



# Manitoulin Planning Board Natural Heritage System

Public Engagement Session

November 10 2021

# What is a Natural Heritage System?

*“A system of connected or to be connected green and natural areas that provide ecological functions over a longer period of time and enable movement of species. Natural heritage systems encompass or incorporate natural features, functions and linkages (also known as ‘corridors’) as component parts within the landscape”*

*-Natural Heritage Reference Manual,  
Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural  
Resources and Forestry, 2005*

# What is a Natural Heritage System?

## -Continued

- Natural Heritage Systems are focused on preserving ecological and hydrological function in existing natural areas containing natural heritage features
- Areas that have the potential to be rehabilitated may be integrated into the Natural Heritage System

# What is a Natural Heritage System?

## -Continued

- The designation of a property or portion of a property does not mean the land becomes public or changes ownership, and it does not indicate a plan to acquire those lands
- Land in a NHS that is currently privately owned will remain in private ownership, unless the owner of the land transfers it to public ownership – most commonly, this may be done during development processes where land is conveyed to the municipality as part of a subdivision or severance
- Municipalities and provincial governments may propose to acquire lands with Natural Heritage Features for conservation or open space uses, and if said lands are acquired, they may be integrated into the NHS as Open Space areas.

# Legislative Requirement

- The Provincial Policy Statement 2020 states that Natural Heritage Systems shall be identified in ecoregions 6E & 7E, and Manitoulin Island falls within ecoregion 6E
- The Planning Board is required to implement a Natural Heritage System as part of the approval of the Official Plan in 2018 as modified by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

# Status

- The Planning Board is required to implement a Natural Heritage System as part of the approval of the Official Plan in 2018
- The Planning Board had a public information session in August 2019 to begin public engagement
- Since then, work on draft mapping, research and draft policies has continued

# System Components

- The Natural Heritage System will be composed of three types of areas:
  - Core Areas, which are larger areas containing significant Natural Heritage Features
  - Linkages, which are natural corridors connecting Core Areas
  - Open Space areas, which are areas in public ownership containing mostly green space/natural cover, such as parks, hiking trails and other recreational areas

# System Components

- We have taken a 'features-based' approach recommended by the Natural Heritage Reference Manual for regions with large amounts of continuous forest cover, focusing on high quality habitat
- Candidate Core Areas have been identified based on existing data of Natural Heritage Features
- Candidate Linkages have been identified based on providing connectivity between Core Areas and preserving ecological function of Core Areas



# Evaluating Core Areas

- Core Areas are evaluated on a number of criteria, including:
  - Size (larger is better, more interior habitat)
  - Shape (wider is often better, narrow areas have less interior habitat)
  - Naturalness (areas in a more natural state are better)
  - Habitat/species diversity – more different types of habitat and wildlife are better
  - Interior habitat (habitat more than 100m from the edge of the area)
  - Presence of Rare habitats or species
  - Protection already in place (e.g. parks, conservation lands)

# Types of Core Areas

- Core Areas include features such as:
  - Provincially Significant Wetlands
  - Endangered Species Habitat
  - Fish Habitat (including spawning habitat)
  - Significant Wildlife Habitat, including rare vegetation communities (e.g. dune systems, alvar, escarpment)
  - Known critical bird nesting habitat
  - Significant woodlands and valleylands
  - Provincially Significant Areas of Natural or Scientific Interest (ANSIs) – though there are none identified in our Planning Area at the moment

# Types of Core Areas- Rare Vegetation Community (Alvar)





# Type of Core Areas – Rare Vegetation Community (Dune System)





# Type of Core Area – Fish Habitat and Wetland



# Linkages

- Linkages are corridors of predominantly natural landscape that connect Core Areas
- They are meant to ensure that wildlife (flora and fauna) can move between areas of critical habitat
- Not all Core Areas have associated linkages

# Types of Linkages

- Whether a linkage is identified, and what that linkage is, depends on the adjacent Core Area type
- For fish habitat or the habitat of aquatic endangered species, linkages are usually watercourses between core areas or areas of natural shoreline between core areas
- For rare vegetation communities, linkages are usually areas of natural cover between patches of habitat (e.g. woodland between alvar areas). These areas are often peripheral habitat for rare plants.

# Data Sources

- Currently, the mapping is based on the following data sources:
  - Natural Heritage Information Centre Mapping, including
    - Endangered species habitat
    - Rare Plant Communities
  - NDMNRF - Endangered Species Habitat mapping provided in 2012 for the Official Plan
  - Land Information Ontario – Unevaluated Wetlands and Provincially Significant Wetlands, Watercourses, and Lakes
  - NDMNRF – Fish Habitat mapping provided in 2012 for the Official Plan (sensitive and non-sensitive)
  - NDMNRF – Nesting Sites data provided in 2012 for the Official Plan (sensitive and non-sensitive)
  - Reports on Natural Heritage from development proposals, where such features have been identified



# Core Areas with Multiple Features

- Many core areas contain multiple natural heritage features – for example, endangered species habitat, fish habitat, and a bird nesting site on a stretch of shoreline. Areas with more diverse features are generally more desirable as Core Areas
- In the event of proposed development, the *adjacent lands* of these core areas will use the recommended adjacent lands of all the features present (most often 120 m, but on occasion more or less), and impacts for all natural heritage features will have to be evaluated

# Core Area with Multiple Features

## Example: Kagawong River

- The Kagawong River between Lake Kagawong and Lake Huron is a good example of a candidate Core Area with multiple features. It includes:
  - Critical fish habitat
  - Endangered Species Habitat
  - Hydrological function
  - Existing compatible recreational uses (boating, fishing, hiking, etc.) and adjacent publically owned open space area

# Core Area with Multiple Features

## Example: Kagawong River

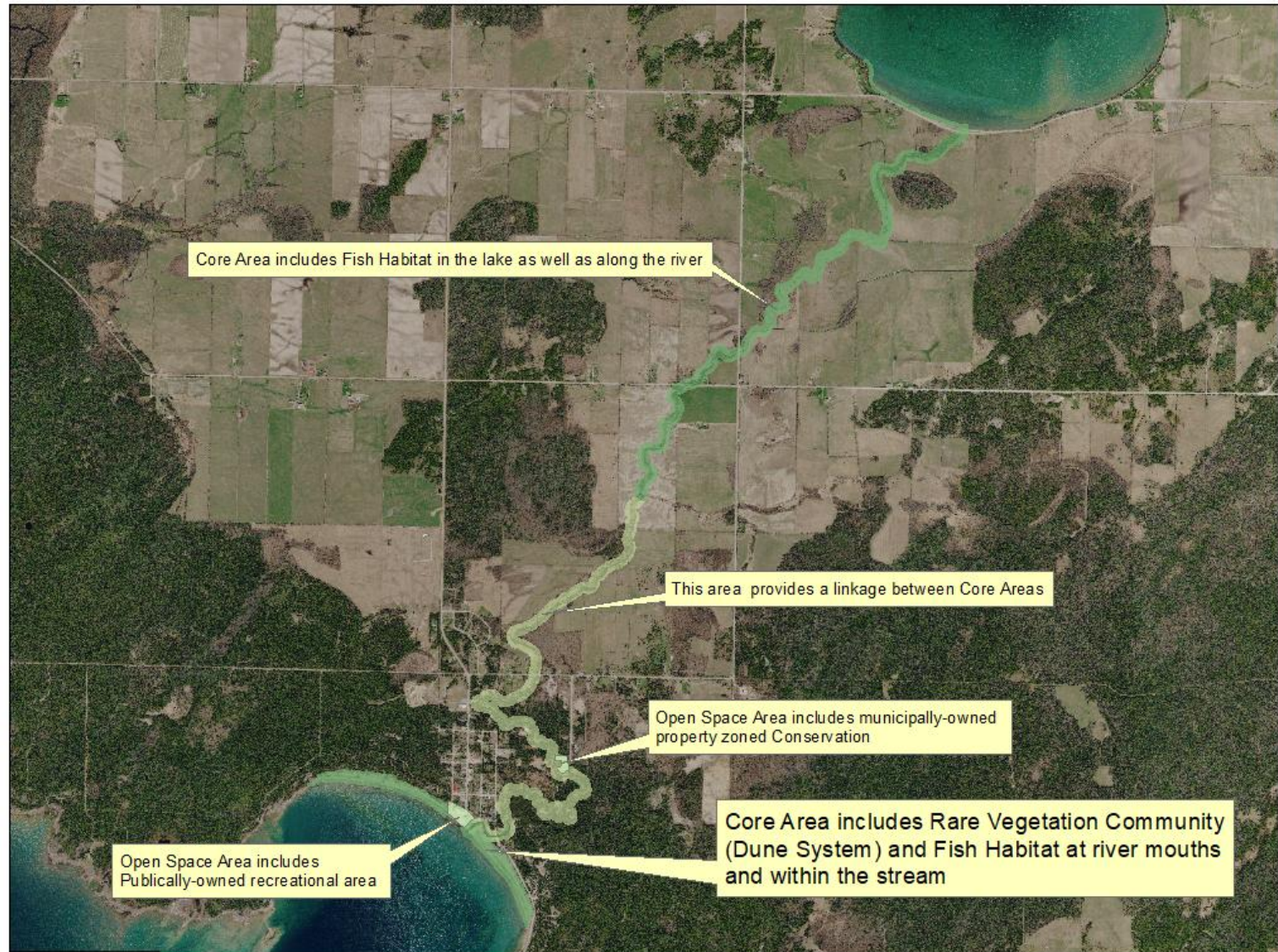


# Core Area with Linkages Example: Mindemoya River

- The Mindemoya River between Providence Bay and Lake Mindemoya is a good example of a candidate core area with linkages. It includes:
  - Critical fish habitat in Lake Mindemoya and the upper Mindemoya River
  - Critical fish habitat and rare vegetation communities around the river mouth
  - A stream mostly in a natural state connecting these core areas



# Core Areas with Linkages Example Mindemoya River



# Rare Vegetation Community with Linkages

## Example: South Shore of Lake Huron

- The south shore of Lake Huron is home to a large number of rare vegetation communities – alvar areas and dune/beach systems that are home to a number of endangered species
- This example shows identified plant communities (alvar in this case) and the natural areas between them that can function as linkages to prevent landscape fragmentation



# Rare Vegetation Community with Linkages

## Example: South Shore of Lake Huron



# Open Space Areas

- Publically owned Open Space areas may become part of the Natural Heritage System if they are largely in a natural state and contain, or could be linkages to, Natural Heritage Features
- Property owned for conservation purposes may also become part of the Natural Heritage System where these lands contain Natural Heritage Features



# Open Space Areas

- Open Space Areas currently identified as candidates are publically-owned properties containing natural heritage features and areas or consisting of green spaces, and that consist of predominantly natural cover.
- These areas have land uses that are compatible with the NHS – principally recreational uses oriented towards natural areas, such as hiking trails

# General Policy

- No new development will be permitted within Core Areas in a Natural Heritage System unless it has been evaluated by an EIS and demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the features contained within, or their ecological function
- This evaluation will also be required when development is proposed in the adjacent lands to a core area (generally 120 m, though this distance depends on the type of natural heritage features within)
- Development within or adjacent to linkages may require an EIS depending on the nature of the linkage, the connected core areas, and the development proposed.

# Existing Uses

- Existing ongoing uses on lands designated as Core Areas in the Natural Heritage System will be allowed to continue
- In the case of agricultural areas, agricultural uses will continue to be permitted uses in Rural and Agricultural areas as per the Provincial Policy Statement 2020
- Existing lots of record will be allowed to construct single dwellings or seasonal dwellings where the Official Plan allows, as long as disturbance to the NHS is minimized- this may require a site assessment by a professional to identify building site locations and possibilities for mitigation

# Severances

- Technical severances of lots that have been merged inadvertently will be allowed to be re-created along the original lot lines, as long as they can meet the minimum standards in the Official Plan
- Severances of original 40 hectare lots will be permitted as long as the proposed uses take place outside the NHS or are compatible with the NHS (e.g. certain recreational uses)
- Lot additions and easements over existing roads may be permitted without an EIS
- Severances for conservation purposes may be permitted within Natural Heritage System Core Areas
- Each application of this type will be evaluated to on a case-by-case basis and an EIS may still be required in some instances

# Expanding the Natural Heritage System

- Natural heritage features and areas are often discovered and documented in the process of planning applications, through government activities, and through activities undertaken by conservation and stewardship groups
- These newly-identified features may qualify to be included in the Natural Heritage System

# Expanding the Natural Heritage System

## -Continued

- When Natural Heritage features are identified and information is provided to the Planning Board, staff will apply the Natural Heritage policies of the Official Plan as relates to these features
- When the Official Plan is periodically reviewed, these new features will be looked at to see if they could become Core Areas or Linkages in the NHS
- If Natural Heritage Features are identified as part of an Official Plan amendment application, consideration will be given to including those features in the Natural Heritage System as part of that amendment

# Next Steps

- We are in the process of contracting a consultant to review and provide feedback on policy and mapping drafted to date
- Work on incorporating additional data received as a result of public consultation
  - Mapping data, literature, and traditional knowledge are all valuable sources that may be able to be incorporated into mapping core areas and linkages

# Next Steps - Continued

- After receiving the review from our consultant and incorporating public feedback, we will proceed to amend the Official Plan to include the Natural Heritage System in the text and schedules
- The amendment process will include a statutory public meeting for the Official Plan Amendment
- The Board and the Municipalities will review and if appropriate adopt the OPA and send it to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for approval. After approval, there will be a 20 day appeal period where the decision can be appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal.



# Ways to Contribute

- Providing mapping information regarding Natural Heritage Features that could be core areas or linkages
- Providing feedback on draft documents
- Attending future public meetings regarding the NHS
- Conservation and stewardship organizations that undertake rehabilitation programs are encouraged to provide information on these efforts

# Questions?

