

Private Members' Business

In its green plan the government recognizes that it has a duty to protect our most precious natural resource: water. Also in the green plan it accepts that it has a moral obligation to do so.

Finally, with the Fisheries Act, the National Parks Act and most important in the Canada Water Act, the government has in its possession a number of devices which enable it to act decisively in the area of water protection.

All that I ask and all that Canadians ask is that the government live up to its commitments. If the condition of the Oak Ridges moraine continues to deteriorate, if there is not immediate action to protect the moraine in its entirety, the water supply of many millions of Canadians will be endangered.

I urge the government with all the conviction I can command to act now before it is too late. Let us take the lead, let us show to Canada and to the world that the green plan has teeth, that this government takes its environmental responsibility seriously and that it really cares about the quality of life of its citizens. This government has the tools, it has the duty and the ability to act. There is no excuse for inaction. I ask that this government act on my motion to provide strong protection for the ecological integrity of the Oak Ridges moraine.

Mr. John E. Cole (York—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the motion that my hon. friend for York North has brought forward today regarding the government's ability to take part and support the Oak Ridges moraine. I was very pleased to hear in his comments that he supports the actions of the green plan and the outline the green plan has set out under the Canada Water Act and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Act. That is a very positive step. It just shows that if everyone works together we can address these problems quickly and efficiently.

The Oak Ridges moraine is one of the most natural features in the greater metropolitan Toronto area. It is something that requires a lot of attention from individuals, from all environmental groups from all levels of government. It is something that has to be acted on now and very quickly.

The moraine is a significant part of the natural greenlands resource in the whole metropolitan area. After all, there are over 30 rivers and streams that have

the moraine as their source in this particular area. The vast underground reservoir of groundwater is critical to the drinking water of many municipalities in addition to metropolitan Toronto; the great municipalities of Newmarket, Sharon, East Gwillimbury, Palgrave, Caledon East, the west side of my friend's area. That is very significant to them.

It is also significant because the slopes of the moraine contain many small wetlands which, on an individual basis, one might not consider to be overly significant, but in total they provide that whole environmental resource that really has been declining in Ontario over the last number of years.

The other aspect of the moraine that is very important is the beautiful natural setting it provides for both recreational and scenic pursuits. After all, the Pine Ridge Trail, which is a scenic trail running throughout the moraine, was probably developed, as is said to have been developed by equestrians many years ago.

The federal government fully supports the activities of the provincial government as the leading player in ensuring the protection of these many environmental values. In fact, the province is and must continue to work with the municipalities and conservation authorities, public interest groups, developers and citizens advisory groups in addressing all of these developmental pressures on the moraine.

• (1130)

The province will be working with municipalities to carefully review official plan amendments and rezoning applications as they apply to this area.

The federal government does support this effort in many ways, but it also provides some expertise in computer modelling and analysis of this particular area. It stands prepared to provide available scientific and technical information as required by the province in its studies of it.

The Oak Ridges moraine is one of the most prominent, physiographic features in southern Ontario. It is a remnant of the glacial ages. It was formed primarily of sand and gravel. The moraine is a rise of land north of metro Toronto stretching from the Niagara escarpment on the west right through to the Trent River in the east, a distance of over 160 kilometres. The moraine extends about 90 kilometres in the greater metropolitan area and involves the regions of Peel, York and Durham.