

Carolinian Canada and Smart Growth Submission #2



The Carolinian Canada Coalition is a partnership of over 40 public and private organizations working cooperatively to conserve the natural landscape, and its biodiversity and ecological services, in the Carolinian life zone of Canada.

More information on Carolinian Canada programs and priorities including publications can be found at <http://www.carolinian.org/>.

The Carolinian Life Zone

The Carolinian Canada Life Zone—Canada's most threatened ecological region—straddles both the Western and Central Panel jurisdictions. Carolinian Canada (CC) is a popular name for the extreme southern region of Ontario where the Eastern Deciduous Forest of North America has its northernmost limits, roughly south of a line running from Grand Bend, through London, to Toronto. Many kinds of flora and fauna are found here but nowhere else in Canada.

The Carolinian Canada Management Committee was fortunate enough to host a presentation by the Secretariat on the Central Panel's work to date. We found that we agree with a number of the concepts and strategies but have identified several areas of concern. We hope that the following suggestions will be reflected in the Panel's recommendations to the Province. Our comments follow the content and Strategic Directions in the report "Strategic Directions for a Central Ontario Smart Growth Strategy".

Part I: Reshaping where and how we live

Carolinian Canada's mandate is focused on protecting and improving the ecological health and natural heritage of the Carolinian zone. To accomplish this, a fundamental change in Ontario's approach to managing land use and transportation systems is needed. Our communities are growing based on a model of community development that is unsustainable on many counts. Carolinian ecosystems and natural heritage are impacted by

- suburban sprawl and the associated model for low density, car-oriented transportation, residential and commercial/ industrial development,
- the related model of scattered non-farm rural development based on severances and estate residential; and
- market forces, policies and disincentives that motivate farmers to remove natural areas.

A comprehensive approach to all these issues is needed to reverse the trends and to "reshape where and how we live".

Panel Direction #1: "The priority action is to attract and direct balanced growth (a balance of jobs and people) within existing urban areas and to support compact development. This will optimize existing infrastructure, reduce pressure on rural areas, and ensure that communities will over time become more transit supportive."

We support this direction and recommend that this approach be embodied in the Provincial Policy Statement. Rural development should also be directed to existing villages and hamlets.

Direction #2: "The province should focus its priorities for public investment on a dynamic system of linked centres/nodes and corridors (see growth concept). Public investment should lead development."

We cannot support this concept as embodied in the "Economic Corridor" depicted in the 2035 Growth Concept as it contradicts the Smart Growth principles and strategies. We fear that it is little more than another major highway network that will promote sprawl and the unfortunate costs that Smart Growth is attempting to curb, particularly in the face of the Mid-Peninsula Highway proposal upon which this Corridor happens to lie. A Panel Member's response to this (Waterloo, March 5, 2003) was that strong policies will be required to ensure that nodes are developed to prevent this from evolving into sprawl. Unfortunately, strong policies have proven ineffective. The Province has much work to do on facilitating Regional Planning and supporting local Official Plans that have strong policies (e.g., at the Ontario Municipal Board). This Corridor as a highway should be removed from the concept or be replaced with a railway corridor.

Direction #3: "With respect to servicing, including water management, conservation, and source protection, the panel subscribes to the philosophy of "plan first, provide/engineer second". Planning for growth should consider how it will be serviced."

We support the notion that servicing should not drive development as it has to date.

Part II: Unlocking Gridlock

Developing an integrated, multi-modal and comprehensive approach to transportation planning directly linked to the land use planning system is crucial to a smarter approach to land use. As with servicing, too often highway planning has simply led to unplanned suburban sprawl and scattered rural development.

Transit and Integrated Transportation

Direction 7: "Invest in existing inter-regional and local transit to bring them up to a high level and standard of service and to meet the demands of growth."

Direction 8: "Implement brand new transit initiatives that will enhance corridors and link nodes of activity to each other throughout the zone."

Direction 9. "Transit is the first priority for transportation investment to serve identified centres, nodes, regional economic areas, and corridors. Other transportation investments should be weighed against investing more into transit. In order to lead growth, transit must be put in place soon. The Panel recommends establishing benchmarks (timelines) and targets (e.g. modal split, % population served by transit), and that investments in modal types should be weighed by the ability to meet these benchmarks and targets."

Direction 10. "The contribution of walking and cycling to human health, the environment, and urban vitality, must be recognized and these modes should be encouraged and planned for in all places."

Direction 11. "The transit, roads/highway, air, rail, and marine transportation network should be coordinated to ensure an integrated transportation network to serve people and goods movement."

We support Strategic Directions 7-11, which would, if acted upon, transform how transportation is approached. Rail should be enhanced to move both goods and people and integrated with other forms of transportation to ensure an efficient transportation system. Currently, the discussion paper over-emphasizes highway dependent solutions. Plans to subsidize public transport, especially light rapid transit (LRT) system /GO train that includes ability to use one ticket to transfer from LRT to bus/subway should be included. For example, from Hamilton, start with LRT then transfer to subway/ buses within city limits of Toronto. This would be similar to Germany's Frankfurt commuter bus from airport allows free transfer to streetcar/bus in a city that is located approximately 45 km from the airport. The Ministry of Transportation needs to change direction toward the Smart Growth approach.

Highways and goods movement

Direction 12. "Priority highway corridors should be the ones that facilitate international trade and contribute to economic success. These economic corridors should form a grid, in order to facilitate both north-south and east-west movement of goods and people."

Direction 13. "The province needs to ensure that all trade corridors (road, rail, air, marine) are used for goods movement and they do not encourage unplanned growth."

Direction 14. "The Panel recognizes that MTO, with its partners, still needs to develop a goods movement strategy. The Panel recommends that as part of this work, the province fully explore all potential and possibility to use rail, air and marine travel, for freight."

Carolinian Canada recognizes the importance of roads in goods movement as part of an integrated, multi-modal transportation system. But Direction 12 may result in a continued emphasis on highways as the virtually exclusive approach to goods and people movement. A hiatus on building new controlled access highways should be instituted while a more integrated approach to transportation planning is developed, as suggested by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists.

We support Directions 13 and 14 as they do emphasize an integrated, multi-modal transportation system that would not spawn as much unplanned suburban and rural development.

Part IV: Optimizing other infrastructure

Taking an ecosystem approach to managing water resources in Ontario should be a cornerstone of smarter planning. The Walkerton Inquiry Part 2 report emphasized this approach to source protection and supported moving to watershed planning more broadly. Watershed planning implies a holistic approach to managing the entire watershed that includes addressing natural heritage protection within that watershed context. This is the approach that Carolinian Canada has been advocating for some time (Carolinian Canada 1996, Reid and Carolinian Canada 2002).

Water management

Direction 27. "The Panel recommends that a priority be placed on optimizing existing infrastructure, both soft and hard (e.g., water, wastewater, institutions, services and tourism) in order to accommodate expected growth in the most efficient manner. Collaboration and cooperation will be required among municipalities and all stakeholders, in order to optimize infrastructure investment as growth occurs."

Direction 28. "Water sources need to be adequately protected, through source protection and watershed planning. In addition to protecting clean water resources, there should also be a strong effort made to restore degraded lakes and rivers."

Direction 29. "Water and wastewater infrastructure must be well maintained and respectful of the environment. This means investment in renewal and upgrade of existing systems. Full cost pricing (incorporating the concepts of life cycle/replacement) to ensure funds to maintain this infrastructure will be necessary. Development and adoption of new technologies in this field should be encouraged and supported. The Panel also recognizes that water and wastewater management are interrelated, and recommends an integrated approach in managing them."

Direction 30. "Water and wastewater should be planned/managed on a watershed basis, or in a watershed context. This includes water conservation, source protection, stormwater source control, avoiding intra-basin transfers, etc."

Carolinian Canada supports Strategic Directions 27-30 as a firmer basis for water management within community planning, particularly when coupled with the recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry. The three watershed planning policy guidance documents "Water Management on a Watershed Basis", "Integrating Water Management Objectives into Municipal Planning Documents" and "Subwatershed Planning" (Ministry of the Environment and Energy and Ministry of Natural Resources 1993a, b, c) should be updated and integrated into the Provincial Policy Statement. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan provides an excellent model for the integration of water resource considerations into land use planning. Funding mechanisms for watershed planning would also be needed.

The Panel should recommend the restructuring of the Ontario Municipal Board so that it is less development focussed and is more supportive of local sustainable solutions. Our present landscape – the reason smart growth was undertaken – is a result of previous planning efforts, mostly initiated 10 or more years ago. Smart Growth must avoid repeating this. In fact, if smart growth is only looking at being implemented in 20 years time, the landscape may no longer be available to implement it!!

Part V: Protecting the environment

Carolinian Canada recognizes that the panel is a balance of interests and that land use planning does require tradeoffs and balancing. Nevertheless, we feel that Strategic Directions 36-39 do not reflect an ecological approach to land use planning that recognizes ecological features, functions and services as natural assets or capital. The underlying approach is resource valuation, which is out of step with contemporary ecological management.

Direction 36. "The Panel recommends that rural areas (outside of settlement areas) be recognized as primarily for sustainable resource use and protection (this includes agriculture, forests, water, aggregates, and natural heritage features, etc.). The Panel recognizes that there is frequently a conflict between residential development and resource use."

Direction 37. "The impact of non-resource based uses in rural areas (outside of settlement areas) should be minimized. To achieve this, further severances and settlement in areas identified for sustainable resource use and protection should be strictly limited. The province and municipalities need a clear and reasonable mechanism to permit resource use in rural areas. In balancing resource use decisions, the Panel recognizes that aggregate extraction is an interim use, and that lands are currently required to be progressively (in phases) rehabilitated in accordance with an approved plan, following extraction. "

Direction 38. "The central zone smart growth strategy should include measures to protect resources (agricultural lands, forests, water sources, mineral aggregates and natural heritage features) and allow for their use, where appropriate. More detailed work is required to identify and map the unique and irreplaceable resources of the central zone (natural heritage, agriculture, aggregates, water sources, forests, etc). Although this mapping and detailed policy work will not be completed before the Panel will provide advice to the Minister, it is essential that it be completed."

Direction 39. "The Panel recommends that inter-ministerial, inter-governmental and inter-agency cooperation and support be pursued vigorously to complete constraint mapping of the irreplaceable resources of the central zone (natural heritage features, agriculture, aggregates, water sources, forests, etc). As a first step, the Panel has begun to identify the types of resources and some criteria that should be used to identify resources to be protected."

Natural Heritage and Environment

Carolinian Canada is pleased that the panel supports the identification and implementation of a natural heritage system for the Central Zone (Strategic Direction 41).

Direction 41. "A natural heritage system (NHS) of core areas and corridors/linkages, should be identified, and growth decisions should be made within the context of protecting and managing the system. This NHS should be developed at the scale of the central zone."

Carolinian Canada whole-heartedly supports Direction 41. A natural heritage system approach underlies many of the policy documents that support implementation of the Provincial Policy Statement such as the Natural Heritage Reference Manual and the Significant Wildlife Habitat Technical Guide. The Provincial Policy Statement should be revised to reflect this systems approach to natural heritage and to assessing impacts.

Over the last few years, Carolinian Canada has been working on a state-of-the-art approach to natural heritage system planning with a team of Ontario's top conservation scientists at the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and the Natural Heritage Information Centre of the Ministry of Natural Resources. This "Big Picture" approach to Natural Heritage System planning has now mapped core natural areas and corridors across the Carolinian zone. It has also very recently been applied to the rest of southern Ontario.

In a separate document, Carolinian Canada provides maps of core natural areas, other significant natural areas and potential corridors for the entire Carolinian zone. These areas need to be identified in the Smart Growth mapping and given priority. We are also providing the ArcView Geographic Information System data files to the Secretariat so this data can be used in developing a natural heritage system for the Central Zone. We understand that the Ministry of Natural Resources is assessing what type of analysis will be required to develop such a system.

The special natural features already identified by the Central Panel, the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine already have special protection measures through provincial legislation and plans. Canada's most threatened ecological region, the Carolinian zone, has no such special protection. The Panel's final recommendations to the government should identify Carolinian species and ecosystems as some of the "irreplaceable" features of the Central Zone. We also suggest the Panel recommend that special strategies be developed to ensure the conservation of Carolinian ecosystems. A provincial plan for the Carolinian zone like that for the Niagara Escarpment or Oak Ridges Moraine is one option. However, many actions are needed beyond the land use planning system. Our 2002 discussion paper "Practical Options for the Greening of Carolinian Canada" articulated one approach as follows.

"One option which deserves particular consideration is the development of a regional conservation and land use strategy for Carolinian Canada, incorporating both stronger Provincial direction for land use planning and special incentives and resources tailored to meet the special needs of this region. This would be analogous to the provincial programs already in place or being developed for the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine and Great Lakes Heritage Coast. All of these current programs are worthy, but even a quick review of the natural values at severe risk in Carolinian Canada demonstrates that this region is equally deserving of Provincial attention.

What is needed is a package of carrots and sticks – incentives and planning controls – that will gradually shift the way land is used to conserve and restore the natural cores and connectors. Municipalities and conservation authorities could lead the way in incorporating Big Picture concepts into Official Plans. Eligibility for property tax incentive programs could be modified to better fit the

conditions in Carolinian Canada. A special focus on Carolinian habitat securement, involving partnerships among governments and private funders, could be established under the new Ecological Land Acquisition Program. A Carolinian Canada Recovery Trust could assist in the delivery of these programs, as the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation is undertaking.

Putting together the details of such a package needs the involvement and creativity of many partners. The process created by the Provincial government for the Oak Ridges Moraine could provide a model for this region as well – an advisory panel representing a broad range of stakeholders, charged with the responsibility of developing a balanced strategy to achieve conservation goals. With the backing of the technical work already done to develop the Big Picture, and the support of the relevant Provincial ministries, such a panel could provide a catalyst for a great leap forward in conservation activity."

Direction 40. "The Panel recognizes that different levels of protection will need to be in place for different features and in different areas. Lands that are deemed unique and irreplaceable (e.g. the Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment) should receive the highest level of protection. The level of protection achieved through development will vary. In existing urban areas protection might have to be less stringent, and incentive based. In approved areas for development, the province and municipalities may be able to apply slightly more stringent levels of protection. New development could be subject to stringent tools and/or provide incentives that steer growth away from key resources and natural heritage areas and key water sources."

Carolinian Canada believes that Strategic Direction 40 presents contradictory ideas. Different types of natural heritage features and functions in different locations certainly may need different approaches to conservation. The statement "The level of protection achieved through development will vary" is particularly odd. We assume this actually means the degree of protection afforded through land use planning will vary. Again, the tools and approaches may be different in different contexts. Certainly regulation, incentives, easements, stewardship and other tools should be available in different situations.

A comprehensive approach to natural heritage protection is needed to implement a natural heritage system and the Panel should recommend this. A comprehensive approach would include:

- Strong protection within the Provincial Policy Statement and Planning Act;
- Strong protection in municipal Official Plans and policies;
- Effective private land stewardship programs;
- Effective property tax incentive programs (e.g. Managed Forests Tax Incentive Program, Conservation Lands Tax Incentive Program);
- Effective incentives for farmers to retire and restore marginal farmland including riparian lands;
- Land and easement acquisition programs implemented by federal, provincial and municipal governments, conservation authorities, land trusts and other private conservation groups (see Reid and Carolinian Canada 2002 for details).

We believe that the Provincial Policy Statement should be revised to provide clearer and stronger protection for natural heritage features and that section three of the Planning Act should require consistency with the policy statement rather than simply "having regard to".

The panel should also recommend that an evaluation system similar to that for wetlands be devised for woodlots and other natural heritage features to identify and protect them. This is especially needed in the southwest where very low amounts of forest and other ecosystems remain. Natural heritage restoration also need to be addressed.

Direction 42. "The smart growth strategy should support "green infrastructure" as meeting multiple smart growth objectives."

We are heartened that the "Panel recognizes the important role of "green infrastructure" (the system of lakes, valleys, and woodlands that contributes to environmental functions) in both rural and urban areas. This includes the role of greenspace and parks with respect to recreation, improving air quality, water management, and energy conservation. Further work is required to define green infrastructure, its contribution to environmental quality, and implementation mechanisms."

Non-tangible benefits of the natural environment need to be acknowledged, for example soil erosion, reduced need for air conditioning, carbon sequestration, UV protection, water table effect, real estate values; as does the value of social capital, for example the value of volunteerism, stay-home parents, community activities. Methods of valuing natural heritage must be revisited to understand fiscal connections with economy.

Agriculture

Farming is a critical enterprise in the Central and Western regions and especially in the Carolinian zone with its rich soils and amenable climate. Yet farmers are under siege from the marketplace, trade agreements and climate. Protecting farmland is important as one element of ensuring a future for agriculture across the region. So we certainly support Strategic Directions 43 and 44. But much more is needed.

Direction 43. In addition to the existing Canada Lands Inventory, more work is required to identify and protect prime agricultural lands and to sustain a viable, economically prosperous agricultural industry.

Direction 44. In optimizing the long-term availability and use of these unique and high quality agricultural resources there must be a stronger commitment to their long-term productive capability and their long-term protection.

The Provincial Policy Statement should provide stronger protection for prime farmland and stronger policies against scattered rural severances that affect farmers' ability to farm. Legislation to allow non-profit organizations to acquire permanent agricultural easements should be enacted by the province. The federal government should provide a tax incentive for the donation or bargain sale of farmland easements. Municipalities should be provided with model policies and by-laws for agricultural land protection.

A new comprehensive approach to environmental incentives for farmers should be introduced. These would include:

- Broadening the application of federal, provincial and local water quality incentives, and linking these more strongly to biodiversity restoration;
- Expand financial incentives to encourage retirement of targeted rural lands to conservation (e.g. proposed federal Greencover program);
- Ensure long-term financial support for the Environmental Farm Plan program; and
- Make current farmland and conservation property tax incentive programs more effective for farmers and for conservation (Managed Forests Tax Incentive Program, Conservation Lands Tax Incentive Program, Farm Land Taxation Program; see Reid and Carolinian Canada 2002 for details).

Carolinian Canada's Priorities for Smart Growth

The Carolinian Canada Coalition's mandate is focused on natural heritage conservation and we emphasize the need to advance natural area protection and enhancement through the work of the Smart Growth panels.

The Western and Central Panels should identify loss of Carolinian species and habitats as a significant issue and consider proposing special measures to address the loss of habitat in the Carolinian Zone through the Smart Growth Initiative. This would also promote the (Central Panel's) Guiding Principles and Core Values. The Smart Growth Panels were set up with the mandate to develop integrated management plans, including strategies to protect significant natural systems (Ontario, 2001b). These plans could include strategies for defined sub-regions. Some of the measures addressed in "Practical Options for the Greening of Carolinian Canada" (Reid and Carolinian Canada Coalition 2002) may be of interest to the Panels.

To achieve the Smart Growth vision, new incentives, new approaches, and new resources will be needed to protect or restore the natural environment that supports our settlements and use of the land, as well as native wildlife. We are all too familiar with the lesson of protecting water source areas and the tragedies that result when this is neglected. The "Greening" paper examines a broad spectrum of possible new tools, drawing from programs currently in place in Ontario and in other jurisdictions. These should be integrated to the extent possible into the Smart Growth initiative as it progresses.

A brief overview of the potential tools is presented within five broad categories below. Specific actions under each category are detailed in the "Practical Options for the Greening of Carolinian Canada" that is also provided for your information.

A. Sharing the Vision

To be successful, the need for conservation of Carolinian species and habitats must be broadly understood, appreciated and accepted by government agencies, landowners, and residents as a road map to achieving ecological health. Embedding the vision into a range of plans, strategies, and actions will hasten that acceptance. Actions needed include:

- Recognize the distinctive nature and needs of Carolinian Canada in federal, provincial and municipal government policies and programs;
- Broaden the focus of protection and recovery activities from species at risk to restoration of landscapes supporting multiple rare species;
- Encourage the use of planning tools that address landscape and watershed-level conservation and restoration;
- Involving the community at grass roots to including volunteers and ENGOs particularly with Smart Growth development and implementation;
- To ensure that plans are relevant and feasible in each of the Smart Growth regions
- To provide opportunity for local citizens to participate in finding solutions and decision making for their future in their community; for example, monitoring in standardized manner other communities use in Ontario/nationally to measure the effect of climate change and human impact on our environment .

B. Strengthening Incentives for Conservation

Most of Carolinian Canada is in private hands, and sharing responsibility for the environment through economic incentives is a concept increasingly being adopted, both in Ontario and in other jurisdictions. Actions needed include:

- Broaden the application of federal, provincial and local water quality incentives, and link these more strongly to biodiversity restoration;
- Expand financial incentives to encourage retirement of targeted rural lands to conservation (e.g. proposed federal Greencover program);
- Make conservation property tax incentive programs more effective; and
- Provide incentives to support First Nations in their protection of conservation lands.

C. Informing and Educating for Conservation and Restoration

To build a broad consensus about conservation priorities, it is necessary to inform rural landowners, urban residents, adults and children; and providing a platform for local input and action by interested participants. Actions needed include:

- Upgrade, simplify and expand educational materials and technical advice for rural landowners; and
- Raise awareness of urban residents of the need for conservation and restoration of Carolinian ecosystems and offer ways they may become involved.

D. Funding Land Securement and Restoration

Achieving the Big Picture vision requires a long-term investment in securing and restoring key parts of the landscape. Actions needed include:

- Expand the existing protected areas system of provincial parks, conservation areas and land trust lands;
- Establish financial commitments by public agencies to support land securement and restoration; and
- Improve income tax incentives to encourage full or partial donations of environmentally significant lands

E. The Role of Land Use Planning and Management

Most of the planning controls affecting private land are implemented through the Official Plans and zoning bylaws of municipalities, but within overall policy direction provided by the Provincial Policy Statement and related guidelines. Actions needed include:

- Strengthen the Provincial Policy Statement and implementation to require protection of key natural features, encourage restoration and promote sound water management;
- Promote naturalization and increase tree cover in urban areas;
- Encourage municipalities to make better use of existing planning and regulatory tools; and
- Update the regulatory role of conservation authorities under new legislation.

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