



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Third season of prescribed burns planned for globally rare habitat on the Oak Ridges Moraine**

Cobourg, ON – This spring, experts will continue prescribed burns in the Rice Lake Plains following two successful seasons. These burns work to restore and revitalize globally rare tallgrass prairie and savanna habitat on the east end of the Oak Ridges Moraine in Northumberland County. The burns will take place within the Northumberland County Forest, the Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) Barr, Webber and Van Hove & Evens properties, Peter's Woods Provincial Nature Reserve including the Burnley-Carmel property, as well as on Alderville First Nation land.

Partners in these projects are holding a **Prescribed Burn Open House on March 13, 2008, 6-9 pm at the Centreton Community Centre**, as part of the *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* and the *Caring for the Moraine – Ganaraska Hills Area* project. Representatives from all organizations involved – NCC, Northumberland County, Ontario Parks, Alderville First Nation, Ganaraska Conservation Authority, the Ministry of Natural Resources Fire Management Section, and the private prescribed burn consultants – will be available to answer questions.

"Tallgrass prairie and savanna plant species depend upon fire to live. As natural fires have long been suppressed in southern Ontario, conservation scientists across North America use professionally-managed prescribed burns to bring new life to these threatened places," says Mark Stabb, NCC's Central Ontario Program Manager. "We are encouraging local people to come out to the open house to learn more about our plans and about how prescribed burns work, as well as to address any safety concerns the public may have."

Prescribed burns are professionally-managed, intentionally-set fires that burn an area within pre-determined boundaries and under strictly controlled circumstances for purposes of restoring natural habitat. Fire clears away scrub and brush allowing sunlight to penetrate down to the soil where native grassland seeds lie. These species will flourish following a fire, restoring the native grassland habitats of the area. Fire also extends the growing season for native plants, and shortens the season for invasive species. Burning only takes place under specific weather conditions that allow a safe and controlled burn.

The burns prescribed for the Oak Ridges Moraine sites will be carried out by trained professionals. Burns sponsored by the *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* partners will be managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources Management Section as well as the prescribed burn consulting firm. Detailed burn plans, fire permits and insurance are obtained in advance for each site.

In 2007 the members of the *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* completed a successful prescribed burn in the area and Alderville First Nation staff also conducted prescribed burns on First Nation land. Two other planned burns did not proceed last year because site conditions were not favourable.

For safety reasons, the public will not be allowed access to the prescribed burn areas during the burns. Media representatives are welcome to observe burning operations from a safe location, to be determined by fire control staff.

The Oak Ridges Moraine, one of Ontario's most significant geographical features, supports a distinctive mix of flora and fauna and plays an essential role in maintaining the quality and quantity of water resources in the region. Tallgrass prairie and savanna once covered an estimated 200 square km of the moraine. Today, less than 1 percent

of the 1 million square kilometers of prairie and savanna habitat that once covered central Canada and the United States remains, making it one of the rarest ecosystem types in North America. Tallgrass communities are important habitats for grassland birds, which are declining across North America.

The prescribed burns are funded and organized by two successful partnerships, both of which have received support from the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation. The *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* is comprised of NCC, Northumberland County, Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority, Lower Trent Conservation, Ontario Parks, the Alderville First Nation, and the Northumberland Land Trust. The partners envision restoration and protection of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna habitat through co-operative efforts with landowners, conservation science, land stewardship, public outreach, and legal protection of land. The Ganaraska Hills partnership is made up of 15 groups promoting and coordinating restoration and stewardship activities on a large portion of the moraine in the vicinity of the Ganaraska Forest.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is a non-profit, non-confrontational organization that takes a business-like approach to land conservation and the protection of biological diversity. Its plan of action involves partnership building and entering into creative conservation solutions with any individual, corporation, community group, conservation organization or government body that shares its passion. Since 1962, NCC and its supporters have protected almost 2 million acres of ecologically significant land nationwide.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Prescribed burns are weather-dependent and site-specific. Typically they occur in early to mid April, after snow melt and once sites are dry. Announcements of individual prescribed burns will be sent as soon as details are known.

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