



Media Release

Effectiveness of the Oak Ridge Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) and health of the Oak Ridges Moraine assessed by the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (ORMF)

(Toronto, Ontario March 9, 2011) A series of eight reports prepared under the *Measuring Success* banner by the non-profit Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation were distributed to MPPs at a Queen's Park briefing yesterday. Today, the documents are available to the public and stakeholders on the ORMF website (<http://moraineforlife.org/resources/measuringsuccess.php>) for review.

Started in 2010, the ORMF's *Measuring Success* research and monitoring project was launched to assess how effective the provincial government, the ORMF and all other Moraine partners have been in meeting the ORMCP's original expectations and targets. Comments received by the public and stakeholders will be used to strengthen each of the eight reports prior to their finalization and publication in June 2011. This is in preparation for the ORMCP scheduled legislative review in 2015.

The Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) is an 186,000 hectare ridge, stretching 160 kilometres across South Central Ontario (including the GTA). This extremely important concentration of forested land has over 60 headwater areas and is one of the most essential groundwater recharge zones in the Province.

It was April 22, 2002 (Earth Day) when the Government of Ontario announced the adoption of the ORMCP. Protecting the ORM as a healthy natural ecosystem was deemed essential to maintaining the health and quality of life for more than 6 million people.

The ORMCP, touted as the strongest environmental strategy in North America when launched, contained innovative and cutting edge policies; such as comprehensive watershed planning, natural systems design and landform conservation.

Preliminary findings from the *Measuring Success* project illustrate that the ORMCP has been very effective in halting urban sprawl on the Moraine, however, minor amendments or augmentations would make the Plan more effective and user-friendly. For example, there is an ongoing need for support from the Province to the municipalities and others in the areas of policy interpretation and technical information, a need to clean up unnecessary inconsistencies and duplications that exist between the ORMCP and other provincial policy documents and a need for a review of the land use policies in rural areas to explore ways of providing opportunities for innovation to maintain viability of rural land uses on the ORM.

The Project finds that while the ORM retains a healthy base of natural terrestrial cover, most indicators of a healthy environment used by the Project show that continued improvements are necessary. For example, naturally vegetated stream corridors are sub-optimal, existing at well below the ecological targets of 75 per cent coverage. Stream conditions have fallen well below preferred standards for fish community health and benthic community health, with elevated phosphorous loading and E. Coli levels. The remaining forest interior habitat, critical to forest dependent bird species, is inadequate in Natural Linkage areas. Furthermore, prairie, savannah and sand barren habitats are rare on the ORM and the bird species dependent on these habitats are in decline.

Since 2002, the ORMF has been responsible for delivering approximately \$50 million to 177 projects in support of stewardship, education, research, trail and land securement projects. Of this total, the ORMF directly allocated more than \$14.1 million and leveraged more than \$35.8 million in additional funding. We contend that the ORMF's stakeholder relationships, proven ability to effectively manage provincial funds and deep understanding of ORM environmental issues make the ORMF best positioned to assist the Province in meeting the ORMCP goals.

The ORMF's *Measuring Success* Project shows that much has been done, and done well. However, it also recognizes that there is much yet to do. Continued work is needed in the areas of policy development, monitoring, land stewardship, land securement, education and outreach if the ORMCP's full potential is to be realized.

For more information, please contact: Kim Gavine, Executive Director, at kim.gavine@ormf.com or 905-833-5733.

*The **Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (ORMF)** is a non-profit organization mandated to preserve, protect and restore the ecological and hydrological health of the Oak Ridges Moraine (Moraine). Although the ORMF's granting role is currently suspended, we still have a pivotal role to play if the Moraine is to remain protected in the future.*

The ORMF has developed the expertise and network necessary to achieve the task at hand and has requested continued funding from the Province. Since 2002, the ORMF has allocated more than \$14.1 million and leveraged more than \$35.8 million to 177 projects in support of stewardship, education, research, trail and land securement projects. With further investment by the Province, the ORMF can build on its success by addressing the challenges with renewed vigour, in order that the Moraine's value to Ontarians remains secure.