

'Big picture' vision designed to ensure survival of plants, animals

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tionists when he brought NOAH to the Federation of Ontario Naturalists annual conference at Toronto's York University.

There, Oregon scientist and author Reed Noss called NOAH "an ambitious vision. I hope you'll all support," and biologist Steve Hounsell, another conference speaker, praised it as "a noble goal, part of a sustainable southern Ontario ecosystem possible in the far future."

Both men stressed the same type of "big picture" thinking that produced NOAH, telling 500 attendees that southern Ontario's native animals and plants must have access to other natural areas if they are to survive.

Noss said most woodlots in the region are no longer sources for wildlife but "sinks," areas where mortality exceeds reproduction and many species can only be replenished when links exist to other, better-protected

natural areas.

NOAH — Richmond Hill biologist Natalie Helferty is credited with inventing the acronym — builds on earlier concepts for large-scale natural corridors involving the moraine and Rouge Park, which thanks to a federal donation of land this year in Markham, Pickering and Uxbridge, can now connect the moraine to Lake Ontario.

This system is going to be compromised if those public lands are allowed to be sold.

John MacKenzie, spokesperson for the Public Spaces environmental group

A draft report prepared for Ontario's natural resources ministry in 1997 found that "the potential exists to join the Rouge Park to a continentally significant system of connected natural areas."

Public Spaces and other

groups want to stop the planned sale of provincially-owned lands east of Rouge Park in Markham, seeing them as part of NOAH.

"This system is going to be compromised if those public lands are allowed to be sold," MacKenzie argued.

He hopes to see the concept promoted through The Wildlands Project, a Tucson, Arizona-based group connected with Noss, which believes "the environment of North America is at risk and an audacious plan is needed for its survival and recovery," according to the organization's website.

"Healing the land," it says, "means reconnecting its parts so that vital flows can be renewed."

In Florida, \$1 billion was recently spent to maintain such ecological links.

In Ontario, that can be done for less, MacKenzie said. "We just have to make the decision now."



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