

Region buying more green space

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

York Region will commit \$3.9 million over the next three years to begin protecting more of the area's environmental distinctions.

The money will be part of the region's new reserve to allow the purchase and acquisition of forest lands and green space properties.

"It's very important that we put our money where our mouth is when it comes to the environment," regional chairperson Bill Fisch said.

Approved in principle last week at the region's transportation and works committee, the greenlands strategy will protect lands through acquisitions such as bequests, easements, donations and purchases.

Public and private stewardship programs, policy planning and monitoring of the lands will also be a part of the new initiative.

According to York Region planning commissioner Bryan Tuckey, the region will work with area planning directors to ensure municipalities are complete partners in the new program.

In 1998, the region adopted a 20-year management

plan with an objective of reaching 25 per cent forest cover of all regional lands.

Currently, forest cover ranges between 15 and 18 per cent of the region's 174,000 hectares.

In order to achieve the region's goal, an additional 25 per cent, or 12,200 hectares, would need to be established — with an annual target of 400 hectares of new forests.

"We have to ensure that our future is secure," Fisch said.

Achieving the region's environmental goals can be accomplished through various efforts, including increased funding to the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to produce 160,000 new trees planted and increased forest cover by 80 hectares each year.

As well, working with the private forest industry and offering a tax incentive program for donations would add another 90 hectares annually. Beefing up education and forestry advice could provide the equivalent of 80 hectares each year while participation with gov-



BILL FISCH: It's time York Region purchased more property, chairperson of the region says.

ernment agencies and naturalist groups would add an extra 40 hectares of forest.

Meanwhile, Fisch also encouraged committee members to increase its financial commitment this year by an additional \$1 million, using the surplus from the 2000 budget that was originally earmarked for the capital reserve fund.

The region will now pledge \$1.5 million this year,

another \$1 million next year and, beginning in 2003, \$1.4 million each year into the new reserve.

"It's important that we put money up front so our kids and our grandchildren can benefit," Fisch added. "We are not only showing the way but also putting money into the fund so we can buy property now."

"It's time to come to the table and purchase property."

York Region is also developing a series of partnerships, including conservation authorities, GTA regions and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, tapping into the organization's extensive history and credibility in natural environment protection.

The new securement fund continues a history of natural heritage conservation, beginning in 1924 with the establishment of the York Regional Forest — 18 tracts of land covering 2,031 hectares, featuring conifer plantations, natural woodlands, forested wetlands and creeks.

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— Bill Fisch, York Region chairperson

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