

# NIAGARA ESCARPMENT —FOUNDATION—

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May 22, 2025

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier  
Legislative Assembly of Ontario  
111 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1A2

**Re: 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Approval of the Niagara Escarpment Plan, Canada's First Large-Scale Environmental Land Use Plan and part of the Greenbelt**

Dear Premier Ford:

June 12, 1985 was an historic day in Canada. It was the date 40 years ago that the Ontario Cabinet approved the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP). All three political parties then represented in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supported the NEP.

In 1973, the William Davis government introduced the *Niagara Escarpment Planning & Development Act (NEPDA)* in the Legislature and it passed with all-party support. The *NEPDA* was the enabling legislation for approval of the Niagara Escarpment Plan 12 years later.

Section 2 of the *NEPDA* states very clearly the purpose of the Act, a purpose that has never been amended since the Act's 1973 passage:

*The purpose of this Act is to provide for the maintenance of the Niagara Escarpment and land in its vicinity substantially as a continuous natural environment and to ensure that only such development occurs as is compatible with that natural environment.*

Note the key phrase “a continuous natural environment.” This natural environment extends some 725 kilometres from Queenston on the Niagara Peninsula to Tobermory on the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula.

The *NEPDA* – and the NEP itself when it was approved – has seven objectives that have stood the test of time over the past 40 years and should serve as a model for protection of many other signature natural areas throughout Ontario:

- *To protect unique ecologic and historic areas*
- *To maintain and enhance the quality and character of natural streams and water supplies*
- *To provide adequate opportunities for outdoor recreation*
- *To maintain and enhance the open landscape character of the Niagara Escarpment in so far as possible, by such means as compatible farming or forestry and by preserving the natural scenery*
- *To ensure that all new development is compatible with the purpose of the Plan*
- *To provide for adequate public access to the Niagara Escarpment*
- *To support municipalities within the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area in their exercise of the planning functions conferred on them by the Planning Act*

From 1975 to 1985, the proposed NEP was subjected to extensive public consultations and lengthy public hearings, one of the most comprehensive public engagements in Ontario’s history.

After the Niagara Escarpment Plan was approved in 1985, the area covered by the NEP, plus all of the area of the National Parks at the tip of the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula, were subsequently designated in 1990 as a United Nations (UNESCO) Biosphere. This international recognition of the Niagara Escarpment further underscores the importance of the NEP, for without the existence and implementation of the NEP, the UNESCO designation would not have been achieved and re-confirmed regularly since 1990.

In 2005, the NEP Area was included in the south-central Ontario Greenbelt. In 1994, 2005 and 2017, the Ontario Cabinet approved updated and renewed editions of the NEP after extensive reviews including public consultations.

The conserved Niagara Escarpment has contributed tremendously to the Ontario economy. Real estate values within the NEP Area are higher than outside it because the conserved natural landscape is so attractive. Ontarians enjoy the outdoor experiences offered by the Escarpment environment that contribute significantly to local economies,

from hiking the Bruce Trail to fishing the rivers, from skiing at the Blue Mountains to enjoying the dozens of waterfalls tumbling over the Escarpment, from nature photography to enjoying the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System with its 163 public parks.

The Niagara Escarpment continues to help Ontario address the climate crisis by serving as a “carbon sink” with its extensive natural cover of forests, wetlands and farmlands, all of which help mitigate climate change by absorbing carbon. Over the past 40 years, the percentage forest cover of the NEP Area has increased because of the protective policies of the Plan, further adding to the NEP’s climate-change role.

On this 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the NEP’s approval, we recognize and applaud successive former Ontario Premiers – Robarts, Davis, Miller, Peterson, Rae, Harris, Eves, McGuinty and Wynne – for their leadership in supporting the NEP with its protection of the Niagara Escarpment from inappropriate development and the maintenance of its continuous natural corridor.

We thank all Members of the Legislative Assembly and all the public servants – at the Niagara Escarpment Commission and in several provincial ministries – who have for decades worked in the public interest to draft, improve upon and implement the policies of the NEP.

Ontario taxpayers, who, since 1967, have invested hundreds of millions of dollars through Ontario government programs to protect the Niagara Escarpment for current and future generations, deserve our appreciation and respect.

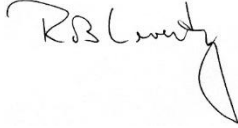
The NEP, as it stands today, is the result of an unprecedented and successful public-private joint initiative spanning over six decades. The work and efforts of our fellow Ontarians, landowners, the private sector, not-for-profit corporations and charitable organizations have been critical in preserving the spirit and integrity of the NEP. Their time and expertise continue be tapped to amass the critical financial resources needed for preserving biodiversity, acquiring natural habitats, protecting farmland, enhancing watersheds, securing conservation easements, challenging inappropriate development, and maintaining continuous ecological corridors along the Niagara Escarpment.

The Niagara Escarpment Plan is a monumental conservation achievement that we all need to celebrate.

In celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Niagara Escarpment Plan, we urge the Government of Ontario to acknowledge this pivotally important backbone of the Greenbelt, which preceded the other two components (the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt’s Protected Countryside) by between 17 and 20 years, and recommit to the significance of this groundbreaking provincial land use planning exercise to protect a local, provincial, national and international treasure – the majestic Niagara Escarpment

landform snaking 725 kilometres through south-central Ontario. We offer you any assistance that may be helpful in celebrating this milestone anniversary.

Your sincerely,



Robert Levery  
President, The Niagara Escarpment Foundation

*The Niagara Escarpment Foundation (NEF) is a not-for-profit corporation, a non-partisan organization and a registered charity founded in 2001 to foster public awareness of the natural and cultural significance of the Niagara Escarpment and to conduct research related to protection of the Niagara Escarpment (nefoundation.ca).*

*The Board of Directors of NEF have a combined experience of over 175 years in Escarpment environmental planning and preservation.*

*Since 2001, the NEF has undertaken public awareness and research projects, primarily related to the effectiveness of the Niagara Escarpment Plan in protecting the Escarpment's watersheds, farmlands and continuous natural corridors to ensure the integrity and continuation of its Biosphere designation.*

cc:

The Hon. Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada

The Hon. Julie Dabrusin, Minister of Environment and Climate Change (federal)

The Hon. Mike Harris, Ontario Minister of Natural Resources

The Hon. Todd McCarthy, Ontario Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Marit Stiles, MPP, Leader of the Official Opposition, Queen's Park

Bonnie Crombie, Leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario

Mike Schreiner, MPP, Leader of the Green Party of Ontario

Chiefs of Ontario

The Anishinabek Nation

Charlene Winger-Jones and Victoria Serda, Co-Chairs, Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network

Chair and Commissioners of the Niagara Escarpment Commission

Past Chairs of the Niagara Escarpment Commission: Joan Little, Don Scott, Russ Powers, Rob Nicholson

Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko, Secretary General, Canadian Commission for UNESCO

Edward McDonnell, CEO, Greenbelt Foundation

Michael McDonald, CEO, Bruce Trail Conservancy

Beth Gilhespy, CEO, Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy

Bruce Harbinson, President, Escarpment Corridor Alliance

Andrés Jiménez Monge, Executive Director, Ontario Nature  
Matt DeMille, Executive Director, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters  
Michael Nadler, CEO, Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Silvia D'Amelio, CEO, Freshwater Conservation Canada  
Tim Gray, Executive Director, Environmental Defence  
Franz Hartmann, Alliance for a Liveable Ontario  
Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director, Canadian Environmental Law Association  
Kimberly Shearon, Acting Executive Director, Ecojustice