

RE ORILLIA 1 SOLAR PROJECT

Natural Heritage Evaluation of Significance

August 3, 2011

RECURRENT
ENERGY





RE Orillia 1 ULC

Natural Heritage
Evaluation of Significance

RE Orillia 1 Solar Project

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Project Report

August 3, 2011

RE Orillia 1 ULC
RE Orillia 1 Solar Project

Natural Heritage Evaluation of Significance

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Description

RE Orillia 1 ULC is proposing to develop and operate a 10-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (Solar PV) facility, on an approximately 25-hectare (ha) parcel of land, located about 7 km west-southwest of Orillia in the Township of Oro-Medonte in the County of Simcoe (Figure 1.1); herein referred to as “RE Orillia 1” or the “Project”.

1.2 Legislative Requirements

Ontario Regulation (O. Reg.) 359/09 – *Renewable Energy Approvals Under Part V.0.1 of the Act*, made under the *Environmental Protection Act* identifies the Renewable Energy Approval (REA) requirements for renewable energy projects in Ontario. Ground-mounted solar facilities with a name plate capacity greater than 10 kW are classified as Class 3 solar facilities and require an REA in accordance with Section 4 of O. Reg. 359/09.

Section 24 (1) of O. Reg. 359/09 requires proponents of Class 3 solar projects to prepare a natural heritage assessment consisting of a records review report, site investigation report and an evaluation of significance report for each natural feature identified during the records review and site investigation.

Natural Features are defined in Section 1 (1) of O. Reg. 359/09 to be all or part of

- a) an area of natural and scientific interest (ANSI) (earth science)
- b) an ANSI (life science)
- c) a coastal wetland
- d) a northern wetland
- e) a southern wetland
- f) a valleyland
- g) a wildlife habitat, or
- h) a woodland.

1.2.1 Records Review Report

Section 25 of the REA Regulation requires proponents of Class 3 solar projects to undertake a natural heritage records review to identify “whether the project is

- a) in a natural feature
- b) within 50 m of an area of natural and scientific interest (earth science)
- c) within 120 m of a natural feature that is not an area of natural or scientific interest (earth science).” (O. Reg. 359/09, s. 25, Table).

Subsection 2 of Section 30 of the REA Regulation requires the proponent to prepare a report “setting out a summary of the records searched and the results of the analysis” (O. Reg. 359/09). The Natural Heritage Records Review Report (Hatch Ltd., 2010a) was prepared to meet these requirements.

1.2.2 Site Investigation Report

Section 26 of the REA Regulation requires proponents of Class 3 solar projects to undertake a natural heritage site investigation for the purpose of determining

- whether the results of the analysis summarized in the (natural heritage records review) report prepared under Subsection 25(3) are correct or require correction, and identifying any required corrections
- whether any additional natural features exist, other than those that were identified in the (natural heritage records review) report prepared under Subsection 30(2)
- the boundaries, located within 120 m of the Project location, of any natural feature that was identified in the records review or the site investigation
- the distance from the Project location to the boundaries determined under clause (c).

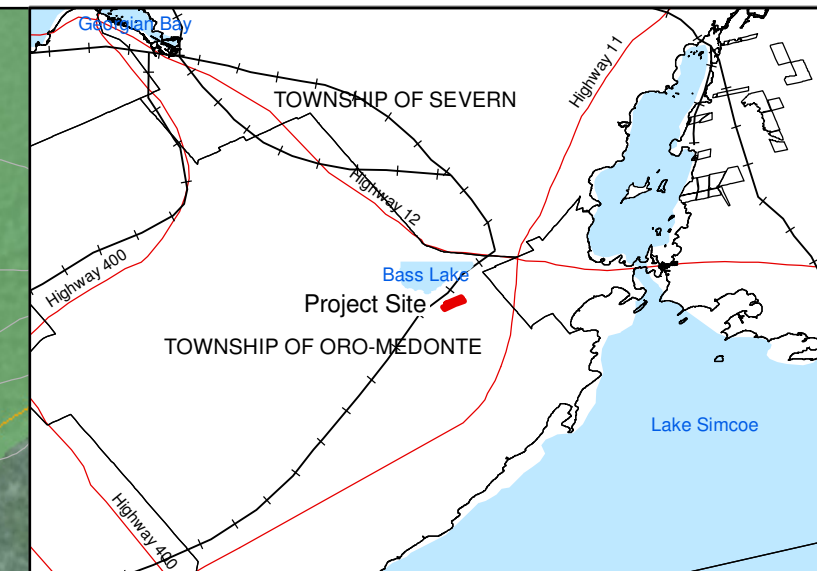
The Natural Heritage Site Investigation Report (Hatch Ltd., 2010b) was prepared to meet these requirements.

1.2.3 Evaluation of Significance Report

Section 27 of the REA Regulation requires proponents of Class 3 solar projects to undertake an evaluation of significance (EOS) for natural heritage features identified during the records review and site investigation that sets out

- a determination of whether the natural feature is
 - ◆ provincially significant
 - ◆ significant
 - ◆ not significant
 - ◆ not provincially significant
- a summary of the evaluation criteria or procedures used to make the determinations
- the name and qualifications of any person who applied to evaluation criteria or procedures
- the dates of the beginning and completion of this evaluation.

This Evaluation of Significance Report for the natural features identified on and within 120 m of the Project location has been prepared to meet these requirements. It has also been prepared in accordance with the Ministry of Natural Resource’s Natural Heritage Assessment Guide for Renewable Energy Projects (December 2010).



- Legend**
- Road
 - Topographic Contour (5m interval)
 - Watercourse
 - ▭ Parcels
 - ▭ Woodland
- Significant Natural Heritage Features**
- ▭ Seepage Area
 - ▭ Significant Animal Movement Corridor
 - ▭ Significant Woodland
 - ▭ Valleyland
 - ▭ Ovenbird Habitat/Woodland Supporting Amphibian Breeding Habitat/Animal Movement Corridor
 - ▭ Wetland
- Project Components**
- Connection Point With Existing Distribution Line
 - ▭ Project Location
 - ▭ 120m from Project Location
 - ▭ Hedgerow to be Removed, Shrubs to be Planted

Notes:
 1. Base data downloaded from www.geographynetwork.ca, other environmental data from LIO.
 2. Spatial Referencing UTM NAD83.
 3. Natural Resource Solutions Inc. provided additional evaluated wetland boundaries, Sept, 2010.

0 100 200 400 Metres
 1:7,500

NORTH

Figure 1.1
 Recurrent Energy
 RE Orillia 1
 Project Location & Significant
 Natural Heritage Features **HATCH™**

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1.3 Evaluation of Significance Report Format

Section 1 of this EOS has identified the legislative requirements for an EOS under the REA Regulation and identified the reasons why an EOS is required for the Project. Section 2 provides a summary of the results of the records review and site investigation. Section 3 provides the evaluation of significance for wildlife habitat, while Section 4 provides the evaluation of significance for the woodland, and Section 5 provides the evaluation of significance for the valleyland. Section 6 identifies the conclusions of the evaluation of significance, and the references are provided in Section 7.

2. Summary of Results of Records Review and Site Investigation

As stated above, natural features requiring an evaluation of significance are identified through the records review (Hatch Ltd., 2010a) and site investigation (Hatch Ltd., 2010b) required under Sections 25 and 26 of the REA Regulation, respectively. These studies have already been completed, and the results are summarized in Table 2.1. This report provides the evaluations for the features identified in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Natural Features on and within 120 m of the Project Location

Natural Feature	Project Location	Adjacent Lands (within 120 m)	Notes
ANSI – Earth Science	No	No	
ANSI – Life Science	No	No	
Valleyland	No	Yes	
Wetland	No	Yes	The Langman Marsh Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW) occurs within 120 m of the Project location. This feature has been previously assessed as provincially significant and therefore an EOS is not required (Hatch Ltd., 2010b)
Woodland	No	Yes	
Wildlife Habitat	Yes	Yes	

3. Wildlife Habitat

Several types of candidate significant wildlife habitats were identified during the site investigation:

- raptor winter feeding and roosting
- woodlands supporting amphibian breeding habitat
- seepage area
- habitat for area sensitive species (e.g., Ovenbird and Savannah Sparrow)

- hedgerows and woodlands as animal movement corridors.

3.1 Seasonal Concentration Areas

Criteria for evaluation of seasonal concentration areas are identified within Table Q-1 of Appendix Q of the SWHTG. The criteria that were considered during the evaluations of the features are discussed in respect of the individual features below.

3.1.1 *Raptor Winter Feeding and Roosting Areas*

The criteria for raptor winter feeding and roosting areas include the following:

- Relative importance of the site – Intermixes of woodland and grassland communities are common within this portion of the province, and therefore this site is not considered to be of relative importance.
- Presence of species of conservation concern/species diversity/abundance – Raptor species that may use the winter feeding and roosting area are currently unknown.
- Size of site – The size of the combined woodland/grassland areas is greater than 20 ha, which exceeds the criteria.
- Level of disturbance – There are nearby roadways, residential properties, and agricultural operations within close proximity of the area, therefore disturbance is moderate.
- Location of site – The site consists of a mix of woodlands and grasslands, therefore this criteria is met.
- Quality of habitat – Though abundance of prey is unknown, habitat is believed to be reflective of the quality of habitat available within the region.
- Historical Use – Historical use of the feature is unknown.

Based on the abundance of this habitat type within the region, lands on and within 120 m of the Project location are not considered to be a significant raptor winter feeding and roosting area.

3.1.2 *Specialized Habitat for Wildlife*

Criteria for evaluation of specialized habitat for wildlife are identified within Table Q-2 of Appendix Q of the SWHTG and the Addendum to the SWHTG (MNR, 2009). The criteria that were considered during the evaluation of the features are discussed in respect of the individual features below.

3.1.2.1 *Habitat for Ovenbird, an Area-Sensitive Species*

Criteria for evaluation of habitat for area sensitive species are identified within Table Q-2 of Appendix Q of the SWHTG. The criteria that were considered during the evaluation of the features are discussed in respect of the individual features below.

- Presences of rare, uncommon, or declining species – Ovenbird are not identified as a species undergoing declines within the province

- Overall area of site – Site is greater than 30 ha, which is the minimum size for significant habitat for area sensitive species (MNR, 2009)
- Amount of vertical stratification – No vertical stratification was noted within the areas of suitable habitat
- Degree of disturbance – There is regular disturbance in the vicinity of the identified habitat given intensive agricultural operations.
- Amount of adjacent residential development – There is no adjacent residential development
- Current representation of specialized habitat in planning area – Woodlands, which represent suitable habitat for Ovenbird, represent approximately 30% of the land cover within the region.
- Provision of significant wildlife habitat – The other significant wildlife habitat characteristics of this woodland includes supporting significant amphibian breeding ponds (see Section 3.1.2.3) and seepage area (see Section 3.1.2.4). Therefore, this criteria is met as several significant wildlife habitats were not noted
- Potential for long-term protection of site – The site is located on private land, and therefore, long-term protection of the feature cannot be assured, however a portion of the woodland is associated with a Provincially Significant Wetland which will allow that portion to be protected from development.

Therefore, as several criteria have been met, Ovenbird habitat is determined to be significant.

3.1.2.2 *Habitat for Savannah Sparrow, an Area-Sensitive Species*

The criteria for area-sensitive grassland species include the following:

- Presence of rare, uncommon, or declining species – Savannah Sparrow populations are believed to be declining as a result of reductions in grassland habitats associated with reforestation, intensification of agriculture, and development within the province (Ontario Partners in Flight, 2005). Therefore, this criteria is met.
- Overall area of the site/current representation of the specialized habitat – Based on satellite imagery, there are several large contiguous areas of grassland present within the regional area; therefore, the available lands on and within 120 m of the Project location represent a small proportion of the suitable habitat. Further, given that Savannah Sparrow commonly nest beside roadways, it is expected that once ground cover becomes established following construction, suitable habitat will remain present on the Project location during the operations period. As a result, this criteria is not met.
- Amount of vertical stratification of site – No vertical stratification was noted during the site investigation within the grassland. Therefore, this criteria is not met.
- Degree of disturbance – The majority of suitable habitat within 120 m is a pastureland/hayfield that is harvested annually, and not in an early stage of succession. Therefore, this criteria is not met.

- Amount of adjacent residential development – There is no true residential development in the area. Therefore, this criteria is met.
- Provision of significant wildlife habitat – There are no other candidate significant wildlife habitat characteristics of this area, therefore, this criteria is not met.
- Potential for long-term protection of the site – The site is located on private land, and therefore, long-term protection of the feature cannot be assured.

Though two of the criteria are met, these criteria simply apply to the presence of the species and adjacent development, and do not truly provide an indication as to the overall value of the site to Savannah Sparrow. Based on the abundance of this habitat type in the area, the expected availability of habitat on the Project location following construction, and the level of disturbance present within the suitable habitat, this feature is determined to not meet the criteria for significance.

3.1.2.3 *Woodlands Supporting Amphibian Breeding Ponds*

The criteria for woodlands supporting amphibian breeding ponds include the following:

- Provision of significant wildlife habitats – The woodland is also considered to be significant Ovenbird Habitat.
- Degree of permanence – Permanent open water wetland habitats are associated with the feature, though located greater than 120 m from the Project location.
- Species diversity of pond – Only northern leopard frogs were recorded during the site investigations; therefore, diversity is considered to be poor and this criteria is not met.
- Presence of rare species – No rare amphibian species were recorded during the site investigations.
- Size and number of ponds – The open water communities within the wetland are considered to be fairly large, and exceed the criteria. Therefore, this criteria is met.
- Diversity of submergent and emergent vegetation – Few species of submergent and emergent vegetation were recorded within 120 m of the Project location.
- Presence of shrubs, logs at edge of pond – Shrubs are present in portions of the wetland community; therefore, this criteria is met.
- Adjacent forest habitat – Portions of the wetland communities border one large forested area; therefore, this criteria is met.
- Water quality – Pollution within the watercourses on the Project location would be restricted to stormwater runoff from agricultural fields and roadways. Therefore, it is assumed that water quality is generally good.
- Level of disturbance – Level of disturbance between the wetland and woodlands is low; therefore, this criteria is met.

As several of the criteria are met, woodlands supporting amphibian breeding ponds are considered to be significant wildlife habitat.

3.1.2.4 Seepage Areas

The criteria for seepage areas include the following:

- Abundance of seeps – Only one seepage area was identified during the site investigation, therefore this criteria is not met.
- Duration of surface water – Surface water was not present all year, therefore this criteria is not met.
- Nature of adjacent area – The seepage area is located within a naturalized area, therefore this criteria is met.
- Presence of rare species – No rare or uncommon species were identified in association with the seepage area, therefore this criteria is not met.
- Location of seeps – The seepage area is located within a woodland, therefore this criteria is met.

Therefore, based on the criteria identified above, the seeps is considered to be significant.

3.1.3 Animal Movement Corridors

The SWHTG defines animal movement corridors as “elongated, naturally vegetated parts of the landscape used by animals to move from one habitat to another”. To qualify as significant wildlife habitat, these corridors should include “habitats that links two or more wildlife habitats that are critical to the maintenance of a population of a particular species or group of species; and habitat with a key ecological function to enable wildlife habitat to move, with minimum mortality, between areas of significant wildlife habitat or core natural areas” (MNR, 2010).

Evaluation methodology of animal movement corridors is identified within Section 8.7 of the SWHTG. The criteria for significance are outlined in Table Q-4 of Appendix Q in the SWHTG, and include the following:

- Importance of areas to be linked by corridor – Areas linking critical habitats/significant areas.
- Importance of corridor to survival of target species – Corridors linking significant or critical habitat for a target species.
- Dimensions of corridor – Most significant corridors should be at least 200 m wide.
- Continuity of corridor – Corridor should be unbroken.
- Habitat and habitat structure of corridor – Corridor with several layers of vegetation and other structures, such as watercourses.
- Species found in corridor or presumed to be using corridor – Corridors with high species diversity are significant.
- Risk of mortality for species using corridor – Corridors with low risk of road kills or adjacent to residential areas.
- Opportunity for protection – Corridors within areas that may be protected, such as undeveloped shorelines or borders of conservation areas.

- Provision of other related values (such as erosion protection).

Such features were found to be present within the hedgerows and woodlands on and within 120 m of the Project location.

The hedgerows present on and within 120 m of the Project location are generally restricted to a depth of a 1 to 2 trees.

Though several hedgerow communities were identified on and within 120 m of the Project location, the majority of these hedgerows do not serve to connect critical habitats/significant areas. The exception being the hedgerow which runs along the southern boundary of the Project location, which connects the significant woodland/PSW to a significant animal movement corridor across Line 13 N (Hatch Ltd., 2010). As a result, this hedgerow is considered to be a significant animal movement corridor.

The woodland within 120 m of the Project location provides corridor for movement from the PSW to upland wooded and agricultural habitats. This would provide sheltered movement from retreat/breeding habitats to foraging areas. Further, the corridor links critical and significant wildlife habitats. The corridor is continuous, and wide. Risk of mortality for species using the corridor would be considered to be low. The corridor also provides erosion protection for the wetland community and associated watercourses. Further, much of the corridor is associated with a significant wetland. Therefore, the woodland is considered to be a significant animal movement corridor.

3.1.4 Overall Conclusion

Based on the evaluation completed above, significant wildlife habitat identified on or within 120 m of the Project location are

- Ovenbird habitat
- Hedgerow south of the Project location as a significant animal movement corridor
- woodland as a significant animal movement corridor
- woodland supporting amphibian breeding ponds
- seepage area.

3.2 Date of Beginning and Completion of Evaluation

The evaluation of wildlife habitat commenced with records reviews (i.e., search of existing sources, review of satellite imagery) in June 2009. Site visits were completed in association with this evaluation on June 18, 2009 and May 26, 2010. Notes from the site investigation as well as information gathered through the records review were compared to criteria for significance periodically from July through November of 2010. The evaluation of significance is completed with the completion of this Report in January 2011.

3.3 Name and Qualifications of Evaluator

Evaluations of wildlife habitat were completed by Sean K. Male of Hatch Ltd.

Sean K. Male, M.Sc. is a Terrestrial Ecologist specializing in assessments of terrestrial habitat, flora and fauna. Sean received his Bachelors of Science (Honours) in Biology from Queen's University, where he completed his Honour's thesis under Dr. Raleigh J. Robertson, studying the impacts of nestbox density in Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) on nest-building behaviour. He then completed a Master's of Science degree in the Watershed Ecosystem Graduate Program at Trent University under Dr. Erica Nol. Sean's thesis focussed on examining the impacts of a Canadian diamond mine on a population of breeding passerines. For his thesis, Sean spent two summers in the Canadian arctic studying populations of Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*) around the Ekati Diamond Mine, located 300 km northeast of Yellowknife. While at Trent, Sean participated in the Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) Migration Banding Project at the Oliver Centre. Following his time at Trent, Sean participated in the Landscape Monitoring Program, participating in a study of the impacts of woodlot size on breeding birds.

Sean joined Hatch as a Terrestrial Ecologist in 2006. Since joining Hatch, Sean has participated in several environmental assessments, REAs and other regulatory approvals for hydro, wind and solar power developments as the terrestrial biologist specializing in field investigations identifying flora and fauna species, including species of significance. He has developed and implemented baseline monitoring and impact assessment programs for both terrestrial wildlife and plant communities, including detailed bird and bat studies for several wind power developments, including the proposed 100-MW Coldwell Wind Power Development near Marathon, Ontario, a proposed 20-MW facility near Port Dover, ON, and a proposed 110-MW wind facility in southwestern Ontario. Sean has also conducted terrestrial and wetland vegetation surveys for several proposed hydropower projects totalling over 40 MW in southern and northern Ontario and has participated in fisheries surveys for several of these projects.

4. Woodlands

4.1 Description of Natural Feature

There is a woodland within 120 m north and east of the Project location.

4.2 Evaluation Criteria and Guidelines for Woodlands

The criteria for establishing woodland significance are identified within Section 7 of the Natural Heritage Reference Manual (MNR, 2010). Many of the criteria rely on the amount of existing forest cover within a given region; the forest cover within the subwatershed of the Project location has been determined to be greater than or equal to 30% (LSRCA, 2007).

Therefore, the criteria used to assess the woodlands within 120 m of the Project location are

- woodland size (woodlands greater than 50 ha are significant)
- ecological function
 - ◆ woodland interior (woodlands with greater than 8 ha of forest interior)
 - ◆ proximity to other woodlands or other habitats (woodlands within 30 m of a significant natural feature receiving ecological benefit from the woodland)

- ◆ linkages (woodlands providing a connecting link between two other significant features)
- ◆ water protection (Woodlands within 50 m of water features)
- ◆ woodland diversity (a high native diversity through a combination of composition and terrain)
- uncommon characteristics (i.e., old-growth, rare vegetation communities)
- economic and social functional values (high economic or special services value).

4.3 Determination of Significance

Characteristics of the woodland in relation to the previously identified criteria are discussed below.

- The woodland is 46.2 ha in size.
- The woodland has 15.1 ha of interior forest habitat.
- The woodland is located within 30 m of a water feature.
- Portions of the woodland are considered to be swamp communities within the PSW, and are also identified as providing significant Ovenbird habitat.
- The woodland does not provide a linkage between significant features.
- There is a small valleyland associated with the woodland, however this feature does not significantly contribute to variation in terrain.
- The woodland does not have uncommon characteristics.
- The woodland is not known to provide economic or social functional values.

Therefore, this woodland meets the criteria of forest interior size, proximity to a watercourse, and proximity to a significant natural feature, and is considered to be a significant woodland.

4.4 Date of Beginning and Completion of Evaluation

The evaluation of woodlands commenced with records reviews (i.e., search of existing sources, review of satellite imagery) in June 2009. Site visits were completed in association with this evaluation on June 18, 2009 and May 26, 2010. Notes from the site investigation as well as information gathered through the records review were compared to criteria for significance periodically from July through November of 2010. The evaluation of significance is completed with the completion of this Report in January 2011.

4.5 Name and Qualifications of Evaluator

Evaluations of the woodland were completed by Sean K. Male of Hatch Ltd. His qualifications are provided within Section 3.5.

5. Valleyland

5.1 Description of Natural Feature

A valleyland was identified during the site investigation within 120 m of the Project location.

5.2 Evaluation Criteria for Determining Significant Valleylands

The MNR document titled “Natural Heritage Reference Manual for Natural Heritage Policies for the Provincial Policy Statement 2005, Second Edition” (2010) explains a series of criteria used to determine the significance of valleylands. This criteria includes

- surface water functions
- groundwater functions
- landform prominence
- distinctive geomorphic landforms
- degree of naturalness
- community and species diversity
- unique communities and species
- habitat value
- linkage function.

The valleyland does not have a catchment area greater than 50 ha. The valleyland does have associated wetlands farther downstream. There is a seepage area associated with the valleyland. There are no floodplains or meander belts identified in relation to the valleyland. Distinctive geomorphic landforms were not noted during the site investigation. Much of the valleyland remain naturalized in a woodland state, though community and species diversity was not high. The linkage function of this valleyland is minimal given its short distance. Therefore, this valleyland is considered significant based on groundwater functions.

5.3 Date of Beginning and Completion of Evaluation

The evaluation of the valleyland commenced with records reviews (i.e., search of existing sources, review of satellite imagery) in June 2009. Site visits were completed in association with this evaluation on June 18, 2009 and May 26, 2010. Notes from the site investigation as well as information gathered through the records review were compared to criteria for significance periodically from July through November of 2010. The evaluation of significance is completed with the completion of this Report in January 2011.

5.4 Name and Qualifications of Evaluator

Evaluations of valleylands were completed by Sean K. Male of Hatch Ltd. His qualifications are provided in Section 3.4.

6. Conclusions

Results of the evaluation of significance are summarized in Table 6.1. Based on the evaluation of significance outlined above, there are several significant natural features on and within 120 m of Project components. The locations of these features are shown in Figure 1.1.

An environmental impact study conducted according to the requirements of Section 38 (2) of O.Reg. 359/09 will be required in order to construct Project components within 120 m of these significant natural features.

Table 6.1 Significant Natural Features on and within 120 m of the Project Location

Natural Feature		Project Location	Adjacent Lands (within 120 m)
SIGNIFICANT	Woodland	No	Yes
	Wildlife Habitat	Yes	Yes
	Valleyland	No	Yes
PROVINCIALY SIGNIFICANT	Wetland	No	Yes
	Earth Science ANSI	No	No
	Life Science ANSI	No	No

7. References

Hatch Ltd., 2010a. RE Orillia 1 Solar Project – Natural Heritage Records Review Report. Prepared for RE Orillia 1 ULC.

Hatch Ltd., 2010b. RE Orillia 1 Solar Project – Natural Heritage Site Investigations Report. Prepared for RE Orillia 1 ULC.

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