

## **New Mapping of the North Gwillimbury Forest**

March 2025

The North Gwillimbury Forest Alliance (NGFA) first defined and mapped the North Gwillimbury Forest (NGF) in the Town of Georgina, in 2012. This was key to the NGFA's ultimately successful campaign to end all development approvals for Maple Lake Estates, and ensure the permanent protection of the forests and wetlands owned by Maple Lake's developer, that were central to the integrity of the NGF.

After 13 years, it's time to update that mapping and ensure that it reflects the best natural heritage information now available. Our objectives in doing so were to:

- ▶ More clearly define what the NGF includes.
- ▶ Clearly identify the mapping sources relied on, and ensure that the NGF's boundaries are consistent with those sources.
- ▶ Ensure that the mapping reflects changes on the ground since 2012.
- ▶ Have maps available in a contemporary digital format so that they can be easily compared with/overlaid on other digital maps, areas can be easily calculated, downloadable maps can be provided to the general public, and the maps can be easily updated in future.

This work was directed by the NGFA's planning consultant, Anthony Usher, RPP. NGFA also retained North South Environmental Inc. (NSE) to undertake the map and air photo analysis and prepare the digital products.

### *What is the NGF?*

The NGF remains much as it was identified in 2012: the more or less contiguous block of forest and wetland lying generally west of The Queensway North and north of Baseline Road, starting from the northern perimeter of the Keswick urban area and extending east into the Sutton/Jackson's Point urban area as far as the Black River. The NGF now also includes all qualifying forest and wetland patches within the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's Lake Simcoe Conservation Preserve.

### *Criteria for inclusion*

The NGF includes patches consisting of woodland, wetland, or both, that meet all of these criteria:

- At least 0.5 ha area.
- At least 40 m wide (second longest dimension) (does not apply to wetland-only patches).
- For woodland-only patches, greater than 60% canopy cover.

A road or other linear interruption of tree cover/wetland that is 20 m or wider, creates two separate patches.

Areas that are not woodland or wetland are included in the NGF if:

- They are roads, indents, or other linear interruptions (that is, NGF woodland or wetland on both sides) less than 20 m wide.
- They are completely surrounded by NGF woodland or wetland, are less than 0.5 ha in area, and in total within the patch, would account for less than 25% of the total area of the patch.

Areas that are outliers from the main contiguous block of the NGF are included, only if they are within 60 m of the main contiguous block or within 20 m of another outlier that is within 60 m of the main contiguous block. However, in the Lake Simcoe Conservation Preserve all outliers are included. All outliers must also meet all the preceding criteria.

This methodology does mean that some areas of abandoned farm field that are not yet wooded but may be in the process of regenerating absent other interventions, are not included because they do not meet the criteria.

These criteria are based on review of, and are largely consistent with,

- Ecological Land Classification for Southern Ontario, Ministry of Natural Resources, 1998
- Natural Heritage Reference Manual, Ministry of Natural Resources, 2010
- Ontario Wetland Evaluation System, Southern Manual, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 2022
- Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Identification and Protection of Significant Woodlands, 2007
- Greenbelt Plan, Technical Definitions and Criteria for Key Natural Heritage Features, 2012
- Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, Technical Definitions and Criteria for Identifying Key Natural Heritage Features and Key Hydrologic Features, 2015
- York Region Official Plan, 2022.

### *Mapping*

We started with the following sources:

- ▶ For woodlands, Map 5, York Region Official Plan.
- ▶ For wetlands, Map 4, York Region Official Plan - Greenbelt Plan wetlands and, in Sutton/Jackson's Point, unevaluated wetlands.

The Official Plan mapping excludes very small woodlands and wetlands. As a rule, these would fail the above criteria in any event.

This initial mapping was then screened against the above criteria and boundary adjustments were made. In the end, the wetlands remained unchanged from Official Plan Map 4. All the adjustments were changes to the boundaries of woodlands from those shown in Map 5.

The map that we are providing for general use, shows the final 2025 boundary of the NGF on a topographic base. It also shows streams, the three major areas protected for public use and enjoyment and varying degrees of environmental protection, and property boundaries. We are also providing a second map that also shows wetland boundaries but not the property boundaries. NGFA also has available other map versions showing the initial woodland and wetland boundaries, on both air photo and topographic bases.

#### *Area results*

Total area of the NGF: **1,499.8 hectares** (3,706 acres).

Which consists of: 887.1 hectares woodland only, 61.1 hectares wetland only, and 551.6 hectares both woodland and wetland.

Therefore, the NGF includes 1,438.7 hectares of woodland and 612.7 hectares of wetland (with 551.6 hectares of overlap).

Woodlands as mapped in the York Region Official Plan totalled 1,393.5 hectares. The adjustments described above resulted in a net addition of 45.2 hectares, yielding 1438.7 hectares.

The areas of the three public use areas are shown on the map.