

# Lease deal makes karst feeder lands' protection official | Your online community newspaper for Hamilton, Ontario and area

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*By Richard Leitner, News Staff*

It's now official: the Hamilton Conservation Authority will lease 37.5 hectares of "feeder lands" by the Eramosa Karst from the province for \$1 per year over the next 20 years.

Land-owner Infrastructure Ontario this week notified the authority that it has approved the lease agreement, first announced last June. It took effect on Feb. 7.

The deal confirms the province's "wishes to conserve, protect and preserve the leased lands as a conservation area and as part of a natural heritage system in Ontario," the public agency stated in a letter to the authority.

Authority chief administrative officer Chris Firth-Eagland called the lease "really good news" and noted it preserves an additional 2.5 hectares on top of the 35 hectares agreed to last June "to tidy up the boundaries."

The deal expands the original 73-hectare Eramosa Karst Conservation Area, donated to the authority by the province in 2006 in recognition of the Upper Mount Albion Road site's unique network of caves, sink holes, dry valleys and sinking streams.

Firth-Eagland said while he hasn't seen the details on renewing the lease, he believes the commitment to preserve the feeder lands "is permanent" and the area will become even more precious as neighbouring development continues.

He said work is already underway on a master plan for trails, benches, interpretive features and management of grasslands used for nesting by threatened bobolinks. The area's water flows into the karst park.

"Also, we're required to have an operational plan that shows the province how we're going to operate the land for the future," Firth-Eagland said, one that will ensure there are no inappropriate uses.

"We're working on both of those (plans) now. I'm not certain when they would be ready to release, but staff are addressing those now."

Brad Gautreau, chair of the Friends of the Eramosa Karst, formed in 2007 to fight initial plans to allow housing on the feeder lands, said the finalization of the lease deal will turn his group's upcoming annual fundraising dinner and dance into a celebration.

FOTEK last July presented the first \$3,000 installment toward the \$15,000 it has pledged to donate to the authority for the feeder lands over three years. That's on top of the \$5,000 it's already contributed to the neighbouring conservation area.

"It's a good end to a very long story," Gautreau said of the lease. "FOTEK's not going to go away but we're not going to be as busy. We have no need to be as busy as we've been."

The dinner is set for 6 p.m. on March 9 at Michelangelo's Conference Centre, 1555 Upper Ottawa St., and will feature a guest address by former Hamilton mayor Fred Eisenberger, who will give an overview of the authority's plans for a Dundas eco-park.

Tickets are \$30 and available at the Josh Tiessen Studio Galley, 148 King St. E. in Stoney Creek, and through the FOTEK website, [www.friendsoferamosakarst.org](http://www.friendsoferamosakarst.org).