

NIAGARA ESCARPMENT PLAN

Why is this feature important to the study?

The Niagara Escarpment is a provincially and internationally significant geological landform. It contains a large aquifer complex that provides an important regional hydraulic function. Portions of the Escarpment are found in eight counties or regions, which include 23 local municipalities. It is also a significant and unique eco-tourist attraction.

WHAT IS THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT?

Stretching 725 km in length from Niagara to Tobermory, the Niagara Escarpment encompasses a range of habitats, physiographic regions and land-uses. Its size and environmental significance make the Escarpment a significant natural heritage feature throughout the GTA West Corridor Preliminary Study Area.

The Niagara Escarpment is classified as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. The 194,340 ha of Escarpment land is managed/governed by the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) and the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP). According to the NEC, it is one of only 13 biosphere reserves in Canada.*

The Escarpment passes through some of the most heavily developed regions of Canada, although the population living on the Niagara Escarpment lands is relatively low (approximately 120,000).

Within the GTA West Corridor Preliminary Study Area, much of Halton Region is part of the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area. Smaller areas of Wellington County and the Region of Peel are also within this Area.

Important attributes of the Niagara Escarpment are listed below:

- Escarpment sites in the Preliminary Study Area include geological formations, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs) and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), conservation areas and parks, wooded areas, aquatic systems, rare species and habitat for significant species.
- The Escarpment provides tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities in the region (e.g. Bruce Trail, scenic viewpoints, wildlife viewing opportunities).
- The Escarpment provides a continuous corridor of natural habitats from the U.S. border to Tobermory, along which migrating birds move at the appropriate seasons.

(* Source: www.escarpment.org/biosphere/about_nebr.htm)
(General Source: The Niagara Escarpment Commission)

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The *Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP)* (2005), guides land use within an area defined by the Niagara Escarpment, from the Bruce Peninsula in the north to the Niagara River in the south. It limits development within the NEP area through limitations on new lot creation and on permitted uses. The intent is to balance development with preservation and public use. Official plans are required to conform to the NEP (map of the area is shown on the following page) and establishes land use designations, policies and criteria for the protection of lands within its policy area. Land use within the NEP areas is divided into seven designations, the first three of which offer the most protection:

- Escarpment Natural Area
- Escarpment Protection Area
- Escarpment Rural Area
- Minor Urban Centre
- Urban Area
- Escarpment Recreation Area
- Mineral Resource Extraction Area

ESCARPMENT NATURAL AREA:

Includes wetlands, wildlife habitat, woodlands, steep slopes and ravines, and provincially and regionally significant ANSIs. These are relatively undisturbed areas that contain important natural and cultural heritage features.

ESCARPMENT PROTECTION AREA:

Include areas that have been modified by land use activities, that often form as a buffer for Escarpment Natural Areas (i.e. agriculture, residential).

ESCARPMENT RURAL AREA:

These lands also provide a buffer to the more ecologically sensitive parts of the Escarpment and encourage compatible rural land uses.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The NEP permits essential transportation facilities in the Escarpment Natural Area, where "essential" is defined as "that which is deemed necessary to the public interest after all alternatives have been considered". New and expanded facilities must have the least possible impact on the natural environment and be consistent with the objectives of the Plan.

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Information on the Niagara Escarpment and the Niagara Escarpment Plan are available at the following sources:

Niagara Escarpment Commission: <http://www.escarpment.org/>

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing: <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/>

Contact Information

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