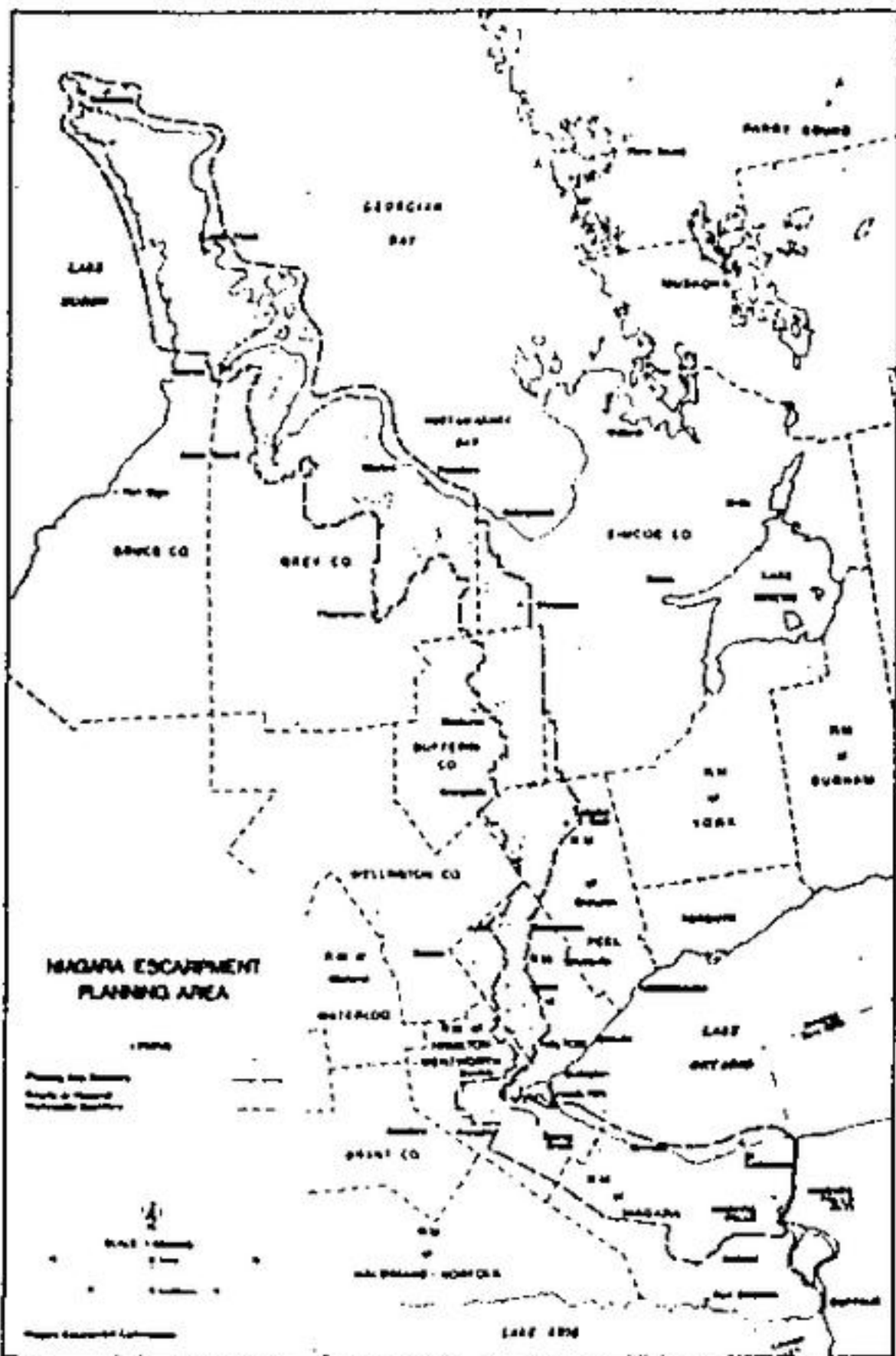


Unveiled Tuesday

11 basic land use designations in Escarpment Commission proposal



The Niagara Escarpment Commission unveiled Preliminary Proposals to preserve the natural environment of 1.3 million acre Niagara Escarpment Area on Tuesday. The Commission invited 55 municipalities to contribute their ideas before a proposed Plan is drafted. It will be the subject of formal hearings.

Commission Chairman Ivor McMullin said the Preliminary Proposals document was "written specifically to assist in obtaining input from municipalities" as required under the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act.

The mandate of the Commission is to prepare a plan that will maintain the Escarpment and land in its vicinity as a continuous natural environment.

Comment on the Proposals is also to be sought from the general public, the Commission's two advisory committees and various provincial ministries.

The Niagara Escarpment Planning Area stretches 450 miles from Niagara Falls to Tobermory, varies in width from one to 15 miles and covers 1.3 million acres.

The Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act specifies that what development occurs should be compatible with that natural environment.

Mr. McMullin said the Commission and its staff will be meeting with the municipalities within the planning area during the next three months to discuss the proposals in detail.

The Commission also plans to conduct public meetings and to establish "drop-in" information centres at its offices in Georgetown, Clarksburg and Grimsby to obtain public comment on the Preliminary Proposals.

Copies of the Proposals are available on request from all three Niagara Escarpment Commission offices.

Land-use maps depicting areas covered by the policies in the Preliminary Proposals are available for inspection at the Commission's offices and will be provided to public libraries and the municipal offices with the Planning Area.

The Preliminary Proposals identify and map 11 basic land-use designations and seven "overlay" designations in addition to proposing various objectives and policies for the designated areas.

The basic designations are: forest areas, general rural, lakeshore, lakeshore residential, mineral resource, scarp, scenic drives, Bruce Trail, special and mixed agriculture, special areas and urban areas.

Other designations which "overlay" and include some of the basic designations are: cultural, hazard, minor urban, natural areas, provincial acquisition areas, scarp protection areas and scenic resource areas.

In addition, there are proposed policies that apply in varying degree throughout the Planning Area. These involve water resources, recreation, transportation and utilities and the administration of the Plan.

"We're hoping the municipalities will be able to provide us with their comments on the Preliminary Proposals as soon as possible so we can draft and publish our proposed Plan by early Fall," Mr. McMullin said.

When the proposed Plan is completed, formal public hearings on the Plan will be scheduled.

An overview

By Ivor McMullin, Chairman
Niagara Escarpment Commission

This is an overview of the Niagara Escarpment Commission's Preliminary Proposals for a Niagara Escarpment Master Plan. These Proposals have been prepared "to provide for the maintenance of the Niagara Escarpment and land in its vicinity substantially as a continuous natural environment, and to ensure only such development occurs as is compatible with that natural environment."

These are proposals only, and will be the subject of discussion with municipal councils, advisory committees, provincial ministries and the public before a proposed Plan is drafted for formal hearings.

It will come as no surprise to note that the Commission is proposing a continuous scarp designation stretching from Niagara Falls to Tobermory at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula as a basic land-use designation. This identifies prominent surface slopes and buries portions of the geological escarpment. The policies propose its preservation as a continuous natural environment.

Overlying this, and extending about 300 metres on either side, there is a scarp protection overlay designation. This is to provide a protective buffer on either side of the scarp, and development in this area will have to be carried out with a careful consideration of its effect on the scarp environment.

As over 90 per cent of the Planning Area is of a rural character, the Commission's task involves, principally, rural as opposed to urban planning. It is fair to say that, until recently, most planning in Ontario has been concentrated on the urban areas. Thus there remains much new ground to be broken.

There are four dominant designations that make up the bulk of the rural area in the Commission's Proposals. These are Special and Mixed Agriculture, General Rural, and Forest.

The Special and Mixed Agricultural areas combined make up 38 per cent of the total area. The Special Agricultural areas identify lands with a high capacity for special crops such as the tender fruits and apples. The Mixed Agricultural areas identify good quality (Class 1, 2 or 3 or equivalent) lands that are not Special Agricultural areas. The policies in these Proposals are directed to preserving these lands for agricultural use.

The forest areas make up 26 per cent of the total area. These lands are now forested or are reverting to forest, and have been assessed as having a high or medium capability for timber production. The policies in the Proposals aim to preserve the tree cover, not only for the future commercial value but also for the great environmental and scenic benefits of forested areas.

23 per cent of the Planning Area has been designated as General Rural. These lands are the lower quality agricultural lands, Classes 4 to 7. The policy Proposals are to permit a limited scale or rural development, including rural residential, at the discretion of municipalities.

The Commission has been charged with designating areas for mineral extraction, and has done so. The Commission has proposed that the existing licensed areas largely be continued, with the exception that the distance from the scarp for which extraction is now prohibited will be increased by applying the Scarp Protection policy. New areas have been designated for future mineral extraction, but these have been selected so as not to use forested lands, good agricultural lands or to disrupt important environmental or cultural areas, scenic areas and areas proposed for public acquisition.

Strong controls are proposed as part of the licensing procedures. Some 39,000 acres, 12,200 acres of it already licensed, have been proposed for designation. The focal point for new mineral extraction areas yet to be opened up is shifted northward from its present position towards the northern portion of the Planning Area.

Bruce Trail

The Commission has carried out extensive studies to determine an optimum route for the Bruce Trail, and this route appears as a basic designation in the Preliminary Proposals. It has a length of 522 miles, 33 per cent of which is on lands now public. No agreement has been reached with landowners for a large proportion of this optimum route. Thus what is on the maps now merely represents that route that would be most desirable from the point of view of trail users.

Where the actual route of the trail will be in the end will depend on what arrangements can be made. The policies propose a variety of options for these arrangements. The policies also propose management techniques for this very popular trail.

The Commission has not confined itself to the Bruce Trail. It is proposing recreation policies involving other types of trails, as well as the full range of recreational activities.

Scenic Drive

It has also mapped a proposed scenic drive system on low speed roads. This is 468 miles long and uses existing roads

except for 22 miles in Bruce County. It goes through some of the highest rated scenic areas.

Among the features identified within the Niagara Escarpment Planning Area are 72 important wildlife habitats, more than 100 sites containing flowers and plants of special interest, more than 100 sites of geological significance, and numerous streams and rivers of importance to fisheries. These have been combined in the Preliminary Proposals as the Natural Areas overlay designation. In addition to these features are many hundreds of archaeological and historic sites which collectively have been designated as Cultural Areas.

Developments in these areas are not necessarily prohibited, but will be carefully regulated so as to ensure preservation of the special features in the area. The overlay designations cover 28 per cent of the planning area for the Natural Areas, and four per cent for the Cultural Areas.

A landscape evaluation study has been carried out for the whole Escarpment area. This has attempted to rate areas by scenic quality as appreciated by the average viewer. The areas rated as above average are shown on an overlay designation. It is proposed that developments in these high quality scenic areas be regulated so as not to unduly impair this scenic value. About 29 per cent of the Planning Area achieves this high quality rating.

For some time there has been an extensive land acquisition program for parks and recreational areas in the Escarpment area. This has been a combined effort of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Conservation Authorities. The Commission is recommending continuation of this program, with modifications and extensions of it. It is recognized that the program must be a very long term one, and that interim development can be permitted on property that will not be acquired for some time to come. 80,000 acres are now under public ownership. The program calls for eventual acquisition of another 98,000 acres, but no time limits are proposed for this.

The Niagara Escarpment area is a prime recreational area and the development of the recreational potential is encouraged throughout the Proposals.

Other portions of the shoreline are designated as Lakeshore Residential to provide limited and carefully controlled opportunity for low density development. The ratio of Lakeshore Residential to Lakeshore that has been designated is approximately 3 to 4.

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