

WILD

Wentworth
Investment in
Legacy
Development



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Having grown up in Wentworth with the privilege of being part of a family of large land owners, I took for granted the natural wonders of our municipality. My youth is filled with wonderful memories of spending time skiing, snowshoeing, hiking and fishing in vast and beautiful landscapes. My family instilled an appreciation of the diversity of animals, birds and plants that populate our region.

Forty years later, as I share my memories with my children, I find that more and more of the untouched places where my stories took place around Wentworth and the surrounding municipalities no longer exist. We have all seen the steady development of housing projects around us and the annual loss of natural habitats.

I have hope that this project and financial commitment will help preserve a large part of what makes Wentworth great. In forty years from now when my children and yours share stories of their youth, my hope is that there remains a reflection of those wonders they describe.

I am confident that we all aspire to conserve our rural community and I fully anticipate that the WILD program will continue to be supported by future councils and the community for generations to come.

Jason Morrison

Mayor of Wentworth, 2021

This project could not have happened without the vision and forward thinking of the following contributors:

Philippe Cyr, councillor seat #1

Bill Gauley, councillor seat #2

David Smith, councillor seat #3

Maurice Pilon, councillor seat #4

Jay Brothers, councillor seat #5

Gilles Ouellette, councillor seat #6

Natalie Black, General Manager and Secretary-Treasurer

Martine Renaud, Director of Urbanism and Environment

HISTORY

Wentworth was first settled and subdivided in the early 1800's. The territory was divided into 7 ranges and about 142 lots. Each lot was about 160 acres and many families settled on more than one lot. One of the main reasons that so much of our municipality remains undeveloped is that most of those original families passed down their land intact from one generation to the next. Today some of those families still reside here or have only sold off those large parcels of land in the last generation.

Those early settlers relied on farming and wood products to make a living. As a result, almost all of the towering pine and oak forests of Wentworth were cut and cleared for fields and to produce lumber. While little of those original farmers' fields remain today, some still dot our landscape and many of the deep forests have regrown.

By the 1950's, most of those early family farms had given up the unproductive land around the lakes and the cottage industry had begun to take shape. Seasonal housing in Wentworth began to concentrate around the lakes and the community transitioned from one of farming to one of recreation. As well, development of the Laurentians began and some existing large lots were subdivided as residential projects arrived over the years including Grace Park, Diamond Valley and Territoire des Lacs. More recently, there has been a trend where once seasonal residents have become permanent homes as our small town country charms have attracted more interest.

At one time the number of bears, wolves, deer and moose were at the level of being almost problematic to settlers, now with the loss of habitat they are a rarer but welcome sight. Our many lakes and wetlands continue to provide homes for loons, ducks, geese and a

multitude of fish and amphibians but, again, pressure on their habitats are always of concern.



Fig. 1: Original Wentworth subdivision

MISSION

With increased pressure for development visible in our region and the continual shift in demographics, the municipality recognises the need to protect our natural wonders. Our legacy for future generations will be the preservation of large untouched tracts of land and the protection of the wildlife that calls it home. We will strive to maintain and expand our biodiversity and create a lasting ecological footprint on our municipality. Our actions today in determining how we plan development of our remaining natural spaces will establish what exists for our children in the future.

Moreover, the municipality will work with its citizens to educate them of the vulnerability of our ecosystems as well as fostering a sense of connection to nature.



PORTRAIT OF WENTWORTH

Wentworth is 94 square kilometers (about 23 000 acres) of majestic forests, a rugged mix of mountains and valleys, sprawling wetlands, winding rivers and, of course, over 30 lakes. Our forests are a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees and home to a vast array of species including deer, moose, wolves, bears, foxes and turkeys. Wetlands of various levels of importance make up 7.4% of our territory. Wentworth is proud to officially recognise a large heron nesting site with other smaller ones dotting the region.

While much of the land around our many lakes and the roads between them has been developed with houses and cottages, there still exists a large portion of the municipality that remains untouched. In fact, approximately 70% of the municipality is owned by only 45 owners, with their homestead surrounded by hundreds of acres. It is thanks to these few owners that Wentworth maintains the country look it has, based on the unofficial conservation that they provide.

Our urban plan recognises the importance of our landscapes and has in place regulations protecting forests of interest, important water plans and large escarpments (Figure 2). It is essential that any conservation plan include protection of these areas as they provide the 'look' of rolling hills, dense forests and beautiful lakes that define Wentworth.

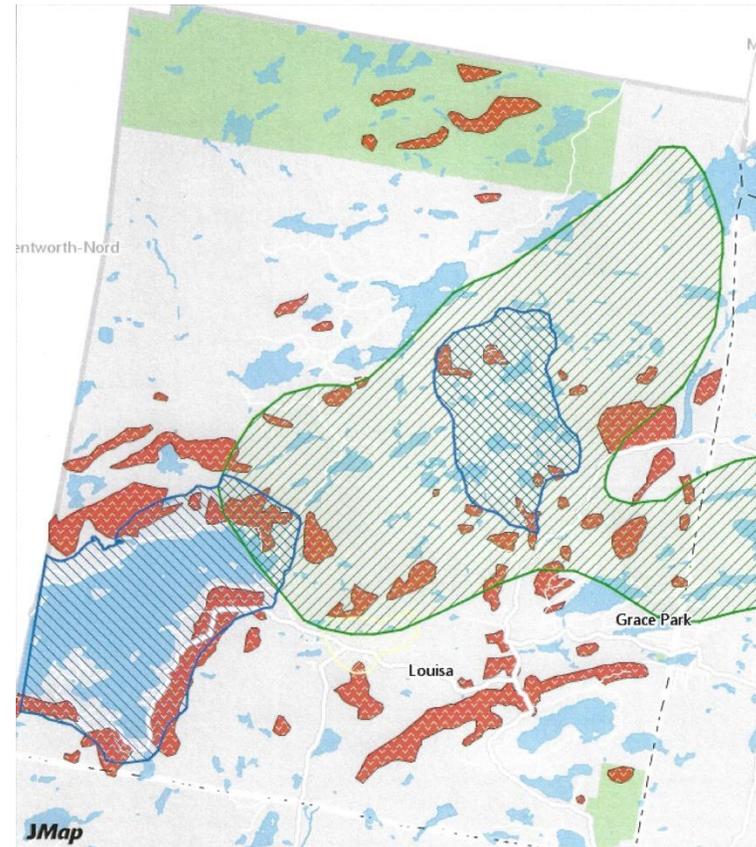


Fig. 2: Landscapes (green), watercourses (blue) and escarpments (red) of interest

THE MUNICIPALITY'S PLEDGE

With all this in mind, the municipal council voluntarily pledges to reserve a *minimum* of 3% of its annual budget in a fund called the Wentworth Investment in Legacy Development (WILD). In 2021, that 3% would represent roughly \$70,000 annually. These reserved funds will be used for three purposes: to purchase land for conservation, the rehabilitation, evaluation and establishment of habitats and to provide access for the public to nature. The long term goal of the municipality would be to have minimum 30% of the land in Wentworth permanently conserved either publicly or through partnerships with owners.

Of the accumulated funds in the WILD program, 70% would be dedicated towards the purchase of land when it becomes available. Too often large land owners are forced to sell due to financial constraints. Unfortunately, the market value of this land is often beyond the municipality's capacity to pay and eventually is sold to developers where high purchase costs can be offset by sales. By slowly increasing this fund over the years, the accumulated amount can position the municipality to make realistic offers.

An important element in choosing which land to protect and where important wildlife habitats exist is through biological studies. Each year, 10% of the WILD fund will be dedicated to ecological studies of our natural environment. And when no studies are needed, it will be used to rehabilitate those habitats when possible.

The remaining 20% will be about building an appreciation for nature with our citizens. We feel the best way to do that is to have you experience it firsthand. The municipality will invest in a multi-sport trail network that connects conserved land both publically owned

and through investment in partnerships with our large land owners. These partnerships will financially help the people that are already doing the job of conservation for all of us. A key point will be to provide access to the 2,600 acres of crown land in the northern portion of the municipality for public use.

The municipality will also continue to evolve and strengthen our regulations around individual efforts of environmental protection on every piece of land. While hundreds of acres of land in conservation is important, ensuring that developed lots continue to provide natural spaces is key to a cohesive environment. The municipality will achieve this through setbacks, land coverage ratios and mandatory green space.



COMMITTEE

Although the best legal tool to concretely implement the values of our policy is still under consideration and has not yet been determined, we wish to create what we will call in this document a ‘committee’. In order to evaluate land purchases, determine which studies should be financed, what conservation projects to fund and to decide where trails should pass, an evaluation committee will be established. The committee will be composed of elected officials, municipal employees, citizens and professionals in the field of environmental studies. The committee members will meet several times a year to discuss potential projects and establish a vision of their goals over each 4 year mandate of council. The committee will make recommendations to council based on their discussions.

The committee will evaluate each potential land purchase, based on criteria in place, and decide which pieces to buy. As well, they will be responsible for overseeing any studies and determining investments into the trail network.

While a global idea has been established with this policy, it will be the responsibility of the committee to recommend the different regulations and pathways required to realize these goals. Of course, this will be a process that will evolve over time and should be kept up to date based on changes in the community.

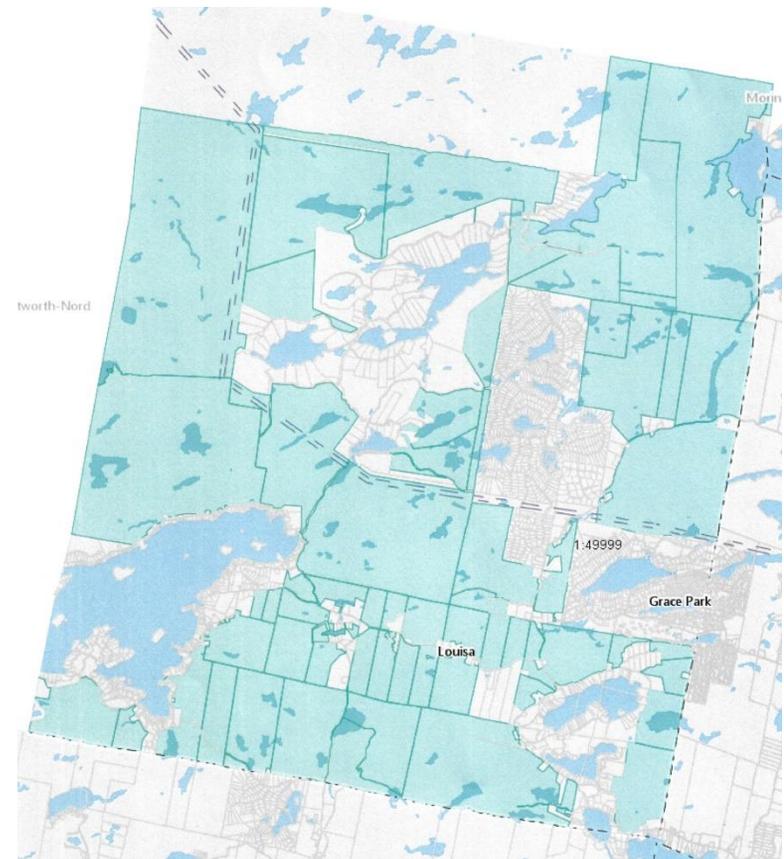


Fig. 3: Large lots of 50+ acres

PRIORITIES

There will be many factors in deciding which properties to buy and it will not be financially feasible to buy everything, nor would it make sense as the municipality does need to continue to grow slowly over time. Therefore, priorities will need to be set and a long term vision fixed.

Wentworth and the MRC d'Argenteuil do an excellent job of regulated protection of our wetlands but very little is done to ensure the preservation of the forests that surround and interconnect them. Studies have been done to determine the location of eco-corridors that animals use for movement throughout our municipality and the Laurentians (Figure 4). A priority will be made to conserve those corridors and ensure that interconnectivity exists whenever possible between the lands we acquire. While deep virgin forest will top the list for conservation, it does not mean that important wetlands will not also be a target. Those connected to our lakes provide an essential filtering system that must be protected as well (Figure 5).

The biological studies that the WILD fund sponsors can also provide us with indications of wildlife habitats and endangered species areas that need protection.

Lastly, landscapes of interest, although not always ecologically important, do play a role in the value of our community.



Fig. 4: Eco-corridor and habitats

PROGRAM ORIENTATION

Once a piece of land has been accepted by the committee and council for purchase, it will be added to the land bank. These municipal holdings will be separate from typical pieces of municipal land (i.e. roads, town hall, etc).

Upon acquisition of land for the WILD program, the municipal council will adopt a resolution placing the land in the program's holdings. The initial establishment of the program will be subject to the adoption of a municipal By-Law including the following criteria:

- That no building can be erected on the land with the exception of those for a recreational or educational function
- No motorized vehicles are permitted on the land except for maintenance purposes and on established trails
- All land in the fund is there for perpetuity
- At no point can the property be sold, in part or in whole, without being removed from the fund
- Most importantly, that no piece of land can be removed from the WILD program



Fig. 5: Wetlands map, importance from green (low) to red (high)

CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Investment in conservation projects will come in many forms and will not be restricted to land held by the WILD fund. An improvement to any area of the municipality helps our entire ecosystem. While studies will help us determine priority areas to invest in at the start of the program, an investment in projects with a direct environmental impact will be the priority. Residents of Wentworth will be encouraged to bring forward projects that may affect their property directly but benefit everyone.

Some typical projects that could be considered are:

- Installation of bird boxes to encourage new nesting grounds
- Installation of nesting poles for herons or floating nests for loons
- Replanting of forests previously cleared or select cut
- Construction of dams to solidify wetlands habitats
- Planting conifers to establish winter feeding ground for deer and moose
- Doing an environmental inventory of a property to determine the existence of endangered species
- Restocking lakes and rivers with fish

Many of these projects will quite easily qualify for additional funding from other levels of government and organizations dedicated to conservation. This will only help to stretch our dollars and have an even greater impact.



TRAIL NETWORK AND PARTNERSHIP

The WILD program will only be as successful as the implication of our citizens. Essential to establishing a connection between our residents and the nature that surrounds them will be creating our trail network. This looping system of trails will provide access for hiking and mountain biking in the summer months and skiing and shoe shoeing in the winter. Furthermore, points of interest will also be established along the trails to highlight important areas. Possible investments could include an observation tower at a swamp or high point or a feeding yard for animals.

The key to a long and interconnected network will be signing long-term servitudes with property owners. The financial compensation for these contracts will have the dual purpose of relieving the financial burden owners face paying the large taxes on their land. Any property owner willing to sign a minimum 5 year agreement with the municipality will be annually compensated per kilometer of trail that crosses their land. The municipality would invest in the trail network and owners would only be responsible to repay a portion of the investment if they decided to cancel the contract early. Of course, greater investments will be made in longer term contracts.

Citizens that support the objectives of the WILD program may be willing to contribute with financial donations or with land. The municipality will have the capacity to issue tax receipts for all donations to help compensate people for their generosity. Furthermore, some property owners, while supporting our objectives but with no interest in parting with their land, will look towards measures to voluntarily protect and conserve their land. As a community, the municipality believes there is an essential benefit

to this and will find avenues to compensate these owners for their partnership in our cause.

We see all these partnerships with property owners as mutually beneficial and will help create a more united and supportive community with little financial impact on the community but major gains in our collective quality of life.

