SENIORS for CLIMATE ACTION NOW!

THE FORD GOVERNMENT

CLIMATE CRIME # 26 UPDATE JAN 2023

Paving the Greenbelt: Who pays? Who profits?

The Greenbelt Act, passed in 2005, instituted the Greenbelt around the Greater Toronto Area as regulatory protection from urban development pressure due to population growth. While protecting prime agricultural land is its primary purpose, it is actually a bundle of other key elements that also protect rural areas, wetlands, forests, watersheds and heritage sites. This includes sensitive ecological and hydrological features, such as the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The Act was accompanied by the creation of the Greenbelt Foundation, an arms-length citizens' body designed to monitor the protection of the Greenbelt.

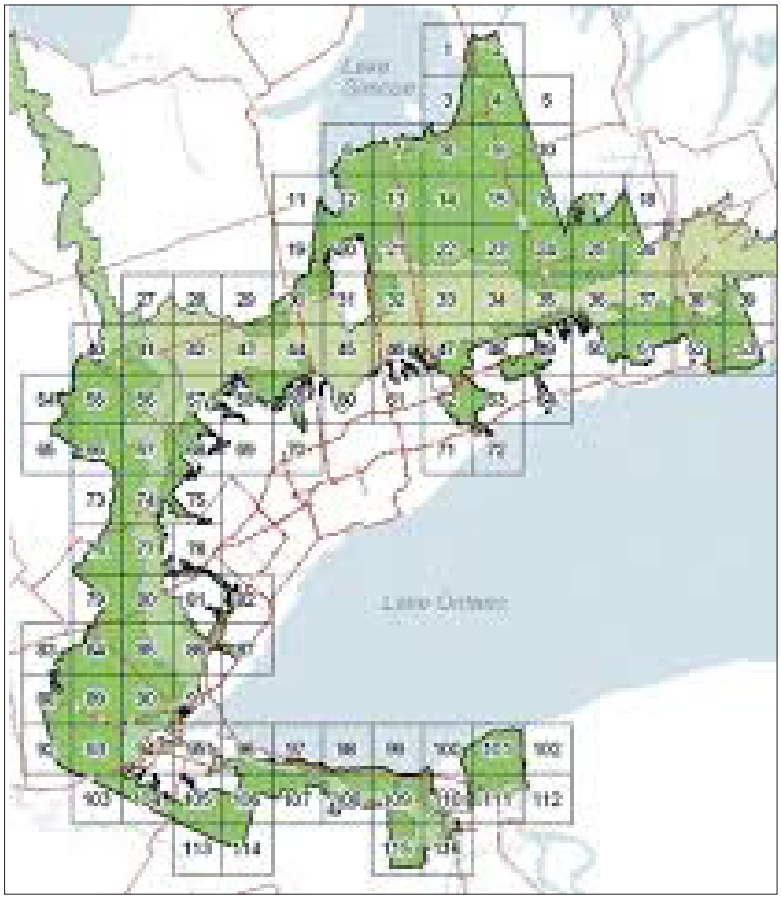
Half the province's population freshwater comes from the Greenbelt. It provides 71 million tonnes of carbon offsets, 2 million acres of protected land, 721,000 acres of wetlands, grasslands and forest.

Ford's First Term

During its first term the Ford government (2018-22) used Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZOs) a record forty-three times in order to circumvent legislated regulatory protections, most outrageously in the Greenbelt.

The government also announced plans to build Highway 413 a major east-west highway expansion from Highway 400 to 403, 50 kms to the west.

Clearly the intention of the government was to pave the agricultural lands, wetlands, and forests of the Greenbelt to accommodate urban sprawl and give developers a free pass to maximize profits.



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The former Mayor of Toronto David Crombie, Chair of the Greenbelt Council and six other members of the Council resigned in December 2020 as a result of Ford's actions.

Second Term

In its second term the Ford government proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Plan, Greenbelt Area boundary regulation (O. Reg. 59/05), and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (O. Reg. 140/02). These would destroy the certain and permanent protection the Greenbelt system relies on, by removing 7,400 acres from the edge of the Greenbelt Area.

Because the land has been protected as farmland, sprawl developers are able to buy it cheaply. If they can have protections removed they will make windfall profits from the increase in the land value.

According to Environmental Defence, "stripping these 7,400 acres of protection at the request of land speculators will unleash a firestorm of land speculation across the entire Greenbelt – denying farmers the certainty they need to continue stewarding the forests, wetlands and soils on their land."

It will also start a never-ending queue of Greenbelt land speculators at the Minister's door, each with their own convenient rationalization for paving their own patch of Greenbelt.

The Ford government continued to move forward on building the Bradford Bypass, a 16.2-km controlled access freeway that would connect Highway 400 to Highway 404 along the northern edge of Bradford, through portions of the Holland Marsh. The Holland Marsh is designated as part of the Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Area in the Greenbelt Plan and is one of the unique features of Ontario's Greenbelt.

The People First/Climate First solution

- **Respect the regulatory protections put in place by the Greenbelt Act and rescind Bill 23.**
- **Stop new highway development to reduce climate breakdown and keep large industrial infrastructure out of farmlands and forests.**
- **Invest in regional rapid transit to help communities develop smarter, denser housing and businesses.**

Sources

https://environmentaldefence.ca/2022/11/04/statement-the-ontario-governments-proposed-7400-acre-giveaway-to-land-speculators-is-a-death-sentence-for-the-entire-greenbelt/

https://environmentaldefence.ca/2022/12/09/important-things-you-should-know-about-the-ontario-governments-six-major-recent-attacks-on-farms-forests-wetlands-and-livable-communities/

https://simcoecountygreenbelt.ca/bradford-bypass/