

Brief Recent History of Forestry in Dufferin County

By 1900, much of Dufferin County had been cleared of trees to facilitate farming. As there had been no reforestation, the trees disappeared, and so did the lumber companies. Many farmers who had supplemented their income with logging fell on hard times. The removal of the tree cover had more far-reaching effects: without stabilization, the thin, sandy soils were eroded by wind and water. This made farming impossible. Dufferin was not alone in this predicament. Similar settlement patterns in other parts of southern Ontario had created similar problems. As early as 1908, the Ontario Department of Agriculture had published a *Report on the Reforestation of Waste Lands in Southern Ontario*. This report outlined the development of blowsands that had resulted from large-scale land clearing. It also described the economic and environmental benefits of reforestation:

"The policy of putting these lands under forest management has many arguments in its favour. It will pay as a financial investment; assist in insuring a wood supply; protect the headwaters of streams; provide breeding ground for wild game, provide object lessons in forestry, and prevent citizens from developing under conditions which can end only in failure."

In Dufferin County, land reclamation through planting began in 1905. Gradually, tree planting gained momentum, as people realized that trees were not a nuisance in land-clearing, but were important for stabilization of soils, maintenance of water supplies, and ongoing timber production. This change in opinion could not have come about without the leadership provided by local municipalities. In 1914, the Town of Orangeville planted 4,000 trees; further plantings occurred in 1916, 1924, 1925, 1926, and 1932. The Township of Mulmur planted 16,000 trees in 1924. This was followed by more plantings in 1925, 1927, and 1928. The Town of Mono began planting in 1925, and by 1952 there were 228,300 trees planted on lands in Mono that were formerly barren.

From aerial photography taken in 1953, it was estimated that there were approximately 19,600 hectares of grass and meadow (poor pasture) lands, and wooded pasture (grazed woodlots) lands in Dufferin County that were suitable for reforestation and woodlot management. Reclaiming the majority of these areas would require plantings of about one million trees per year for thirty years. By March 31, 1974 over 17 million trees had been planted in Dufferin County.

In 1953, the Grand River Valley Conservation Authority initiated a forest management agreement with the Department of Lands and Forests with the purchase of 190 hectares in the Township of East Luther. Many of the lands owned by the Conservation Authority are important water source and water-holding areas. However, they also have value in terms of wildlife, recreation, and timber production.

In 1967, *Woodlands Improvement Act* (WIA) Agreements began to take hold in Dufferin County. These agreements provided private landowners with assistance from the Department of Lands and Forests (now the Ministry of Natural Resources) in the planting and management of their woodlots. In 1982, the 9000th Woodlands Improvement Act Agreement in Ontario was signed in Dufferin County. Prior to the cancellation of the WIA program in the 1990s, there were approximately 200 WIA Agreements in Dufferin County, covering a total area of about 2,000 hectares.

An important step in the reclamation of barren lands in Dufferin County came in 1930 when the County of Dufferin entered into its first forest management agreement with the Department of Lands and Forests. The County of Dufferin, following the lead taken by the County of Simcoe in 1922, signed a forest management agreement with the Department of Lands and Forests under the auspices of the *Counties Reforestation Act*. The Dufferin County Forest began its existence on July 3, 1930 when a motion was introduced at the Dufferin County Council meeting requesting the Ontario Forestry Branch to secure options on lands in Mulmur Township for reforestation purposes. This motion was instigated by County Treasurer James Henderson. The first purchase of land for what would become the Dufferin County Forest was made on November 7, 1930. It consisted of 426 ha (1,013 acres) on Concessions VII and VIII in Mulmur Township. The cost of this initial purchase was \$7,637.32.

During the next 40 years Dufferin County made additional purchases bringing the current area of the Dufferin County Forest up to 1,050 ha (2,596 acres). The last purchase was made on September 17, 1971. It consisted of 40 ha (100 acres) on Concession VI in Mulmur Township acquired at a cost of \$25,000.00 (including a \$19,012.65 grant from the Ministry of Natural Resources). The Dufferin County Forest is distributed over twelve tracts in all six of Dufferin's rural municipalities.

Although the Dufferin County Forest is owned by the County of Dufferin, for many years it was managed by the provincial government. (Originally the Department of Lands and Forests, which became the Ministry of Natural Resources in the early 1970s.) On November 26, 1930, the County of Dufferin signed its first Forest Management Agreement with the Department of Lands and Forests. The agreement was made under the *Counties Reforestation Act*, later coming under the jurisdiction of the *Forestry Act*. Subsequent agreements were signed, remaining relatively unchanged until 1991.

When the last agreement expired (April 1, 1991), the County of Dufferin decided that increased demands on the forest properties, as well as changes to the Ministry of Natural Resource's agreement forest program, meant it could not simply sign a new agreement. The County decided that a comprehensive management plan would have to be prepared for the Dufferin County Forest before a new agreement was signed.

In December, 1993 the County of Dufferin and the MNR approved the Terms of Reference for a new management plan. Subsequently, the County of Dufferin, in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources, hired a management plan author to develop a forest management plan for the period 1995-2015. This management plan would describe in detail the operations for the period 1995-2000 and, more generally, the operations for the period 2000-2015.

Our Forest, Our Future: Dufferin County Forest Management Plan 1995-2015 was passed by Dufferin County Council on June 8, 1995. This plan guides the use and management of the Forest, emphasizing three main points:

- An ecosystem approach to forest management.
- Protection of the provincial interest in natural resources.
- A community-based approach to the planning and management of the forest properties.

The Dufferin County Forest is managed and used for a number of purposes including: recreation, natural heritage protection, erosion and water control, provision of wildlife habitat, outdoor education, protection of biodiversity, and support of the rural economy through timber production.

Following the adoption of the long-term forest management plan by Dufferin County Council, the County in 1995 took over the control and co-ordination of all activities having to do with the Dufferin County Forest. In order to fulfill this new role, Dufferin hired a County Forest Manager, the first County in Ontario to do so.

On March 13, 1997, the County signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). This Memorandum, which expired in 2002, outlined the County's and the Ministry's responsibilities in the management of the Dufferin County Forest. A new Memorandum will not be signed, thus terminating the formal relationship between the MNR and the County in the management of the Dufferin County Forest.

Subsequent to the provincial government eliminating many of its private land forestry programs (WIAs, agreement forests, tree nurseries, extension services, tree planting) in the 1990s, a number have been resurrected – in different forms.

Some of the provincial tree nurseries that were closed have been take over by private enterprise; in other cases their capacity has been transferred to private enterprise because the nursery lands have been sold

or leased for other purposes. The province has made a commitment to subsidize the planting of 50 million trees in southern Ontario by 2020. This program, as well as other tree planting subsidy programs, are run by the not-for-profit Trees Ontario. Many local conservation authorities have also expanded their nursery and tree planting programs since those offered by the provincial government were cut.

The management of the agreement forests has been taken over by the owners (municipalities and conservation authorities) – in some cases the job is being done by staff, in other cases by forestry consultants hired on contract – in most cases by some combination of the two approaches.

Extension services are now provided mostly by private forestry consultants, who are also landowners' main source of information and assistance with accessing the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program. This program provides a reduction in property taxes to landowners who write and follow a management plan for their forested property.

In 1995, the Ministry of Natural Resources introduced the Ontario Stewardship Program. Based in the southern part of the province, Ontario Stewardship, answers the question, "What positive role can agencies play in influencing the land management practices of private landowners?" Ontario Stewardship seeks to link landowners with funding, information and expertise to ensure that good management practices flourish. The Program's strength lies in its 40 Community Stewardship Councils, volunteer groups of representative landowners and land interest groups who determine what are the environmental priorities for a given area (usually a county) in Ontario. Each Community Stewardship Council has, dedicated to it, an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources staff person known as a *Stewardship Coordinator*, an individual who through work experience, training and aptitude acts as an Executive Director and facilitator to the Council and hence the community. Since the inception of the program, the County of Dufferin has been actively involved in the local stewardship council, the [Dufferin Simcoe Land Stewardship Network](#).

It is unlikely that there will be a return to the heyday of free, or almost free, trees, tree planting and other forestry services, but there has again been an upswing in interest and funding over the last five years. The upswing is now not driven mainly by the sight of eroded blowsand areas, but by climate change and trees' ability to sequester carbon. We are unlikely to ever return to the amount of forest there was prior to European settlement, but we are inching in the right direction.