

Private Members' Business

The federal government's National Water Research Institute is strongly involved in both surface and groundwater studies and it is the largest freshwater research establishment in Canada and is based in Burlington, Ontario, so it is certainly very close to the Oak Ridges moraine. Through this institute, Environment Canada has a memorandum of understanding with the University of New Brunswick to provide assistance in developing an operation of a groundwater program at the university. It is that groundwater that I think initially is the main thrust, although not the only thrust, of the member's comments. Very clearly there is in place a mechanism and a system to look at the groundwater programs.

Scientists have worked jointly with the drinking water section of the Ontario government on an analysis study to develop expert systems for groundwater wells located in the Oak Ridges moraine and other areas of the province. I know that in my riding groundwater wells and groundwater problems in areas such as Whitevale and Claremont are certainly very high on the list of concerns of the people who live in those areas. There is a very clear and consistent concern about the cleanliness and safety of the drinking water sources for these people in a very direct fashion.

I realize that the member has mentioned the concerns about the Keele Valley landfill site. As the member knows, the alternative to the Keele Valley site is the Pickering landfill site and it has similar concerns and considerations as it impacts on the over-all drinking water clarity and cleanliness. I am happy in one sense to indicate that the federal government has some responsibility in that it is a significant landholder in the northern reaches of Pickering where it holds some 18,000 acres of land on the lower reaches of the moraine. I am happy to report and I am sure the member would be glad to know that the federal government continuously has said that there will be no landfill sites in that region that it owns for many reasons. Certainly one of the very clear benefits of that decision is that the groundwater contamination that he mentions as it relates to federal lands will not occur.

There are many open spaces and natural areas in the moraine which serve as a vital function to ensure the integrity and the continuing existence of a balanced ecosystem. Such areas can help provide us with clean air

and water and preserve the diversity of plant life and wildlife habitat. It is certainly very common in the areas associated with these creeks and forests emanating from the moraine to see an assortment of plant and wildlife. There are some forested areas in the northern part of the riding such as the Glen Major conservation lands. Some 15 or 20 years ago I was involved with organizations planting thousands and thousands of trees in that particular area. This land is not sitting there without anybody looking at it.

There have been some very clear attempts to preserve these areas. Now with the green plan, for public organizations that wish to take advantage of additional tree planting programs, there are some tremendous opportunities. In reaches of the moraine such as Pickering we have the Seaton Hiking Trail, we also have the Ganaraska Forest, which I appreciate is outside of my riding but is another area of tremendous recreation significance to my constituents as well as to many others.

There is no doubt that the importance of maintaining this natural resource has been acknowledged. It has been acknowledged by the royal commission on the Toronto waterfront. It recommends the preservation of the ecological, scenic and recreational significance. It also recommends that a planning group with a clear provincial mandate be established to identify the conservation priorities. The prime consideration should be the identification of future development, land use objectives and a conservation plan for the moraine.

The provincial government has acknowledged its responsibility in this whole area. It has set up a study to do so and it has a particular interest in the Oak Ridges moraine as an area of special significance requiring increased control of development.

I believe the steps are well under way to accomplish the things the member has requested in his motion. I look forward to continuing discussion and debate on this issue.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek consent of the House to share my time with my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Is there unanimous consent to give the floor for five minutes each to the next two speakers?