

To:	Chair Siegart and members of the Tourism Advisory Committee
Committee Date:	July 24, 2019
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-TAC-09-19
Title:	Sustainable Tourism in Grey County
Prepared by:	Bryan Plumstead
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Tourism Advisory Committee as amended as per Resolution TAC05-19; Adopted by Committee of the Whole on August 8, 2019 as per Resolution <i>CW166-19</i> ;

Recommendation

1. **That Report CAOR-TAC-09-19 regarding Sustainable Tourism be received for information; and**
2. **That staff proceed with recommended actions.**

Executive Summary

As one of Ontario's leading tourism destinations, Grey County enjoys many benefits from tourism expenditures and investment, and is seeing increased impacts and visitation to our natural areas. Grey County's Tourism Advisory Committee is charged with enhancing sustainability of Grey County as a tourism destination, and had an initial conversation at their April meeting. This report provides some background on sustainable tourism, overviews sustainability and tourism in many Grey County studies, including Recolour Grey, and provides three recommended actions around inventory and engagement of natural areas with tourism visitation, continued work in active transportation, and investigation of sustainable tourism resources for businesses.

Background and Discussion

Tourism has been one of the fastest growing industries in the world over the past decade. As a driver of economic growth and development tourism has also necessitated a focus on sustainability and managing growth for community benefit. While this growth has been less dramatic in Canada, there is no question that visitor numbers and impacts across Ontario are increasing, presenting both opportunity and challenge to Grey County. With our proximity to Canada's largest metropolitan area, and within a day's drive of 140 million people, Grey County is well-known as an outstanding four-season outdoor recreation destination.

Natural features of Georgian Bay and the Niagara Escarpment, over 250 kilometres of the Bruce Trail, seven waterfalls and Ontario's largest resort at Blue Mountain bring many visitors to enjoy our natural areas. Along with the many benefits of tourism, visitor impacts and numbers are growing. The concentration of demand at Bruce Peninsula National Park has led to overwhelming visitor numbers, necessitating management strategies and a sustainability plan for the Northern Bruce Peninsula.

"Enhancing sustainability of Grey County as a tourism destination" is one of the mandates of Grey County's Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC). At its April meeting, TAC reviewed background documents around sustainability and had some discussions around our natural areas as a starting point in considering three questions.

What is the proper balance for tourism in Grey County?

What investments need to be considered to leverage the assets we have?

What infrastructure investments need to be made?

This report suggests a foundation and some initial options for Grey County's approach to tourism and sustainability. It includes a look at how tourism and sustainability are mentioned in ReColour Grey, Grey County's recently approved Official Plan, other County plans and provides some recommendations for specific actions.

Sustainable Tourism -Definition

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation defines sustainable tourism as **tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future**. Rather than being a type of product, it is an ethos that underpins all tourism activities. As such, it is integral to all aspects of tourism development and management rather than being an add-on component. The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural,

historic, cultural or social environment. This is achieved by balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination.

- WTO (<http://gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/sustour-define.html>)

What is Sustainable Tourism?

It is informative. Travelers not only learn about the destination, they learn how to help sustain its character while deepening their own travel experiences. Residents learn that the ordinary and familiar may be of interest and value to outsiders.

It supports integrity of place. Destination-savvy travelers seek out businesses that emphasize the character of the locale in terms of architecture, cuisine, heritage, aesthetics, and ecology. Tourism revenues in turn raise local perceived value of those assets.

It benefits residents. Travel businesses do their best to employ and train local people, buy local supplies, and use local services.

It conserves resources. Environmentally aware travelers favor businesses that minimize pollution, waste, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and unnecessary nighttime lighting.

It respects local culture and tradition. Foreign visitors learn about and observe local etiquette, including using at least a few courtesy words in the local language. Residents learn how to deal with foreign expectations that may differ from their own.

It does not abuse its product. Stakeholders anticipate development pressures and apply limits and management techniques to prevent the "loved to death" syndrome. Businesses cooperate to sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, scenic appeal, and local culture.

It strives for quality, not quantity. Communities measure tourism success not by sheer numbers of visitors, but by length of stay, money spent, and quality of experience.

It means great trips. Satisfied, excited visitors bring new knowledge home and send friends off to experience the same thing - which provides continuing business for the destination.

Source: National Geographic Online (<http://gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/whatis-sustour.html>)

Principles of Sustainable Tourism

Increasing evidence shows that an integrated approach to tourism planning and management is now required to achieve sustainable tourism. It is only recently that there has been a growing recognition of the importance of combining the needs of traditional urban management (transportation, land use planning, marketing, economic development, fire and safety etc.) with the need to plan for tourism.

Some of the most important principles of sustainable tourism development include:

- Tourism should be initiated with the help of broad-based community-inputs and the community should maintain control of tourism development.
- Tourism should provide quality employment to its community residents and a linkage between the local businesses and tourism should be established.
- A code of practice should be established for tourism at all levels - national, regional, and local - based on internationally accepted standards. Guidelines for tourism operations, impact assessment, monitoring of cumulative impacts, and limits to acceptable change should be established.
- Education and training programmes to improve and manage heritage and natural resources should be established.

Source: Jamieson, Walter and Alix Noble, "A Manual for Sustainable Tourism Destination Management" CUC-UEM Project, AIT, 2000 (<http://gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/etour-principles.html>)

Sustainable Tourism and Grey County

Grey County's recently adopted Recolour Grey; County of Grey Official Plan seeks to foster healthy, happy communities, and sets goals related to development, communities and our natural resources.

The vision of this plan mirrors that from the *County's* Corporate Strategic Plan where *Grey County* looks ***"to be the place where people feel genuinely at home and naturally inspired – enjoying an exceptional blend of active healthy living and economic opportunity"***. This vision is centralized around five main themes, which set the foundation and policy direction in this Plan.

1) **Cultivate Grey** considers the rural and agricultural areas outside of our towns, cities, and villages.

- 2) **Develop Grey** focuses on our *settlement areas*, where the majority of population growth, essential services, and businesses will be located.
- 3) **Natural Grey** focuses on Grey *County's* scenic and naturally beautiful environment.
- 4) **Live Grey** Live Grey captures some of the key areas that influence living standards and quality of life in Grey *County*.
- 5) **Move Grey** looks at how we move people, goods, information, and services into, out of, and throughout the *County*.

Opportunities are listed in Section 1.4.1 of Recolour Grey, including Natural Environment and Cultural Heritage and Tourism & Recreation.

Natural Environment and Cultural Heritage: “The natural and cultural environments are important aspects to Grey *County* and are reasons why many people value this area. We need to protect our natural and cultural environments to benefit future generations, as they serve as important components to the *County's* rich biodiversity and culture. It is necessary to promote activities and *development* that work well with the landscape and support the tourist industry.”

Tourism & Recreation: The topography in Grey *County* is suited to the *development* of four season resorts and shorelines which host marinas and other water-related businesses. Within the guidelines outlined in this Plan, the *development* of such *recreation* uses and related *development* can provide settings which enhance the tourism economic sector in the *County* and attract visitors from around the world. The *County's* tourism goal is to “**increase sustainable tourism revenues through managing and marketing Grey *County* as a tourism destination**”.

Tourism is connected to all sections of this Plan and relies on coordinated community *development* to solidify the *County's* reputation as a destination of choice for Ontario.

Like many activities across Grey *County*, a proper balance of protection of natural and cultural environments and reasonable development to support economic activity is the goal. While much of this is beyond the scope of the Tourism Department and Tourism Advisory Committee, the following sections outline some options and priorities for an approach to sustainable tourism. Appendix I provides excerpts from ReColour Grey and other county studies, which mention Tourism and Sustainability as background.

*Inventory of Grey *County's* natural areas*

Grey *County* is heavily forested, and is home to wetlands, river and valley systems, each with its own unique eco-system. An extensive inventory and background study was completed in early 2017; Green in Grey which seeks to balance preservation of

natural areas with opportunities for recreation and tourism. Grey County has also completed a Forest Management Plan which outlines forest management and recreation activities in County Forests, and is in the process of updating this plan. Grey County is also in the final stages of completing a Recreational Trails & Master Plan for its county forests and the CP Rail Line. Other jurisdictions also own and manage natural areas for a range of environmental and recreation purposes, including Conservation Authorities, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Bruce Trail Conservancy, Ontario Nature, and others.

With many different land managers providing natural areas for a variety of uses including tourism use comes different approaches, governance and management tactics, priorities and resources. Identifying natural areas that are open to visitors, and available for tourism use across Grey County is an important first step in looking at where there may be unsustainable impacts, and how to mitigate these impacts. In many cases, multiple jurisdictions may own property in close proximity, for example in the Kolapore Uplands or Pretty River Provincial Park. Respecting private land that also may be adjacent but not open to visitors is another important consideration.

Tourism staff are working with our GIS department in compiling an inventory of natural areas in Grey County. Sharing this common database, and reaching out to the conservation authorities, MNR&F, Bruce Trail Conservancy and others to talk about visitor numbers, impacts, management and monitoring is recommended as a next step.

Active transportation

Active Transportation is important to Grey County, as one of the goals of Grey County's Transportation Master Plan, and a factor in Grey County's Paved Shoulder Policy, and most recently in undertaking a Cycling & Trails Master Plan. *Active transportation* as tourism activities (e.g. hiking, cycling, skiing, etc.) can also provide economic benefits for our communities. Grey County Tourism has been working on developing cycling product and experiences since 2010, and most recently has worked with Grey County Transportation Services, municipal works department and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to implement the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail along our Georgian Bay shoreline.

Continuing to work with county and municipal partners on active transportation development is recommended, particularly in implementing the Cycling & Trails Master Plan.

Sustainable Tourism Resources for Business

There are many sustainable tourism resources and certifications in the marketplace, including Sustainable Tourism 2030, a program that is partnered through Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO.) As the exclusive purveyor of Green Tourism

certification in the province, TIAO is able to offer affiliate Sustainable Tourism memberships, including preferred rates for TIAO Members.

Undertaking some research, consultation with local businesses and stakeholders and other Destination Marketing colleagues to understand the benefits and costs of participating in a sustainable tourism certification process is recommended.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislative considerations at this time.

Financial and Resource Implications

Proposed actions within this report are within the approved 2019 budget for Tourism. Future recommendations with respect to sustainable tourism may be brought forward for consideration.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal: Planning
- External

Attachments

[Recolour Grey – County of Grey Official Plan](#)

Section 1.41 Our Opportunities

10) **Natural Environment and Cultural Heritage**

The natural and cultural environments are important aspects to *Grey County* and are reasons why many people value this area. We need to protect our natural and cultural environments to benefit future generations, as they serve as important components to the *County's* rich biodiversity and culture. It is necessary to promote activities and *development* that work well with the landscape and support the tourist industry.

11) **Tourism & Recreation**

The topography in *Grey County* is suited to the *development* of four season resorts and shorelines which host marinas and other water-related businesses. Within the guidelines outlined in this Plan, the *development* of such *recreation* uses and related *development* can provide settings which enhance the tourism economic sector in the *County* and attract visitors from around the world. The *County's* tourism goal is to “**increase sustainable tourism revenues through managing and marketing Grey County as a tourism destination**”.

Tourism is connected to all sections of this Plan and relies on coordinated community *development* to solidify the *County's* reputation as a destination of choice for Ontario. The following are principles to support tourism and *recreation* opportunities throughout the *County*:

- The *County* will work co-operatively with tourism and *recreation* groups and operators to contribute to economic prosperity and higher quality of life in our communities;
- The *County* will encourage implementation of the *County's* Tourism Destination Development Action Plan;
- Municipalities are encouraged to develop positive and creative planning policies to accommodate tourism and *recreation-oriented developments*, including methods of expediting the approval of tourism and *recreation-oriented developments*;

- Recognize the economic importance of the tourism and *recreation* industry to the *County*, and the role these industries play in attracting visitors and new migrants;
- Tourism and *recreation* businesses are encouraged to work together to promote their facilities and the *County's* tourism and *recreation* industry;
- The *County* will promote the *development* of eco-tourism in natural heritage areas within their carrying capacity;
- The *County* will promote the *development* of agri-tourism in the rural areas, so long as it does not interfere with agricultural operations;
- The *County* encourages the *development* of attractions, especially those with capacity for year round use which will assist in developing Grey *County* as a regional tourism destination;
- The success in attracting tourism and *recreation developments* to the *County* should be monitored to assist in determining the types of *developments* which could be attracted in the future;
- Support public and private programs that improve customer service excellence for businesses involved in tourism and *recreation*;
- The *County*, tourism/*recreation* groups and businesses and the local municipalities are encouraged to work to advance the eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and cultural heritage tourism opportunities available in the *County* and support *linkages* to surrounding regional cultural facilities;
- The *County* will support the growth and expansions of existing tourism and recreation developments.

Final Approved Version – June 6, 2019 (effective date June 7, 2019), p. 11-12

3 DEVELOP GREY

3.1 Growing our Economy

While the Official Plan cannot itself create *development* or job opportunities, it can have *development* supportive policies in place that encourage sustainable *development* and an investment-ready environment across the *County*....

Natural resources play a key role in the economic *development* of the *County*. Planning for these areas includes:

- Managing the use of these resources to achieve economic and environmental benefits balanced with attractive living environments;
- Managing the *development* and use of these resources so they do not conflict with one another;
- Sustainable policies that ensures wise use of the land base.

Under these guidelines, tourism and *recreation development* can take advantage of specific *Grey County* landforms which include topography and shorelines suited to the *development* of resorts and other tourism related businesses.

3.2 Economic Objectives:

1) Ensure the *County's* natural and cultural resources and environment are protected and developed in a balanced approach to support the tourism and *recreation* sector, and for the benefit of citizens.

Final Approved Version – June 6, 2019 (effective date June 7, 2019), p. 22

4 LIVE GREY

4.1 Housing Policy

Residential Intensification

7) Sharing the *Healthy Development Checklist* created in partnership with the Grey Bruce Health Unit with developers and lower-tier municipalities to address healthy community design including public health and safety needs embedded within residential *intensification*, redevelopment, and new residential *development*. Some areas of consideration within this checklist include:

- Including cycling *infrastructure*, such as bike lanes, paved shoulders, bicycle parking, and signage.

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1) Healthy Environments

Understand the effects of tourism on the environment throughout the *County*, and ensure there is appropriate and safe *infrastructure* to support year-round and seasonal populations.

Include *active transportation infrastructure* (i.e. sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, and pathways) while giving consideration for *complete streets* (Section 8.2) within both the rural and urban landscape of the *County*. Design this *infrastructure* to work jointly with

surrounding amenities in order to increase access and connectivity in order to minimize travel distances between destinations.

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4.5 Our Culture

Grey *County* is home to a lot of art, entertainment, theatre, and creative spaces. Culturally rich and diverse environments are key ingredients to creating supportive, well-connected communities. There are also *significant* economic benefits tied to culture that add to the overall prosperity of an area. Money flows through local businesses, creating more jobs and enhancing quality of life for those living in Grey *County*. We want to promote the success of our businesses in order to attract and retain the best and brightest but to also complement our thriving tourism sector. Grey *County* has many successes to be proud of, and we need to continue to strengthen and celebrate our culture in the area.

1) Supporting cultural programming and strategies to create innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism

- Advance eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and cultural tourism opportunities in the *County* and support linkages to surrounding regional cultural facilities.
- Identify sustainable strategies that enhance our natural and cultural heritage, as part of a greater initiative to build resilient environments.

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7 NATURAL GREY

Background

Natural Grey focuses on the environment. The natural beauty of Grey *County* is a major reason why people choose to live in or visit the *County*. Grey *County* needs to be supportive of not just people, but of the plant and wildlife species as well. We need areas for people to interact with nature without overwhelming it. The *County* also needs to consider our changing climate, and do our part to reduce our impacts on climate change.

Natural Grey features include *land use types* including *Hazard Lands* and Provincially *Significant Wetlands* and *Significant Coastal Wetlands* that are identified on Schedule A. These *land use types* include specific policies and permitted uses that can be considered either within these areas or adjacent to these areas. The other natural features and areas are constraints, which are identified on Appendix A and Appendix B. For constraints, *development* can be permitted within these areas or adjacent to these

areas, subject to addressing the specific policies identified in this Section, or any *provincial and federal requirements*.

7.12 Parks and Open Space

Parks within the *County* include forest properties, trails, municipal parks, sports fields, and civic spaces. These are the places where people come together for events, for sports activities, all forms of leisure and *recreation*, to enjoy nature, and to meet neighbours.

Parks are an essential component to great place-making within our communities. Parks play a significant role in the *County's* goal of creating healthy communities, and are important to our physical, mental, and environmental health.

Many of our *County* forest properties are undeveloped for *recreation*, but help in the protection of our natural features. Some of our forests have recreational opportunities and the *County* is developing a Recreational Trails Master Plan for all forest properties.

The following are principles and policies to support and encourage parks and open space:

- 1) The *County* will complete a Recreational Trails Master Plan for all *County* owned forest properties and the *County's* CP Rail Trail. It will be a guiding document that directs how to properly develop the properties, what uses are appropriate, what facilities are required, and what we are looking for in partnerships with user groups.
- 2) The Recreational Trails Master Plan will encourage other municipalities and/or agencies to create similar plans in order for all public lands to have a consistent approach to management.
- 3) Municipalities are encouraged to provide public or privately operated park and open space uses in proximity to residential, commercial, and institutional land uses.
- 4) In assessing the need to provide parkland dedication versus cash-in-lieu of parkland, the proximity to existing parkland features shall be considered. Where feasible, all new residential developments shall be within 500 metres of parkland or open space uses.
- 5) The design of new parks, or redesign of existing parks, are encouraged to be age-friendly accessible spaces, offering a wide range of passive and active recreational opportunities. The development of parkland and recreational facilities, and services should be done in consultation with local residents and in cooperation with other providers such as school boards. Establishing parks adjacent to school sites is encouraged.

6) Consider the need for further forms of parks such as dog parks (leash on or leash off), trampoline parks, skateboard, bicycle, or roller skate parks, food forests or community gardens, or water-based activity parks.

7.13 Climate Change

Climate change is considered by many to be the world's biggest challenge in the coming century. Grey *County's* weather is already changing and will continue to change. We can expect that there will be more frequent snow squalls, more extreme rain and flooding events, and warmer summer temperatures. We must take action to adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate. This will include making greater efforts to protect and to enhance the resiliency of our natural, built, and social environments. This Plan has been written with this objective in mind.

Additionally, the *County* of Grey will work towards creating a Climate Change Action Plan that will coordinate the *County's* efforts to embrace and facilitate resilient, sustainable *development* to mitigate the effects of climate change within our communities.

The *County* can become more resilient to climate change. Our efforts to adapt can also help Grey *County* remain affordable and economically competitive. The emerging green economy will provide significant opportunities for creative solutions, innovation, and job growth.

The following are principles and policies to assist with mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change:

Parks and open spaces provide opportunities to increase tree canopy and woodland cover across the *County*.

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8 MOVE GREY

Move Grey considers how we move people, goods, and information into, out of, and through the *County*. Grey *County* is a large area and moving around the *County* can be a challenge. We need to ensure that we have the transportation, services, and technology in place to support the needs of our residents, tourists, and businesses, so we can grow and thrive.

Motorized vehicles are essential for traveling the *County* due to our vast geography. Most people who work in Grey *County* commute by car, truck, bus, or as a passenger in a vehicle. Most children in Grey *County* get to school by bus or by car. Not everyone has access to a vehicle and therefore it will be important to provide a variety of

transportation options that work together as a *complete transportation system*. This is often called a 'multimodal transportation system' but for the purposes of this Plan it is called a '*complete transportation system*'. One of the key objectives of this Plan is to maintain and improve the *County's complete transportation system* to provide efficient car, truck, and transit routes as well as cycling and pedestrian routes/trails which connect our rural areas with our *settlement areas* and other key locations throughout the *County*. The policies in this Plan will ensure that a *complete transportation system* is maintained and improved to support the needs of our residents, businesses, and tourists.

8.2 General Transportation Policies

a. The *County* will support different forms of transportation that work together to provide a *complete transportation system* that will contain the following elements:

- Connections between *settlement areas* including Recreational Resort Areas with a priority provided to *active transportation* and transit connections;
- Providing connections between our rural areas and *settlement areas* including Recreational Resort Areas so that people can access services and facilities located within these areas;
- Considering the needs of all age groups when designing and planning transportation *infrastructure* and facilities;
- *Complete streets* which are designed for all age groups and for different forms of transportation including walking, cycling, transit, and driving;
- Develop a *functional classification* of the roads throughout the *County* and develop policies and standards related to the function of the roads. Local municipalities are encouraged to develop a *functional classification* of local roads;
- Partnerships with local municipalities for pedestrian and cycling routes/trails as well as providing opportunities and supporting a variety of transportations options within a municipality;
- supporting local municipalities in developing *active transportation systems*';
- providing guidelines for wayfinding signage to support tourist and cultural attractions, to support downtowns, and for pedestrians/cyclists on routes/trails;
- coordinating with local municipalities and existing transit providers about planned or future transportation connections (nodes) and transit corridors;

- collaborating with local municipalities to ensure the provision of sidewalks and trails are considered within proposed *developments* and within existing developed areas;
- developing a ‘share the road’ educational campaign to educate all road users about the importance of sharing the road and respecting all road users.

b. When considering transportation options and the transportation needs of our residents, tourists, and businesses, prioritization should be given to pedestrians, transit, cyclists, and the movement of goods over those of single occupant cars.

Final Approved Version – June 6, 2019 (effective date June 7, 2019), p. 137-8

8.4 Active Transportation

Active transportation includes everything from walking, cycling, movement with mobility aids, skiing, snowshoeing, skating, skateboarding, longboarding, roller blading or any other way to travel that is self-powered. Providing more opportunities for *active transportation* is important to the *County*. This includes making communities more walkable and accessible for all. Choosing *active transportation* can encourage people to lead healthier lifestyles. In addition to health benefits, *active transportation* can also reduce transportation costs, traffic congestion, pollution from vehicles, and contribute to a more connected community. *Active transportation* as tourism activities (e.g. hiking, cycling, skiing, etc.) can also provide economic benefits for our communities. The following are policies to support *active transportation*:

1) The *County* and local municipalities will pursue the connection of existing and future trails, sidewalks, and paved shoulders throughout the *County* that integrates with the *complete transportation system*. Land dedication may be required to accommodate these connections.

2) New *developments* will need to be designed to be walkable and bike friendly by including for example trails, sidewalks, and/or paved shoulders where appropriate to integrate with the overall *complete transportation system*.

3) The *County*, in consultation with the local municipalities, conservation authorities, and the community, will develop a Trails and Cycling Plan to look for opportunities to enhance existing trails and cycling routes and develop connections to create an overall *active transportation* system that integrates with the *complete transportation system*. The *active transportation* system will be designed to connect *settlement areas* and built-up areas to allow residents and tourists to travel between these areas. The *active transportation* system will also be designed to connect between community facilities, public beaches/shorelines, open space areas, schools, recreational areas, tourist attractions, and parks.

4) Tourism and recreational *developments* that support *active transportation* will be encouraged. This includes but is not limited to expansions of new ski runs, outdoor skating venues, snowshoe trails, *development* of new hiking and biking trails, connecting to existing trails, and other tourism uses that encourage *active transportation*.

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9.4 Monitoring the Plan

1) The *County* will continue to carry out a monitoring and evaluation system that reviews and identifies emerging social, economic, environmental, technological, and health trends, in order to analyze the effectiveness of the Plan, and identify adjustments and updating where required. Both quantitative and qualitative measures will be utilized to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policies contained in this Plan.

Final Approved Version – June 6, 2019 (effective date June 7, 2019), p. 180-81

[Green in Grey - Natural Environment Study](#)

Grey County completed a Natural Heritage Study called Green in Grey in early 2017. The study identified key natural areas and linkages and recommended policies related to these features. Many of the natural heritage features and linkages found already existed in Grey County's mapping.

The study was conducted following changes in the Provincial Policy Statement in 2014 and policy directive that was implemented in the County's Official Plan in 2010.

The Grey County countryside is full of wonderful natural features such as large wetlands, forests and watercourses, each containing their own unique and diverse ecosystem. Identifying these individual features has largely been completed, but it's important to also understand how they all link together to form our entire natural environment. The Provincial Policy Statement refers to this connected natural environment as a "Natural Heritage System" and requires these systems to be identified. The study, Green in Grey, balances the protection of the Natural Heritage System with the continued need for development, agricultural production, and resource use in the County, as well as recreation and tourism.

Extensive consultation was completed for this study, including two open houses around the County, a technical advisory committee including representatives from local Conservation Authority's, local municipalities, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, County Staff and the Consultant team. More consultation opportunities will be available through Recolour Grey, our review of the *Official Plan*.

- The study is considered a background document and the recommendations of the study have been implemented in the County's new Official Plan, Recolour Grey.

[Grey County Forest Management Plan](#)

Grey County has a [Forest Management Plan](#) for all of its forest properties to guide all management activities in Grey County owned forest properties. The plan was drafted in association with the former Grey County Forest Advisory Committee. Members of this committee included local snowmobile clubs, Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), members of Grey County Council and staff, ATV clubs, cycling clubs and trails organizations. Grey County is in the process of updating this Plan and will be seeking feedback soon.

The Plan guides all management activities for the period of January 2003 to December 2022. It consists of two nested plans – a 20 year general management plan and a five year plan which provided the operational details from January 1st, 2003 to December 31st, 2007.

The Plan was written to integrate the management of forests for “forestry purposes” as defined in the Forestry Act, the Provincial Policy Statement under the Planning Act, Niagara Escarpment Plan, Grey County Official Plan Land Use Policies, and other policies, guidelines, initiatives and documents. The Plan includes statements, which articulate the goals objectives, principles, strategies, options and targets for Grey County forests pertaining to such matters as recreational, educational and heritage uses of the forest, timber production, the maintenance and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitats, protection of ecology sensitive areas and significant species, and the further acquisition or disposal of County forest properties.

[Recreational Trails Master Plan](#)

Grey County owns approximately 8,500 acres of forest (45 individual forest properties) and 77 km of CP Rail Trail from Owen Sound to Dundalk. These forests and their recreational trails are enjoyed by many people for a variety of activities. Some activities include hiking, mountain biking, birding, and, in some specific locations, ATViing and snowmobiling.

Grey County is completing a Recreational Trails Master Plan to help manage our trails and plan for the future. Through this plan, we are documenting trail needs and prioritizing future trail projects and management practices.

The Grey County Recreational Trails Master Plan (RTMP) will establish a clear vision, with goals and objectives, for a recreational trail network. The RTMP applies only to Grey County owned forests or trails. This plan does not cover privately owned lands, municipal trails, Conservation Authority trails or other regional trails such as the Bruce Trail, the Georgian Trail, or the Tom Thomson Trail (unless they fall on County property).

In developing this RTMP, the County has used an inclusive planning process, including feedback from stakeholders and the community to consider existing trails, trail user types, trail use compatibility, existing permitted uses, permitting of new uses, and potential areas for trail improvements. The RTMP identifies permitted trail activities within the County forests and improvements required to support trail users.

Continued investment in trails, County Forests, and the CP Rail Trail along with a comprehensive and linked trails network will help ensure Grey County has a strategy to promote and protect these important assets.

If planned and managed correctly, trails will:

- keep users on a designated path,
- introduce people to natural areas,
- increase awareness of the natural environment, and
- help protect natural areas.

[Cycling & Trail Master Plan](#)

Grey County is developing a long-term, comprehensive Cycling and Trails Master Plan to guide future planning and decision-making to enhance cycling and off-road trail opportunities within the County and its local municipalities. The plan is meant to be used by County staff, decision makers and community partners to support and provide direction for future investments in cycling and active transportation infrastructure network by identifying a network and programs that supports commuter cycling, cycle tourism and non-motorized recreational trail use.

The County has retained WSP Canada Group Limited (WSP) to support the development of the Cycling and Trails Master Plan. The plan will incorporate previous work completed by the County and its partners including on-going projects such as the Recreational Trails Strategy. The plan will be developed using a three-phased process and is expected to be completed by Spring 2019.