



Land Stewardship Task Force Recommended Conservation Plan: Summary.

The Land Stewardship Task Force (LSTF) was asked by the Board of the Club to consider how to update or enhance the protected status of the 1,589 acres that is currently zoned as open space (see map) while retaining club ownership and control of these lands. Here is a summary of the report. The full report can be found at <http://www.gohomebay.org/s/Land-StewardshipTask-Force-Report-Final.pdf>

1) The Eco Significance of our lands and the region.

The Club's Open Lands constitute a pristine wetland and interior lake and forest ecosystems. They provide habitat for the highest density of rare Canadian Shield animal and plant communities in Ontario, including the richest biodiversity of reptiles and amphibians in all of Canada. Critically, the Open Lands connect to other protected or semi-protected areas to the north and south of Go Home Bay; linkages that create a corridor along the eastern shore providing protected spaces for threatened and at-risk Canadian species. These lands are part of the UN's Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve; a designation that underscores how important eastern Georgian Bay is to Canada's conservation challenges.

2) Why should we look at new kinds of protection?

For 120 years, stewardship of the land has been an important principle guiding the Club. In 1988, members approved a Community Plan that included four new building sites (two of which remain unsold) with the remaining 1,589 acres of "open lands" designated for the exclusive use of members and prohibiting any further development. Altering the Plan requires a 2/3 majority vote by site holders.

The task force was asked to explore greater levels of protection because of dramatically heightened pressures and risks anticipated in the decades to come. The population of the GTA for example, is projected to grow by over 3 million people by 2041 increasing demand for vacation properties - particularly shoreline areas such as the front of Long Island. Currently, our primary protection is through Municipal Zoning. Given the inevitable pressures from population growth, municipalities such as ours (currently Muskoka) will be under pressure to accommodate greater development in accessible but underdeveloped areas like Go Home. This could also lead to spikes in land taxes. Currently we are part of the "Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program" that reduces our taxes by 75%. A future provincial government, in the face of development and economic pressures, could cancel or alter the program and open up a new market driven valuation of our lands resulting in a major rise in the Club's tax burden.

3) The Conservation Plan Recommendation.

The committee investigated various options and concluded that a conservation agreement made pursuant to the Conservation Land Act with a qualified conservation body is the best option for protecting our open lands. This solution maintains the Club's ownership of the designated lands subject to development and land use restrictions that the Club would establish. The Committee recommends that those Open Land restrictions be consistent with our existing Community Plan. Currently, the Open Lands are private property accessible only to Club members and their guests. That would not change under the terms of a conservation agreement. The agreement is registered on title and the ongoing role of the conservation body is to ensure that the landowner abides by the terms of the agreement. This type of agreement is a legal document and cannot be amended by the Club/landowner without the consent of the conservation body and the provincial Minister of Environment.



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4) Canadian Nature Fund Opportunity.

The federal government established the Canada Nature Fund (CNF) to address the global biodiversity and ecosystem conservation crisis. It funds Conservation Organizations such as the Georgian Bay Land Trust (GBLT) to obtain conservation agreement/easements that protect environmentally sensitive and important lands. The Club's Open Lands would likely qualify. (For example; the GBLT has successfully secured a funded easement for The Tadenac Club.) The projected value of the easement is between \$250 and \$600 per acre, potentially resulting in a significant financial award to the Club. The GBLT has expressed an interest in acquiring a conservation agreement/easement over the Club's Open Lands and on a non-binding basis submitted an application to the CNF. A decision is expected this summer.

5) Costs, Process and Next steps.

No costs have been incurred by the club to date. Should the club elect to apply for an easement there will be costs associated with surveying and land valuation, an environmental assessment, legal costs for the application and for an opinion regarding the use of proceeds given our not for profit status. These costs will be incurred only as required in the process and fully reviewed and approved by the board.

Information/input sessions will be held over the summer. Check the website for details. A further presentation will be made at the summer AGM August 10 including a draft agreement describing possible activities and restrictions to be allowed on our open lands. If the board feels that there is strong enough support from the membership after the summer meeting, and if the Club qualifies for CNF funds then a vote in Q4 or Q1 would be required to meet the funding time lines. To carry, the motion requires a 2/3 majority vote of site holding members in good standing. If we don't qualify for funding then more time can be taken on a decision/direction.

