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**Subject:** Niagara Watershed Plan – Draft for Consultation

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, June 16, 2021

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## Recommendations

1. That consultation **BE INITIATED** on the DRAFT of the Niagara Watershed Plan (Volume 1 & 2) with the public and other stakeholders, Local Municipalities, and Indigenous groups.
2. That Report PDS 30-2021 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Municipalities and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA).

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Niagara Watershed Plan (NWP) project and to initiate the consultation and engagement process for the draft of Volume 1 & 2.
- PDS 17-2021 – Appendix 7.1 (May 12, 2012) provided the most recent update on the watershed planning program and the Niagara Watershed Plan (NWP) project. This report is a continuation of the work program outlined in Appendix 7.1.
- The Niagara Watershed Plan is being published in 3 volumes. Volume 1 (Characterization) and Volume 2 (Management) are in 'draft for consultation' format at this time. Links to Volume 1 & 2 are below and included as an appendix.
  - Volume 1 [full report] [www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol1-draft.pdf](http://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol1-draft.pdf)
  - Volume 1 [text only] [www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-text-draft.pdf](http://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-text-draft.pdf)
  - Volume 2 [full report] [www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol2-draft.pdf](http://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol2-draft.pdf)
- Volume 3 of the NWP will analyze various growth scenarios as part of the overall Official Plan work program. Volume 3 will be completed later in summer 2021, once final growth scenarios are available.
- NPCA staff have been actively participating in the project.

## **Financial Considerations**

The costs associated with completing the Niagara Watershed Plan project are accommodated within the Council approved project budget for the Niagara Official Plan.

## **Analysis**

### **Introduction:**

A watershed is defined as an area that is drained by a river and its tributaries. The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS, 2020) requires that watersheds be the “ecologically meaningful scale for integrated and long-term planning”.

Watershed planning is a methodology used to define values, objectives, and targets that support the protection, enhancement, or restoration of the natural resources (with an emphasis on water resources) within a watershed through the development of management plans, policies, and other related tools.

### **Role of the Region in Watershed Planning:**

The Provincial Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan were updated in 2017. The updated plans place a greater emphasis on the need for watershed planning to ‘inform’ land-use planning. This change was accompanied by a Provincial shift in the responsibility for watershed planning.

Specifically, Section 4.2.1.1 of the 2019 *Growth Plan* states “Upper- and single tier municipalities, partnering with lower-tier conservation authorities as appropriate, will ensure that watershed planning is undertaken to support a comprehensive, integrated, and long-term approach to the protection, enhancement, or restoration of the quality and quantity of water within a watershed.”

Coinciding with that change in Provincial direction, through a 2018 update to the Protocol for Environmental Planning Services in the Region, the responsibility for ‘watershed planning’ was transferred to the Region, and the responsibility for ‘sub-watershed planning’ was transferred to the Local Municipalities.

## **Integration with the Natural Environment Work Program for the Niagara Official Plan:**

To facilitate this transfer of responsibilities, one of the background reports for the Natural Environment Work Program (NEWP), which is being completed in support of the Niagara Official Plan (NOP), was the Watershed Planning Discussion Paper (WPDP). The purpose of the WPDP was to provide a better understanding of the history; new Provincial direction; and the updated process, roles, and responsibilities related to watershed planning in the Region. The WPDP provided direction in three key areas:

- The scope of watershed planning that is required to 'inform' the NOP.
- Policies for watershed planning that should be included in the NOP.
- A framework for watershed planning in Niagara moving forward.

The previously completed Watershed Planning Discussion Paper (October 2019) can be accessed here:

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/natural-environment-watershed-planning.pdf>

The WPDP identified the need for a tertiary-level watershed plan to be completed to inform the NOP. In accordance with the direction of the WPDP a project to complete the Niagara Watershed Plan (NWP) was initiated.

Following the completion of the NOP project there will be a need for the Region to complete more detailed watershed planning at the 'quaternary-level'. The NWP has delineated 12 quaternary watersheds in the Region. Beyond that, sub-watershed planning becomes the responsibility of the Local Municipalities. Sub-watershed plans are typically completed in support of Secondary Plans or similar large-scale developments.

### **Niagara Watershed Plan Project:**

The NWP will be published in 3 volumes:

1. Characterization
2. Niagara Watershed Management
3. Growth Analysis

Overall, several of the key outcomes of the NWP will be:

- A detailed characterization of the 3 tertiary watersheds in the Region
- A description of what features and systems should be considered required components of the water resource system (WRS) in conformance with Provincial policy
- The integration of the natural heritage system (NHS) and WRS
- Criteria to support the evaluation of various growth scenarios in the Region
- A set of goals and objectives that will inform future watershed planning in the Region
- A range of guidance on approaches that can be used to better manage natural resources in the Region
- Direction for integration with other components of the Niagara Official Plan work program

### **Consultation and Engagement:**

The NWP project was first introduced as part of a virtual public information centre for the NOP in September 2020.

Following that, a Goals and Objectives Discussion Paper for the NWP project was shared with local municipalities, the public, and other stakeholders in November 2020 for input. This included the use of a survey which was widely shared.

The Niagara Watershed Plan – Goals and Objectives Discussion Paper (October 2020) can be accessed here:

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/niagara-watershed-plan-discussion-paper.pdf>

The results of the consultation and engagement to date are reflected in the draft documents.

The next step in the project is to undertake a consultation and engagement program on Volume 1 & 2 of the project. Volume 3 will be released for consultation later in the summer of 2021.

A consultation summary report for the entire project will be prepared and will accompany the final version of the NWP.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

Council could choose to not direct staff to initiate the consultation process on the draft of Volume 1 & 2. This is not recommended.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

This report is being brought forward as part of the ongoing work program for the Niagara Official Plan. The Niagara Watershed Plan project aligns with Objective 3.2 Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship:

*A holistic and flexible approach to environmental stewardship and consideration of the natural environment, such as in infrastructure, planning and development, aligned with a renewed Official Plan.*

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

- PDS 6-2018: Natural Environment Project Initiation Report (Jan 31, 2018)
- PDS 18-2018: Natural Environment Project Framework (April 25, 2018)
- PDS 10-2019: Update on Natural Environment Work Program (Feb 19, 2019)
- PDS 32-2019: Natural Environment Background Study and Discussion Papers (Nov 6, 2019)
- PDS 26-2020: Natural Environment Work Program – Phase 4 (July 15, 2020)
- PDS 1-2021: Natural Environment Work Program – 2nd Point of Engagement (Feb 17, 2021)
- PDS 17-2021: Official Plan Update and NES Recommendation (May 16, 2021)
- PDS 3-2020: ELC Mapping Update (Feb 12, 2020)
- PDS 33-2020: ELC Mapping Final Report (Dec 9, 2020)
- CWCD 122-2019: Agriculture and Environment Groups Stakeholder Lists (Mar 29, 2019)
- CWCD 179-2019: Notice of Public Information Centres (May 19, 2019)
- CWCD 153-2020: Natural Environment Work Program Update (June 5, 2020)
- CWCD 314-2020: Update – Natural Environment Work Program (November 11, 2021)
- CWCD 2021-70: Mapping and Data for Natural Environment Options (Mar 19, 2021)

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## **Appendices**

Niagara Watershed Plan - Volume 1 [full report] (Draft for Consultation)

[www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol1-draft.pdf](http://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol1-draft.pdf)

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Niagara Watershed Plan - Volume 2 [full report] (Draft for Consultation)

[www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol2-draft.pdf](http://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/rural-and-natural-systems/pdf/nwp-vol2-draft.pdf)