

First Nations Drum
April 1, 2017

Ontario Planner Struggles to Save Huron-Wyandot Homeland

By Dr. John Bacher (PhD) & Danny Beaton (Mohawk, Turtle Clan)

The Turtle Island region of Huronia – otherwise known by its archaic colonial name of Simcoe County – is under environmental assault by urban sprawl. A blockade to stop Dump Site 41, the occupation of Springwater Provincial Park, and sacred water walks along the shores of Lake Simcoe are tactics being used to rescue the traditional territories of the Huron-Wyandot.-

Victor Doyle is a senior planner with the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, (OMMAH) and is inspired by the earth-respecting spiritual actions of various Ojibway communities and their many Mohawks allies. Doyle has been with OMMAH for three decades and is at the epicenter of ongoing battles to protect this sacred land with his fighting for provincially-directed land use planning to rescue wildlife, farms, forests and water from human greed.

Doyle's most avid opponents are twofold – corporations, and the powerful minions of developers who run Simcoe County (politicians). Doyle's determination to stand up against their pressure has earned him their enmity. One such politician is former Mayor Doug White of West Gwillimbury, who as far back as 2010 dismissed Doyle's defense of Ontario's land use policies as the mere rantings of "one unelected provincial bureaucrat."



Waawaasaegaaming (Lake Simcoe) Water Walk 2015, The Narrows, Orillia, ON. Photo by Les Stewart

Chief Planner of Toronto, Jennifer Keesmaat, has made Doyle the public voice on the issue, commanding media attention on the research of agronomists, foresters, conservation biologists, land use planners, hydrologists and municipally-controlled conservation authorities. Though no official title accompanies Doyle's point-man position, his stature and prominence should be effective in forestalling or preventing further encroachment.

Two brave conservationists, Wayne Wilson and Patti Young, are no longer with the Nottawasaga Conservation Authority due to their opposition to urban sprawl from the booming City of Barrie spilling over into its watershed and into the community of Midhurst in Springwater Township. In 2014, both Wilson and Young departed under the guise of an NVCA "efficiency audit." Young vacated her position first with Wilson following suit.

While such relatively obscure figures cannot get the media's attention, Doyle's warnings about violations of provincial land use policy ravaging Huronia have been published in two of Canada's leading newspapers, the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail. Doyle's first warnings about Huronia appeared in the December 12, 2009 edition of the Toronto Star. The newspaper characterized his warnings as "a damning memo from Ontario's senior planner" that paints "a stark picture of unsustainable sprawl, congestion and skyrocketing infrastructure costs if the province proceeds with a controversial strategy to urbanize large swaths of Simcoe County north of the Greenbelt."



Waawaasaegaaming (Lake Simcoe) Water Walk 2015, Tudhope Park, Orillia, ON. Photo by Les Stewart

When penning his 2009 warnings, Doyle worried about schemes promoted by corporations to turn the small hamlet of Bond Head, a village of 500 people served by septic tanks, into a city of 114,000 persons. This threat still endures, although now in a more modest scale of a 30,000 hectare proposal. A new

danger emerging is the construction of 10,000 housing units in Midhurst. The biggest problem posed by this development is the polluted runoff spilling into Willow Creek, which is a major source of water flowing into the Minesing Wetlands. The wetlands are an important refuge for rare, endangered and ecologically significant wildlife including the endangered Hine's Emerald Dragonfly, Sturgeon, Bald Eagle, Trumpeter Swan, Sandhill Crane, Blue Winged Warbler, and various turtles.

As Doyle took to writing his second citizen report this spring, Ontario's land use planning system's "Co-ordinated Review" appeared to be on the brink of collapse. A freeze on urban boundary expansions – a key principle of both the Greenbelt and the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan – was under attack by media, developers and municipalities.

The Toronto Globe and Mail provided a link to Doyle's full 27 page report titled "The Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan: Settling the Record Straight" where he vigorously defends urban boundaries. This led to a modest expansion of the Greenbelt on urban river valleys and on grape and fruit tree growing lands in Grimsby. While "Setting the Record Straight" saved the Greenbelt, it has not yet rescued Huronia. The warnings in the report do show why Midhurst, Bond Head and all of its remaining rural land need the protection of the Greenbelt.

Nonsense used to justify the urbanization of Willow Creek, such as the claim urbanization does not harm streams, is junk science, and has been refuted by Doyle using data from the watershed report cards assembled by conservation authorities. Using a study by the Credit River Conservation Authority, Doyle demonstrates how surface water in urbanized areas is always rated, "Very Poor" or "Poor" and explains that damaged watersheds are without any native fish, turtles or frogs.

Doyle said the main threat posed to Minesing Wetlands wildlife refuge from urban sprawl is "the major issue of habitat loss, which, in turn, is the key loss of bio-diversity." Doyle warns refusal to extend the Greenbelt into Simcoe County is causing a mass sale of farms purchased by land speculators. His report states, "development interests continue to be speculatively buying or securing huge land assemblies tens of thousands of acres beyond the green belt." The speculation in Simcoe County has led to farmland to commonly sell for \$54,000 dollars an acre. In contrast, in the better regulated Waterloo region, farmland cost \$14,000 an acre.

Doyle's report illustrates the necessity of the struggle to protect Huronia inside the Greenbelt – a struggle made more difficult by the hostility we received while walking around Lake Simcoe with Ojibway environmental leaders in the "Walk for the Water." My experience includes a driver of an animal control vehicle angrily scowling at us for taking a rest near a bicycle trail.

Those in Huronia that care for the earth should not be treated with contempt, but with the honor given to one standing-up for the sake of the entire community and the life web supporting it. The province must rescue Huronia by extending the Greenbelt.