



## The Corporation of the City of Sault Ste. Marie

# COUNCIL REPORT

February 23, 2026

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council  
AUTHOR: Emily Cormier, Sustainability Coordinator  
Peter Tonazzo, Director of Planning  
DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services  
RE: Municipal Participation in Canada's 30 x 30 Conservation  
Target and Recommended Municipal Action

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to support the City's participation in the Federal Government's 30 x 30 Conservation Target through the identification of municipally owned natural lands for assessment under Ontario Nature's Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP)<sup>1</sup>.

Staff are requesting Council approval to submit four City-owned parcels to Ontario Nature for evaluation in 2026. To do so will require Council to authorize staff to execute a consent letter with Ontario Nature. This letter will allow them to assist the City in determining which lands may qualify for inclusion in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD)<sup>2</sup>.

### **Background**

In 2022, the Government of Canada endorsed the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework<sup>3</sup> under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>4</sup>. This framework includes a commitment to protect and effectively conserve 30 percent of Canada's lands and waters by 2030. The purpose of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ontarionature.org/programs/protected-places/municipal-protected-areas/>

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) contains the most up to date spatial and attribute data on marine and terrestrial protected areas (PA) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) in Canada. CPCAD is compiled and managed by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), in collaboration with federal, provincial, territorial jurisdictions, and other data providers. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/national-wildlife-areas/protected-conserved-areas-database.html>

<sup>3</sup> The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is an international agreement adopted in 2022 at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. It sets goals and targets for 2030, aiming to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by putting nature on a path to recovery by 2050. Key elements include protecting at least 30% of the planet's lands and waters by 2030 and ensuring the fair sharing of benefits from genetic resources. <https://www.cbd.int/gbf>

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the international legal instrument for "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources" that has been ratified by 196 nations <https://www.cbd.int/>

30 x 30 target is to preserve biodiversity, enhance climate resilience, and sustain ecosystem services that support economic and social well-being. Across Ontario, municipalities have been increasingly engaged in the federal initiative, recognizing that their natural assets play an important role in achieving national conservation goals and climate resilience. The experiences of other municipalities provide helpful context, and three examples are provided below.

1. The City of Greater Sudbury has received international recognition for more than fifty years of greening and conservation work, and its Mayor's Task Force on 30 x 30 framed local participation to strengthen community identity, enhance greenspace, and align with municipal climate adaptation and sustainability plans<sup>5</sup>. Sudbury emphasized that participation does not create new nature reserves or limit public access, and that classification within the CPCAD Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) does not replace municipal decision-making authority.
2. Similarly, the Town of Caledon directed staff to engage with Ontario Nature to explore the feasibility and implications of joining the 30 x 30 program<sup>6</sup>.
3. The City of Hamilton undertook a similar process beginning in 2023, integrating the MPAP Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP) into its natural heritage policy review and determining that participation could be accommodated with existing staff resources<sup>7</sup>.

Ontario Nature has supported more than twenty-five Ontario municipalities in submitting over 40,000 hectares of municipal and conservation authority lands to the CPCAD.

In 2024, Ontario Nature approached the City to participate in the MPAP. It is also important to note that in 2025, with support from the City through the Ecological Corridor Project<sup>8</sup>, the Sault Ste. Marie Region Conservation Authority (SSMRCA) contributed 1,512 hectares of their lands and an additional 444 hectares of management areas to the 2025 30 x 30 submission. Planning staff have shared preliminary shapefiles with Ontario Nature. To proceed, the City must execute a consent letter that will allow Ontario Nature to evaluate the recommended parcels and submit qualifying land on the City's behalf.

Participation is voluntary. Lands included in the CPCAD remain fully under municipal ownership and control, with no change to land use permissions, public access, or recreation. Recognition as a protected or conserved area serves

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<sup>5</sup> <https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=d2736690-df0d-4bbf-8724-a47ce0c73ded&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=44&Tab=attachments>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pub-caledon.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=48946>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2025-07/comm-update-Hamiltons-Contribution-to-Canadas-30X30-Conservation-Target-Municipal-Protected-areas-projectUpdate.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ontarionature.org/news-release/partners-advance-ecological-corridors-planning-sault-ste-marie-garden-river-region/>

primarily as an acknowledgment of the City's existing conservation intent and land management practices.

### **Analysis**

The City's natural areas provide ecological, recreational, cultural, and economic benefits that align strongly with several municipal priorities, including climate action, environmental stewardship, sustainable growth, recreation, and long-term resilience. Participating in the 30 x 30 initiative supports these objectives by recognizing and reinforcing the City's commitment to the protection of wetlands, forests, waterways, and parklands that contribute to flood mitigation, heat reduction, wildlife habitat, and community well-being.

Ontario Nature offers a standardized, nationally aligned approach to evaluating municipal lands. Their assessment determines whether a parcel qualifies as a protected area or as an Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM). Evaluation considers clear boundaries, long-term protections, active management to support biodiversity, and the ability to control activities that may negatively impact ecological values. Ontario Nature requires GIS data, relevant land management documentation, and staff input regarding City policies and operations. Based on the experience of other municipalities, staff anticipate that the City of Sault Ste. Marie can meet these requirements with existing resources.

Following internal review and confirmation with Ontario Nature and SSMRCA, staff recommend that the City submit the following four City -owned blocks as part of the 2026 intake (please refer to attached maps for more information):

#### *Block 1 – 321 Walls Side Road – Shore Ridges Wetland*

Block 1 is landlocked and mostly covered by a portion of the Provincially Significant Shore Ridges Coastal Wetland. The majority of the surrounding lands are owned by the Sault Ste. Marie Region Conservation Authority<sup>9</sup>. The parcel is approximately 64.4 ha and primarily zoned Environmental Management (EM) Zone, with a very small portion of the northeast corner zoned Rural Area (RA). The Shore Ridges Wetland exhibits strong ecological value and already functions as a significant natural asset.

#### *Block 2 – Finn Hill Area*

Block 2 includes Finn Hill and associated escarpment lands to the north. Combined, the parcels are approximately 28.1 ha and zoned Parks and Recreation (PR), accommodating one of the flagship John Rowswell HUB Trail sections, Finn Hill, and a number of recently constructed single-track bike trails.

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<sup>9</sup> As previously noted in the Background section of this report, the Sault Ste. Marie Region Conservation Authority (SSMRCA) contributed 1,512 hectares of their lands and an additional 444 hectares of management areas to the 2025 30 x 30 submission.

*Block 3 – Carp River Wetland Complex*

Block 3 includes a number of city -owned parcels within the Provincially Significant Carp River Coastal Wetland Complex, south of Herkimer Street and west of Carpin Beach Road. Together, the parcels are approximately 46.5 ha and zoned Environmental Management (EM).

*Block 4 – 1173 Fourth Line East - Wishart Park*

The fourth parcel is Wishart Park, a prominent 31 ha municipal greenspace that combines new recreational opportunities with natural habitat value. The parcel is zoned Parks and Recreation (PR).

Planning staff, in consultation with other relevant City staff, have determined that development potential on the four blocks of land is very limited, beyond that of long-term protection and public greenspace. Further, contributing the recommended blocks to the 30x30 project does not, in and of itself, impact any future development potential upon surrounding lots.

Participation in the CPCAD does not create new land use constraints, modify zoning, or impose new public access controls. Municipal Council retains full authority over decisions affecting land use, management, and future planning. National recognition of these lands simply affirms the City's existing stewardship role and elevates its profile in provincial and federal conservation efforts.

Ontario Nature has indicated that CPCAD designation does not preclude recreational use; non-motorized trails and other compatible activities are permitted where they do not dominate the site or undermine its conservation function. If land use needs change over time, such as for development, Ontario Nature will support the City in the process to remove them from the database.

**Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial impacts associated with the City's initial participation in the MPAP. Sustainability and Planning staff can accommodate the necessary data preparation, liaison with Ontario Nature, and internal review within existing workloads. Should future phases, such as the development of enhanced land management plans or policy updates, require additional resources, staff will return to Council through the appropriate budget process. There is no fee for participating in the Ontario Nature assessment, which is funded by the federal government and the Greenbelt Foundation. A consent letter will be required, but it does not carry any financial obligations.

**Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact**

Participation in the 30 x 30 initiative supports the City's Strategic Plan by reinforcing its commitment to environmental stewardship, community livability, and the promotion of Sault Ste. Marie as a community with significant greenspace and high quality of life. From a policy perspective, the assessment of the City's natural

lands may offer useful information for future official plan updates, natural heritage system policies, and land management practices. The collaboration with Ontario Nature may also help identify opportunities to strengthen biodiversity protections in municipal policy. In terms of climate impact, conservation of wetlands, forests, and riparian areas plays an essential role in climate mitigation through carbon storage and sequestration, and in climate adaptation through flood attenuation, erosion control, habitat protection, and increased ecological resilience.

### **Recommendation**

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Sustainability Coordinator concerning Municipal Participation in Canada's 30 x 30 Conservation Target be received and that staff be authorized to undertake the following actions:

- Submission to Ontario Nature of the following municipally-owned lands for assessment under the Municipal Protected Areas (as shown on the attached maps) Project:
  - Block 1 – 321 Walls Side Road (Shore Ridges Wetland);
  - Block 2 – Finn Hill Area;
  - Block 3 - the City-owned parcels within the Carp River Wetland Complex west of Carpin Beach Road in the Herkimer area; and
  - Block 4 – 1173 Fourth Line East - Wishart Park parcel;
- Further that the Chief Administrative Officer and City Solicitor be authorized to execute the consent letter between City and Ontario Nature to facilitate the municipal assessment and the submission of qualifying lands to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Cormier  
Sustainability Coordinator  
705.989.8748  
[e.cormier2@cityssm.on.ca](mailto:e.cormier2@cityssm.on.ca)

Peter Tonazzo  
Director of Planning  
705.759.2780  
[p.tonnazo@cityssm.on.ca](mailto:p.tonnazo@cityssm.on.ca)