



*All Aboard...
the
Moraine Train!*

Commemorative Programme

**Celebrating 20 years of community
activism on the Oak Ridges Moraine**

Sunday, November 1, 2009
11 am – 2:30 pm
York Durham Heritage Railway



citizens'environmentwatch

**STORM
COALITION**



MONITORING the MORaine

STORM: The

It started with a phone call. It was 1988 and Kathy Guselle, president of SAGA (Save the Ganaraska Again) called the Environmental Assessment Advisory Committee (EAAC) looking for help to ensure planning protection for the headwaters of the Ganaraska River. The response was “ask for an environmental assessment.” The request was made and the EAAC (chaired by Dr. Robert Gibson) held a hearing on September 7, 1989; the room was packed with SAGA delegates and supporters. The EAAC Report No. 38 recommended that the province undertake a review. While the request was denied by Minister Bradley, this process laid the foundation for a fundamental shift in citizen engagement and traditional planning on the moraine and beyond.

At this meeting, two graduate students calling themselves S.T.O.R.M., talked about the ecology of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the need for citizen engagement as part of an ecosystem approach to watershed planning. Don Alexander and John Fisher were flooded with phone calls. One of these was from Dorothy Izzard, chair of Concerned Citizens of King Township’s subcommittee called STORM. In October 1989 S.T.O.R.M. (east) and STORM (west) met in King City and the Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition was born.

Six months later STORM was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, its charter, mission (provincial legislation for consistent application across the 30 municipalities), goals and objectives, organizational structure and guiding policies put in place. The founding board comprised Don and Dorothy as co-chairs and directors John Fisher, Kathy Guselle, Gloria Reszler, Tom Meininger and Ene Leivo.

The October meeting was a catalyst for a frenzy of activity; talking with David Crombie, Commissioner for the Toronto waterfront, Liberal MPP Ron Kanter, who headed up the Greater Toronto Area open spaces taskforce, members of parliament and conservation authorities. A seminal conference, *Greenways and Green Space on the Oak Ridges Moraine*, was held at Trent University with Randal Arendt and his ideas of alternative development as keynote speaker. This proved formative as the

First Decade

nascent moraine movement began to be taken seriously; people weren't only talking about their own issues but were advocating for broader ecosystem-based planning principles. Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority created a moraine taskforce and the Crombie and Kanter commissions identified the Oak Ridges Moraine as a significant ecological landscape and called for provincial intervention. It was a heady time and change was in the air.

In March 1990, the government responded. Liberal Cabinet Minister Greg Sorbara announced, at the eve of the election, provincial interest in the moraine accompanied by interim guidelines. In 1991, the new NDP government announced a three-year planning study and a technical committee to oversee the commission of 15 background studies. The invitation for STORM to sit at the table created internal divisions with a clash of conflicting visions for its future role in moraine protection. Over the next three years STORM volunteers continued to advocate for provincial legislation for the entire moraine and in 1994 the final report was delivered to Minister Hampton. The effort had been worth it; the management strategy included as one of the implementation options an Oak Ridges Moraine Act and land use plan. Without STORM, Ontario Naturalists and the Conservation Council at the table, moraine protection in place today would not have been possible.

The next four years was a reflective time for STORM. The new conservative government had a singular agenda to deregulate environmental protection. Fearful lest the movement lose what little protection it had in the moraine guidelines, STORM went 'underground' focusing on education and awareness. A committee, chaired by David McQueen, produced the *Oak Ridges Moraine* book. In 1996, it was short-listed for the Trillium Award and sold out in its second printing. David Lewis Stein from the Toronto Star was writing articles about the moraine. A 1997 conference on the moraine's hydrogeology showcased five years of work headed up by the Geological Society of Canada.



STORM: The

It started with a number of phone calls. In 1999, Debbe Crandall, STORM's Executive Director and past chair, called every ENGO she could think of. Bolstered by a bold new strategic plan, it was time for STORM to re-emerge. Mike Harris' government had just been re-elected and development on the moraine was out of control. The interim guidelines were toothless; King City was mired in conflict over Big Pipe planning, Oak Ridges had just emerged from a year-long OMB hearing, Richmond Hill was opening the gates to development on its remaining wild areas, Uxbridge council and citizens were facing off against Gan Eden, and Stouffville was tripling its urban footprint. Basically, there was nothing for STORM and its 30 member groups to lose.

Within a few months, an informal partnership was forged between STORM, Federation of Ontario Naturalists (now Ontario Nature), Earthroots, Save the Rouge Valley System and Richmond Hill groups. The 'Kettle Lakes Coalition' started organizing a campaign against Richmond Hill's OPA 200, which purported to 'protect' the environment by planning for many 1000s of new homes in its remaining non-urban moraine lands. That October, the Kettle Lakes warriors; Linda Pim (FON), Debbe Crandall (STORM), Lea Anne Mallet (Earthroots) and Glenn de Baeremaeker (SRVS) held a press conference at Queen's Park to deliver the moraine message. It was almost derailed by the news that UDI head, Steve Kiesser, had charged Minister Steve Gilchrist with bribery (this was later proved to be false). Suddenly, the moraine was in the news and the groups were able to leverage this scandal into moraine awareness. Unfortunately, it also created a fatal crack in relations with SRVS.

The next year and a half was a whirlwind of activity. Bruce McKenzie joined Debbe at STORM. The STORM/FON/Earthroots campaign shifted and adapted in response to media reporting and polling data. There were monthly press conferences; town hall meetings co-organized with Liberal MPP Mike Colle (creator of the Save Don't Pave and Hike the Moraine campaigns); GTA-wide Take Action events; frequent trips to Queen's Park to support a bevy of private members' bills: two Liberal (Colle), one NDP (Martel and Churley) and one Conservation (Gilchrist); radio ads; request for reviews under the Environmental Bill of Rights and numerous demonstrations.

Second Decade

Meanwhile, a February 2000 public meeting saw 1,500 people force Richmond Hill to abandon OPA 200 and in May, one of the most closely watched OMB hearings began. SRVS, with funding from the City of Toronto had standing, STORM and others sent in observers and the Toronto media had daily moraine coverage. As the hearing progressed into 2001, the province had no recourse but to strongly intercede; if ever there was an indictment of the inadequacies of the planning system, this was it. By sheer serendipity, a by-election in the heart of the moraine and Tory Blue country provided STORM and others with the platform to test the political waters of protection for the moraine.

On May 17, 2001 the province blinked. Chris Hodgson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, ordered a six-month moratorium on all moraine matters. On June 28, Liberal Greg Sorbara was elected and within the month, the Oak Ridges Moraine Advisory Panel (on which STORM asked to sit and after some hesitation was invited) was in full swing. By August, public meetings on the panel's draft recommendations were held across the moraine. The response was unprecedented; overwhelmingly the public demanded nothing less than full and legislated protection with no more urban development on the moraine. By December 14, 2001 the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act* was brought into law with unanimous three-party approval and on April 22, 2002, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan was approved. A year later the ORM Foundation was created with \$15 million from the province.

On December 15, 2001 STORM held an internal victory dinner to celebrate 12 years of single-mindedly pursuing and achieving its primary goal; provincial legislation for the moraine. Should it now hang up its hat? Drawing upon lessons from other groups, STORM shifted strategic gears away from advocacy to monitoring the ORMCP. In 2004 STORM, Citizens' Environment Watch and the Centre for Community Mapping began designing a new project. A year later the Monitoring the Moraine project received significant multi-year funding and a new chapter in STORM's role in moraine governance had begun.

STORM: The

So what will the next decade hold for STORM and the Oak Ridges Moraine? As has happened a number of times over the past 20 years, there likely will be shifts in the way STORM operates. Its longevity has been its resilience to adapt to the prevailing political and financial environments. Another adaptation is the emerging “Moraine. For Life.” collaborative between STORM, the ORM Land Trust and Oak Ridges Trail Association as a way to share resources and more effectively communicate the moraine message.

There is one thread that runs through STORM’s core; the fundamental belief that citizens are drivers of change and that without an engaged and informed citizenry, sustainability is not achievable. This was true in 1989 when STORM volunteers shared their knowledge and understandings of ‘ecosystem-approaches to planning’ with politicians downstream of the moraine. And so it will be again that concerned and knowledgeable citizens will herald in the next decade of moraine protection. It is civil society that has the foresight to anticipate the 2015 mandated review of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. In 2004, STORM’s *Loose Threads of the ORMCP* workshop identified the 10-year review as a significant milestone and that community-based monitoring (Monitoring the Moraine) could help drive the process.

Over the next decade, the public will be again called upon to defend the Oak Ridges Moraine and its protection framework. With the Greenbelt Act calling for harmonization of the ORMCP, Niagara Escarpment and Greenbelt Plans, there are those who worry about the loss of identities of



Photos: Laura Gardner

Third Decade

the constituent parts. The obvious external threats could be private sector interests working behind the scenes to pressure government to relax or unravel the ORMCP protection policies. It is likely that large urban developers will raise the specter of the need for more land to house and employ people in response to the province's *Places to Grow*. Likewise, the aggregate industry may weigh in on the need to open up close-to-market sources to accompany the need for more housing and economic growth. More compelling could be the argument that municipal coffers are getting desperately low with limited residential assessment to offset the costs of doing business.

The review also presents opportunities to improve upon the scientific knowledge and planning approach that underpinned the ORMCP framework in 2001. Since then, Steve Holysh's work with the Conservation Authorities Moraine Coalition on the York Peel Durham Toronto groundwater study has vastly improved the knowledge and understanding of how groundwater moves through the region's underground aquifer systems. Ministry of Natural Resources' ecologists like Steve Varga have been on the ground re-evaluating, re-classifying and mapping significant ecological features. Source Protection Plans for municipal wellheads will include inventories of and strategies to deal with known sources of contamination. Biosphere designation will provide international recognition for the moraine as a model of sustainability and as an integrating framework for addressing conservation, local economic development and research and monitoring. Through the Moraine Research Coalition academic institutions will be contributing moraine-related natural, social and policy science. And data collected and compiled on the Stewardship Tracking System may contribute valuable information about best restoration practices.

There have been some big changes over the past 20 years. Organizing meetings across 160 kilometres before email was the norm was ... well, interesting. And certainly there is a greater willingness on the part of most municipalities and ministries to include the public as part of decision-making. What hasn't changed is the passion, commitment and dedication of the citizen volunteer. These days there's just more of them.

Debbe Crandall

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Special thanks to Jen Bedford, Deanna Coop, Kevin Black, Sheilagh Crandall and Debbie Gordon, without whom STORM's 20th Anniversary may have sailed past.

A special tribute to Kathy Guselle, SAGA, and STORM's first representative on the Technical Working Committee and Moraine Community Hero. Kathy was dedicated, principled and a wonderful role model. The Oak Ridges Moraine is what it is today because of Kathy.

Thanks also to Don Alexander, Lois Brown, Debbe Crandall, John Fisher, Dorothy Izzard, Ene Leivo, Tom Meininger, David McQueen, Joseph O'Neill, Gloria Reszler, Niva and Jules Rowan, James Vermeulen, Dan McCarthy, Kathy Padgett, Anna Tilman and Graham Whitelaw.

