

From: [Susan Watson](#)
To: [Chris White](#); [Sue Foxtan](#); officeofthemayor@brantford.ca; [Guy Gardhouse](#); [Lisa Hern](#); [Shawn Watters](#); [Christine Billings](#); [Ken Yee Chew](#); dougccraig@icloud.com; [Mike Devine](#); [Jim Erb](#); [Gord Greavette](#); [Colleen James](#); [Sandy Shantz](#); [Natasha Salonen](#); [Kari Williams](#); [Pam Wolf](#); [Jerry Smith](#); [John Challinor II](#); [Alex Wilson](#); [Bruce Banbury](#); [Brian Coleman](#); [David Miller](#); [Gino Caputo](#); [Dan Lawrence](#); [Rob Shirton](#); [Eowyn Spencer](#)
Cc: [Richard Vivian](#); tpender@therecord.com; [Seto, Chris](#); kate.bueckert@cbc.ca; jstruthers@metroland.com; [Erin Caton](#); [Michele Richardson](#); [Linda Busuttli](#); [Carly Klassen](#); [Phil Allt](#); [Dan Gibson](#); [Rodrigo Goller](#); [Cathy Downer](#); [Leanne Caron](#); [Dominique O'Rourke](#); [Cam Guthrie](#); [Mayors Office](#); [Krista Walkey](#); [Luke Jefferson](#); [Gene Matthews](#)
Subject: FOI results prove MNR Niska grant was for Conservation lands
Date: November 19, 2024 8:04:27 PM
Attachments: [FOI-2402-Release Documents - SWatson.pdf](#)

Chair White and members of the GRCA Board:

Several weeks ago, I filed a Freedom of Information Request for the original GRCA application to the Ministry of Natural Resources for the grant to acquire the former Kortright Waterfowl Park (Niska) lands.

Among the documents I received was a letter from Leo Bernier, Minister of Natural Resources to Ron Fox Secretary – Treasurer of the GRCA; the letter, dated January 31 1977, announces the approval by the Minister of the purchase of the Kortright Waterfowl Park lands by the GRCA. These FOI results and that letter are attached to this email.

The heading of the letter specifies the approved project to be: **Valley Land Acquisition – Hanlon Creek Conservation Area** . The approval from the MNR includes a grant of \$160,000 toward the \$320,000 cost of the land purchase.

I submitted a second FOI to Ms. Spencer, asking for the "*particulars and conditions of approval*" attached to the letter, but Ms. Spencer informed me that these documents were not attached to the Minister's letter and directed me to make an inquiry to the Ministry of Natural Resources or the Provincial Archives.

Despite the clear statement by Minister Bernier that the purchase of the Kortright Waterfowl Park lands was to form part of the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area, (which statement is confirmed by GRCA Minutes and GRCA statements at the time of purchase and in a GRCA Factsheet of 2014) the GRCA has persisted in asserting that the Niska lands were acquired for the Hespeler Dam project and since that project has been mothballed, the Niska Lands are no longer necessary for the original reason for purpose.

The assertion that the Niska Lands were purchased for the Hespeler Reservoir project is completely false. As confirmed by Minister Bernier's letter the purchase of both the Kortright Waterfowl Park lands and the earlier purchase of adjacent lands from the Hanlon estate were made to bring these keystone properties into the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area.

The purchase of the Kortright Waterfowl Park lands in 1977 was the culmination of a series of reports that identified the importance of these lands in the formation of the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area.

In addition to the MNR grant for this Conservation Area, it is well-documented that the City of Guelph contributed 30-40% of the purchase price.

The 1968 Preliminary Report of the Hanlon's Creek Basin, the 1972 Hanlon Creek Ecological Study and the 1975 Interim Master Planning Study all recognized the keystone role of the Niska Lands in providing access to nature within the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area. The 1975 Interim Planning Study identified the whole area of the Kortright Park lands, with specific mention of the upland cultivated fields, as being included in the proposed wildlife viewing area.

Every step of the process for establishing the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area was led by the City of Guelph with the intention that these lands would be protected in perpetuity for future generations of Guelphites. The GRCA, acting on its mandate to provide land for access to nature, provided valuable assistance in technical planning in addition to access to provincial financial support.

It is now widely recognized that providing Green and Blue Spaces for access to nature is a vital contributor to community and individual health. Our City is now facing down a 174 ha parkland shortage relative to population by 2051. No one can assert that either parkland or conservation land is "no longer needed."

In the public engagement conducted as part of the recent Conservation Area Strategy, the most common request was **"Don't sell off conservation land"**, followed by, **"You need to acquire more conservation land."**

The GRCA's fabrication of a false narrative to justify selling off the Niska lands is shocking. These lands were Purchased by the GRCA to provide access to nature and are to be protected in perpetuity.

The GRCA needs to correct the false narrative being propagated about the Niska Lands and instead collaborate with the City of Guelph to fulfill the vision of the Hanlon Creek Master Plan and to carry out your own mission statement to "provide access to outdoor spaces."

Sincerely,

Susan Watson

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Eowyn Spencer** <espencer@grandriver.ca>

Date: Fri, 18 Oct 2024 at 11:06

Subject: RE: Freedom of Information Request

To: Susan Watson

Hi Susan, Please see the attached the decision letter and release notice/documents related to your FOI request.

If you have any further questions, or to obtain printed copies, please feel free to contact me directly.

Kind regards,

[Eowyn Spencer](#)

Supervisor of Administrative Services

Grand River Conservation Authority

400 Clyde Road, PO Box 729

Cambridge, ON N1R 5W6

Office: 519-621-2763 ext. 2200

Toll-free: 1-866-900-4722

www.grandriver.ca | [Connect with us on social](#)

From: Susan Watson

Sent: Sunday, September 22, 2024 8:38 AM

To: Eowyn Spencer <espencer@grandriver.ca>

Subject: Freedom of Information Request

Ms. Eowyn Spencer

Freedom of Information Coordinator

Grand River Conservation Authority

400 Clyde Rd. PO Box 729

Cambridge, ON N1R 5W6

Dear Ms. Spencer:

I understand that amongst your many roles, you are also the Freedom of Information Coordinator for the GRCA.

I would like to request a copy of the application made to the Ministry of Natural Resources by the GRCA for MNR funds towards the purchase of the 116 acres of the former Kortright Waterfowl Park property (Ontario Waterfowl Research Foundation) in Guelph. The application was likely submitted to the MNR in 1976 or very early in 1977.

An archival article from the February 2, 1977 issue of the Guelph Mercury (attached) announced that a \$160,000 grant had been received from the Ministry of Natural Resources to cover the Province's 50% share of the property purchase price of \$320,000.

The application may state that the purchase is related to the Guelph Valleylands project, the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area or the Hespeler Dam Project.

I am happy to provide credit card information over the phone for payment of the \$5 application fee at your convenience.

Thank you in advance for your help with this matter.

Sincerely,

Susan Watson