

Preserving and protecting the Escarpment

On Feb. 27, Premier Mike Harris and Natural Resources Minister Chris Hodgson, announced 27 provincial parks and protected areas as part of the governments' new Lands for Life program.

With this announcement the government has made a long-standing commitment to the protection and use of natural resources in Ontario. Lands for Life is a comprehensive planning process for Crown land that will protect natural areas and promote the best uses of natural resources with a goal toward completing Ontario's park system.

As part of the Lands for Life commitment to protect significant natural features of Ontario's landscape, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has assumed control of the Niagara Escarpment in order to enhance the protection of this area. This transfer in responsibility from the Ministry of Environment (MOE) to MNR is characterized by some as a

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REPORT



Ted Chudleigh

lack of commitment to the Niagara Escarpment Plan. I thought it would be appropriate to respond to those fears and explain the reasoning behind the changes as well as explain some of the other significant features of the Lands for Life program.

The transfer of responsibility of the Escarpment to MNR is easily understood. MNR is already responsible for the protection of 6.3 million hectares of parkland and is going to complete Ontario's system of parks and protected areas through its Nature's Best program. The transfer is a good fit. Through this transfer, the government remains committed to the Act

governing the Escarpment and the NEC.

Those of you who are regular readers of my column will remember my personal feelings toward protecting the Escarpment in a previous submission. This transfer reflects the government's and once again, my own, personal commitment and determination to maintaining strong protection of the Escarpment for the benefit of Ontarians.

Other components of Lands for Life include the initiative, called Nature's Best. Through Nature's Best, a complete parks and protected areas system will be developed that will protect the best examples of Ontario's natural features. This system will ensure the protection of habitat for wildlife, fish and endangered species.

Of the 27 parks and protected areas announced with Lands for Life, the government has already protected the boundaries of 10 areas in law and is finalizing the regulations for the other 17.

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