

Planning on Building on the Oak Ridges Moraine? What You Need to Know.

The Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) is an irregularly shaped geologic feature, formed from glacial sand and gravel deposition. It stretches from the Trent River in the east to the Niagara Escarpment in the west and reaches up to 150 metres in depth. Due to the extensive recharge and discharge capabilities, 64 rivers originate on the moraine, which forms a watershed divide between lands draining south to Lake Ontario, and those draining north to Lake Simcoe, Scugog and Georgian Bay.

In 2001, the Province released the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) in an effort to protect both the hydrologic and ecological integrity of the ORM. The plan identifies hydrologically sensitive features such as streams, lakes and seepage areas, as well as key natural heritage features including wetlands, woodland and prairies. The plan requires that minimum vegetation protection zones be maintained between these features and any development or site alteration in addition to minimum areas of influence where it must be demonstrated that the ecological and hydrologic integrity of the plan area is being maintained, in order for development or site alteration to proceed.

The ORMCP divides the moraine into four land use categories, those being Natural Core, Natural Linkage, Countryside and Settlement Areas, with differing land use policies for each. The most restrictive policies exist within the core and linkage areas, with development being primarily directed toward settlement areas. The Countryside land use designation serves as an agricultural and rural transition and buffer between core/ linkage areas and settlements, with typical rural and agricultural uses permitted.

While primarily a land use planning policy document, the ORMCP defines development as, *'The creation of a lot, change in land use or construction requiring a Planning Act Approval'*. In cases where this type of development is contemplated, the policies of the ORMCP are rigidly applied. Where existing lots of record are vacant, the ORMCP states that nothing in the plan applies to prevent the use, erection or location of a single dwelling if, the use, erection and location would have been permitted by the applicable zoning by-law in November 2001 and it demonstrates, to the extent possible, that the use, erection and location will not adversely affect the ecological integrity of the Plan Area.

The ORMCP requires that all Municipalities with watersheds originating on the ORM prepare watershed plans, in addition to incorporating the policies of the ORMCP into their municipal planning documents (i.e. Official Plans, Zoning By-Laws). For additional information on the ORMCP visit <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page322.aspx> or contact the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) at info@grca.on.ca.
