

# Policy Brief:

## The Natural Environment & Natural Resources

The Sault is surrounded by an abundance of natural resources, with 20% of the world's freshwater supply, easy access to thousands of hectares of unspoiled wilderness, and the mineral rich Canadian Shield right beneath us. Our natural environment contributes to our economy, well-being, and recreational pursuits. It is a big part of our lifestyle and identity.

### ■ Policy context.

There are numerous provincial regulations aimed at protecting the environment while at the same time accommodating development and the use of natural resources. These regulations guide local development decisions. The goal is to strike a sustainable balance between economic prosperity, social well-being, and environmental health.

The appropriate balancing of these factors is heavily contested. Some feel that environmental protection has gone too far, while others feel it has not gone far enough.

Currently, most development is discouraged from locating on or near wetlands, fish habitat and significant wildlife habitats.

**Did you know that SSM has 2,400 ha. of wetlands, and 357 km of rivers and streams that are designated as fish habitat?**

**Can the Sault accommodate new heavy industrial facilities while not harming the natural environment we enjoy?**

Provincial regulations also aim to protect the long term viability of 'Provincially Significant' resources, such as aggregate and mineral deposits, which serve an important economic function. Current regulations restrict the development of uses such as residential, parks and daycares in close proximity to known aggregate deposits. Placing these incompatible uses near aggregate deposits could restrict future aggregate operations due to the off-site impacts of increased noise, dust and truck traffic.

Another example of provincial balancing relates to development within Provincially Significant wetlands. While most development is prohibited from locating within a Provincially Significant wetland, mineral and petroleum extraction is generally permitted. In this case, the Province has identified mineral and petroleum extraction opportunities as critically important to the provincial economy.

### ■ The issue.

Development can have negative impacts on the natural environment. The goal is to 'grow from within', by focusing development within the built up area of the city. When development extends beyond the built up portion of the city, it reduces and fragments open spaces, habitats and ecosystems.

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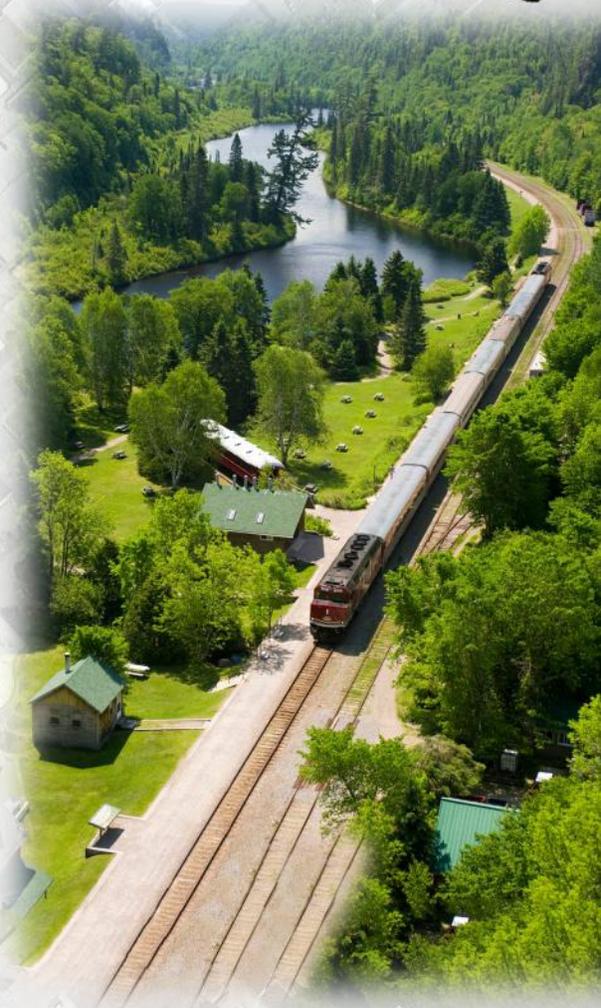
For example, deer travel significant distances to take winter refuge in the thick evergreen forests near the Airport. Development within the identified deer yards or along their travel corridors could significantly impact deer populations. Irresponsible development along local creeks and rivers which function as spawning grounds, food sources, and nurseries, can also have negative impacts upon local fish populations.

Locally, the main economically viable natural resource is sand and gravel deposits; however in some cases the natural environment itself is the resource. Tourism and recreational activities such as golf courses, fishing opportunities, cross country ski trails and hiking trails all rely on the natural environment. In fact, many of us choose to live in Sault Ste. Marie because of these recreational opportunities.

The new Official Plan will regulate development in a manner that balances economic prosperity with environmental protection. While this delicate balance must be consistent with Provincial regulations, there is an opportunity to recognize local considerations.

**What parts of the Sault's natural environment do I wish can be kept for future generations to enjoy?**

**If I was the one making the decisions, how would I balance economic prosperity with environmental protection?**



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