



## Halton’s Natural Heritage System

The **Natural Heritage System (NHS)** is comprised of two “sub-systems”: the **Regional NHS** and the **Provincial Greenbelt NHS** each with their own policies in the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and the Greenbelt Plan (2017), respectively. Other pertinent policies/plans include A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2019), the Provincial Policy Statement (2020), and the Niagara Escarpment Plan, 2017.

Regional NHS + Greenbelt NHS = Halton’s NHS, Map 1



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### NHS Protection - Key Principles

- **Sustainable development**, in which protecting the natural environment is a vital factor;
- **Landscape permanence**, which recognizes that although the Region will urbanize and change, certain landscapes must be preserved permanently;
- **No negative impacts** to the RNHS from development or site alterations as per ROP Section 118(3) and 118(3.1.);
- **Coexistence between valued agricultural land base** as per ROP Section 118(3.1) a) to b) and 118(3.3).

To find out if your property falls within the Natural Heritage System, please visit [www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca) or call 311.

### Protecting and Preserving the NHS

The **Natural Heritage System (NHS)** protects and enhances natural features and functions, as well as key features and areas identified in Section 115 (2),(3) and (4) of the ROP, including wetlands, woodlands, rivers, lakes, and other natural areas of ecological significance.

The NHS is premised on a **systems approach** which recognizes that all features and their ecological functions are interrelated. This ecosystem based approach ensures that key features and areas are preserved and enhanced for future generations. As such, the current **NHS protects about 50.6% of Halton Region lands.**

### NHS and other Land Use Designations

In accordance with the ROP, the NHS is to be integrated within the other land uses such as Settlement Areas and the Rural Countryside. Within rural areas, agricultural land uses and the NHS are generally intended to co-exist as compatible uses, outside of key features.

# Environmental Impact Assessment Guideline (2020)

## What is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?

An EIA is a **study that is triggered when development or site alteration is proposed within or adjacent to the NHS, including unmapped Key Features, and may affect significant natural features and functions.** Provincial and Regional policies state that development will have no negative impacts on the features and their ecological functions. An EIA must be prepared by a qualified professional.

## What is Halton's EIA Guideline?

The EIA Guideline is a document that clarifies, informs, and aids in the implementation of the NHS policies in accordance with the ROP and Provincial Plans.

The EIA Guideline provides guidance to determine when an EIA is required, when an EIA requirement can be waived, and the scope and content of the EIA.

The EIA Guideline provides waiving criteria on Figures 2.4 and 2.5 (Pages 16 and 17). Please contact Regional staff to confirm if an EIA may be triggered on your property or if your project is eligible for waiving.

Please visit <https://www.halton.ca/The-Region/Regional-Planning/Regional-Plans,-Strategies-and-Studies/Environmental-Impact-Assessment-Guide-Update> to view Halton's EIA Guideline. If you require Halton's EIA Guideline in an alternate format, please call 311.

## EIAs in relation to Agriculture

To maintain a healthy balance between rural and agricultural areas and the NHS, when development is proposed within or adjacent to the RHNS, an EIA may be required.

- The EIA requirements for agricultural buildings are different from many other types of development. In many cases, the requirements may be reduced.
- An EIA is not required for normal farm practices or for an agricultural use or building that is permitted as-of-right by zoning.
- If an EIA is required for agricultural buildings, Halton Region can help by scoping the EIA, providing financial aid, or providing in-kind service

## 'One Study' Approach

EIA requirements are coordinated between the Region, the local municipality, the Conservation authority (CA) and the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC), as appropriate.

## Roles & Responsibilities in EIA Process

Agencies, the consultant and the proponent have a responsibility to coordinate the requirements of the EIA Guideline and have specific roles / jurisdictions within the technical review and approval of an EIA. Please refer to **Table 1.7 on Page 6 of the EIA Guideline.**

Note: Decisions with respect to the Endangered Species Act (2007) are deferred to Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). Engagement with Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) may be required where potential or confirmed impacts to key features are identified. Approval from/consultation with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) may be required based on proposed works in or adjacent to a watercourse.

## What is the role of the applicant/proponent?

- Liaise with Lead Planning Authority
- Engage with consultants and agencies to complete EIA
- Become familiar with EIA process, key steps, and components

## Who should you contact about an EIA?

The Lead Planning Authority (generally the Local Area Municipality, the Region, or NEC)