



# Staff Report

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## Planning & Development Services – Planning Division

**Report To:** COW-Operations, Planning and Development Services  
**Meeting Date:** November 7, 2023  
**Report Number:** PDS.23.116  
**Title:** Natural Asset Inventory-Natural Heritage Study Project Update  
**Prepared by:** Adam Farr, Senior Planner

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report PDS.23.116, entitled “Natural Asset Inventory-Natural Heritage Study Project Update” for information;

### B. Overview

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This report provides an overview of the scope of the Natural Asset Inventory and Natural Heritage Study project. The project involves two separate but interrelated parts:

1. the identification and creation of an inventory of natural assets across the Town of The Blue Mountains; and,
2. the development of recommendations for identification, management and protection of those features of importance to the Town.

The project includes data gathering, research and public engagement components and is scheduled to take place over the next several months with a completion date targeted for spring of 2024.

### C. Background

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The project has been the subject of continued Council interest, was approved as part of the 2023 budget and is intended to provide greater clarity, detail, understanding and an overall update with respect to the Town’s identification, protection and management of natural assets/heritage.

A Request for Proposals was issued earlier in the year and, in accordance with Town procurement policies, North-South Environmental and Green Analytics have been retained as the project consultants.

## **D. Analysis**

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Climate change and biodiversity are increasingly important issues at local and international scales. Understanding our natural assets and taking steps to ensure they are identified and that our policies and practices support their protection and appropriate management are critical steps toward creating sustainable communities that address fiscal, social and ecological sustainability and community vitality. In addition, the identity of the Town of the Blue Mountains is tied closely to its natural environment character and this forms a significant factor in its desirability, as a place to live, work and play.

### **Natural Asset Inventory**

The Natural Asset Inventory will create an inventory of natural assets across the Town of The Blue Mountains. A natural asset inventory includes natural features that provide an ecological benefit to the Town, such as forests, tree canopy cover, wetlands, watercourses, and other naturally vegetated areas. These features provide a series of services that are vital to citizen health, including water and carbon storage, water quality improvement, microclimate regulation and urban heat island effect mitigation. The Town's Asset Management Plan (AMP) does not yet include natural infrastructure assets, and a natural assets inventory is first needed to identify natural infrastructure assets and assess them for climate vulnerabilities and quality as infrastructure assets. This work directly supports the Community Sustainability Plan Bold Action 5: Develop an action plan to create a natural asset inventory.

### **Natural Heritage Study**

The Natural Heritage Study will provide recommendations for natural heritage targets and criteria for identifying features of importance to the Town's biodiversity and sustainable landscape planning, and policies, tools, requirements and standards that ensure appropriate management for the Town's natural environment in the long-term. The natural heritage study will be informed by the Natural Asset Inventory, review of existing policies and practices, best practices in natural environment management, and policy-based requirements and opportunities to support the Town's vision and objectives for the natural environment. This work will support the Community Sustainability Plan Bold Actions 5: Develop an action plan to create a natural asset inventory; and, Bold Action 6: Develop a Biodiversity Strategy.

### **Project Scope**

There is broad public interest in the natural environment in this community and that interest extends to a range of matters some of which will fall out of the scope of this exercise. The project scope is limited to the two areas identified above. Some additional project work will ultimately be required to implement recommendations. However, in order to arrive at a conclusion in a timely manner, manage the project costs and deliver the key products the Town needs to manage project scope. To this end, the project consultants have provided a structured project schedule with key deliverables.

## **Project Deliverables**

Project deliverables are the Inventory Data Management Manual associated with the Natural Asset Inventory and the Natural Heritage Study report both of which are targeted to be presented for Council consideration in the spring of 2024. Interim reports on the respective projects will be delivered as appropriate.

## **Project Schedule**

The project schedule includes concurrent data gathering, research and analysis. Public, stakeholder, First Nations and agency engagement is planned over the next several months.

## **Public Engagement**

Public engagement includes forthcoming public notice of the project and two open houses tentatively scheduled for January and March/April respectively.

Following receipt by Council of this report a project web page will be prepared and posted in conjunction with broader notice of the project and a data request that will include:

- a project description;
- documents for review as they are available;
- the option for people to subscribe for more information and project updates;
- details (when available) on timing and location of public open houses;
- project updates as they are available.

In consideration of the busy Christmas season and the extensive public consultation being undertaken for the Official Plan project throughout November, a first Open House (Engagement Point #2 below) is planned for January 2024. Additional notice of the time, place and details will be provided in the New Year.

As a note, this project and related public engagement activities are not directly associated with the Official Plan Update and related public consultation events. While the NAI & NH project may generate policy content for consideration as future Official Plan Amendments the project is more broadly cast to consider a wider range of issues and outcomes.

Notice and details of the second Open House in March/April will be provided closer to the confirmed meeting date.

At this time the project schedule and budget includes data gathering outreach to key agencies and general engagement to collect issues and input from the public and key stakeholders such as the agricultural community, development interests, and established environmental groups. The focal point for public and stakeholder engagement is the Open Houses. Planning and Operations staff are working closely with the project consultant and Communications staff to seek effective engagement.

The following is a summary of key Engagement Points throughout the project:

- **Engagement Point #1 | Project Notice & Data Request** | This communication will provide a notice of the study being initiated, communicate its primary purpose and objectives and ways to get engaged (e.g., dates for open houses, project contacts, etc.), and include a direct request to agencies and groups (e.g., land trusts) who may own data relevant to the current work to share it for the purposes of the current work.
- **Engagement Point #2 | Background & Directions** | This is the first of two open houses. Background data being utilized for the project, mapping of natural heritage cover (including tree canopy) and outcomes from the Policy, legislation and Best Practices Review and Current Practice Assessment & Gap Analysis, including preliminary directions, will be presented. Proposed approach for undertaking the NAI and NHS will also be presented. Agencies and stakeholders will have an opportunity to review and provide comment on works to date and these preliminary directions (e.g., asset prioritization).
- **Engagement Point #3 | Draft Outcomes & Recommendations** | This is the second of two open houses. Draft outcomes of the NAI, including conditions, vulnerability and risk, valuation and prioritization will be presented. Draft targets and criteria for significant natural heritage features and recommendations for amendments and practice standards will be presented. Agencies and stakeholders will be asked to review and provide comment on potential gaps, efficacy of recommendations in meeting the Town's goal and strategic objectives for the natural environment, including long-term protection and stewardship of their natural legacy. This engagement event will be structured in a manner that encourages feedback by asking questions and providing opportunities for dialogue with the project team. Feedback and comments will be reviewed and, in consultation with the Town, addressed in finalizing the project deliverables.
- **Engagement Point #4 | Final Recommendations – Presentation to Council** | Per the RFP, the project team will work with the Town to prepare a presentation of the final NAI and NHS Report. The presentation will include key outcomes and products and focus on recommendations, priorities, next steps and implementation. Project engagement will be highlighted through the presentation.

Direct engagement with First Nations is planned to seek project input and, depending upon the preferred approach, will likely include:

- Project Notice and Engagement Request
- Engagement Meetings
- Presentation of Draft Outcomes

## **E. Strategic Priorities**

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This project corresponds to and implements the 4 strategic priorities of the 2020-2024 Corporate Strategic Plan.

### **1. Communication and Engagement**

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

**2. Organizational Excellence**

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

**3. Community**

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

**4. Quality of Life**

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

**F. Environmental Impacts**

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The content of the Natural Asset Inventory and Natural Heritage Study project deals with identification, protection and management of natural heritage/assets. There are no direct environmental impacts associated with the preparation of this report and/or approval consideration of its content.

**G. Financial Impacts**

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Inclusive of both the Natural Heritage Study and Natural Asset Inventory, the project budget is \$150,000 with the successful bid being awarded for \$149,723.53.

**H. In Consultation With**

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This report was prepared in consultation with the Manager of Sustainability and Solid Waste, Manager of Planning Services and the Director of Planning and Development Services, Town Communications staff and the lead project consultants, North-South Environmental.

## **I. Public Engagement**

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The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Adam Farr at [planning@thebluemountains.ca](mailto:planning@thebluemountains.ca) and, where related to the content of the Natural Asset Inventory and Natural Heritage Study, these comments will be referred to the project consultants for consideration as part of the related public engagement events.

Respectfully submitted,

Adam Farr  
Senior Planner

For more information, please contact:  
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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	PDS.23.116 Natural Asset Inventory-Natural Heritage Study Project Update.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Oct 26, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

**Shawn Postma - Oct 26, 2023 - 9:05 AM**

**Adam Smith - Oct 26, 2023 - 4:03 PM**