

Why is a regional natural heritage plan important to my lake?

The Kawarthas Naturally Connected natural heritage system provides information and mapping depicting how environmental features (wetlands, woodlands, lakes, streams, meadows, habitat for plants and animals) are connected and support all plant, animal and human life in our region. A healthy natural heritage system provides critical “*ecosystem services*” (nature’s benefits) including: good air and water quality, habitat for Ontario’s native species, prevention of erosion, reduction of effects of climate change, economic benefits. e.g., support for agriculture, business, recreational activities, etc.

This mapping system and project report (<http://www.kawarthasnaturally.ca/phase-1-final-mapping-product/>) shows how natural features on your property may contribute to regional ecological health by protecting important local biological features and connections in the system/plan. (Please note that the “preferred scenario” suggested on the map is based on best heritage practices, but does not account for existing zoning.)

How can my actions on my property be helpful?

Your stewardship actions (protecting the water quality via septic maintenance, planning for shoreline restoration, planting native species, obtaining advice and assistance from local experts) support your watershed area, and in turn, the larger regional natural heritage system to which your property and watershed are connected. Also, your knowledge of your own property features can provide important new and possibly missing information to the KNC project team, regarding local natural areas.

Who can help me to do this?

Any organization that engages in stewardship would be a good place to start: local environment groups, conservation authorities, etc. Get shoreline ideas from FOCA’s guide: <https://foca.on.ca/shoreline-owners-guide-to-healthy-waterfronts/>

What does it mean if I’m in a priority area?

Priority areas are those containing the most important connected natural heritage features with the highest ability to support biodiversity in your region, the health of the overall environment and community. Your best effort to protect your important part of the natural heritage system includes stewardship of the land and its resources. You are also in a great position to share project information with community members which may result in more stewardship and protection for the priority area.

If I’m *not* in a priority area do I need to do anything?

No you don’t **need** to, there is currently no specific legislation that enforces the protection of the NHS; however, your efforts to engage in environmental stewardship are important for many of the above reasons. In general, any efforts on your property will have an overall positive effect in supporting environmental and community health in your area. Your and your neighbors’ efforts, if multiplied and connected across communities, will increase the sustainability of our environmental resources across the region.

Visit: <http://www.kawarthasnaturally.ca>