

**\*High-resolution images available**

## **Green group works with doctors to promote health benefits of the Greenbelt**

***Booklet series describes how Greenbelt cleans our air and water and provides activities to keep active***

(Toronto, March 6, 2008) Today, doctors' offices across the GTA and Niagara have another tool to help inform Ontarians on how to stay healthy in their daily lives.

Ontario Nature (ON), in co-operation with the Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) and with support from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, has developed a series of four booklets filled with information on the health benefits of the Greenbelt.

The Greenbelt encompasses rural and agricultural land from east of Cobourg to St. Catherines in the west and extends up to Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula. The area also includes the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. In February 2005, the Ontario government passed the Greenbelt Act to protect this greenspace from intensive urban development.

"The Greenbelt contains some of the most fertile agriculture lands in Canada, hundreds of kilometres of bike and walking trails, extensive areas of parkland and provides important habitat for a variety of species, all on the doorstep of Canada's largest urban area," said Caroline Schultz, Executive Director of ON. "Not many other areas in Canada can boast of that combination."

"This series has been developed following our review of the scientific literature, which suggested that there were unwelcome health impacts of urban sprawl," said Dr. Riina Bray, co-chair of the OCFP Environmental Health Committee.

The first booklet in the series describes some of the critically important ecological services provided by Greenbelt natural areas, such as filtering water runoff, trapping air pollution and keeping soils healthy. The next booklet in the series, which will be released in April, will detail how the many trails, parks and bike paths in the Greenbelt can help residents with their fitness and to develop a healthier lifestyle. The remaining two issues will cover the dietary benefits of the Greenbelt's many fresh food sources and the social and mental health benefits of this green space.

Physician Dr. Neil Arya believes the booklet series links patient health with the local environment in a unique and eye opening way.

"We know that personal and public health can be heavily influenced by the individual and societal lifestyle choices we make and the environment in which we live and create. The Greenbelt booklet series is a fantastic method of raising awareness of this relationship. Having grown up on the Niagara Escarpment in Warton and Owen Sound I personally experienced the valuable ecosystem services the Greenbelt offers," said Dr. Arya.

For an online version and additional information on the links between green space and health, visit [www.greenbeltforhealth.ca](http://www.greenbeltforhealth.ca)

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**For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact:**

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*Ontario Nature is a not-for profit that works to protect and restore natural habitats through research, education and conservation. It connects individuals and communities with nature through various conservation groups across the province (charitable registration # 10737 8592 RR0001). For more information, visit [www.ontarionature.org](http://www.ontarionature.org).*

*The Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) is a provincial, voluntary, not-for-profit organization whose mandate includes undergraduate, post-graduate education, the continuing professional development of family physicians and the maintenance of high standards of medical care and education in family practice. It represents more than 8,236 family physicians who provide patient care for remote, rural, suburban, urban and inner city communities throughout Ontario.*