



FOREST OPERATION REVIEW COMMITTEE AGENDA

**Tuesday, April 19, 2016, 7:00 p.m.
55 Zina Street, Orangeville – Sutton Room (2nd Floor)**

Declarations of Pecuniary Interest by Members

REPORTS

1. **FOREST OPERATION REVIEW COMMITTEE – April 19, 2016 – ITEM #1
Recreational Use of the Dufferin County Forest**

A report from the General Manager dated April 19, 2016 to provide information for consideration and discussion of the next steps towards the development of a recreational use policy for the Dufferin County Forest.

For consideration of the Committee

Next Meeting: To be determined
55 Zina Street, Orangeville – Sutton Room



REPORT TO Forest Operation Review Committee

To: Chair Laura Ryan and Members of the Committee
From: Darrell Keenie, General Manager - DCMA & County Forest
Meeting Date: April 19, 2016
Subject: Recreational Use of the Dufferin County Forest

In Support of Strategic Plan Priorities and Objectives:
Communication and Connections: 2.1 Connect with Residents
Good Governance: 3.3 Improve policies, practices and procedures

Purpose

To provide information for consideration and discussion of next steps toward the development of a recreational use policy for the Dufferin County Forest.

Background & Discussion

Based on County Council's approval of a new Forest Management Plan for the Dufferin County Forest at its March 2016 convocation, the Forest Operation Review Committee (FORC) is now being asked to consider the development of a policy to govern recreational use of the Forest properties. The following sections are provided for information and discussion purposes:

Purpose of a Recreational Use Policy

The purpose of the recreational use policy is to effectively manage recreational use of the Dufferin County Forest in accordance with the goal of *Our Forest, Our Future: Dufferin County Forest Management Plan 2016-2036*. The goal is: *To protect the quality and integrity of ecosystems in the Dufferin County Forest, including air, water, land and biota; and, where quality and integrity have been diminished, to encourage restoration or remediation to healthy conditions; while providing a variety of social and economic benefits to the public.* Where recreational use and environmental sustainability have the potential to come into conflict, environmental sustainability will take precedence.

Should recreational uses be permitted in the County Forest?

1. Consideration of Risk

While recreational use of the County Forest contributes to the County's liability exposure, it is among a significant list of other services and programs delivered by the County, such as the County Road network, each having an inherent risk factor.

2. Forest Management Plan – Social Sustainability

In the recently approved Forest Management Plan (page 48), the County has committed to the development of a recreation policy for the County Forest. There is also a significant body of evidence that time spent in the forest environment has many beneficial impacts on human health. However, this does not preclude the development of a policy that restricts all recreational uses.

Is it possible to accommodate all generally accepted outdoor recreational uses while maintaining environmental sustainability?

1. Current Recreational Uses

A spreadsheet showing recreational uses currently permitted is attached. (Attachment 1.) The forest area is divided into the same segments as were used in developing the land use classes that form part of the forest management plan. The list of activities is not exhaustive, but includes the most common ones currently taking place or wanting access. The spreadsheet is based on the fact that the “natural areas” identified in the previous management plan are roughly equivalent to those areas identified as “natural forest” in the current management plan. This spreadsheet should be considered as the “status quo” where recreational use is concerned.

2. Separation of Uses

In order to maximize the number of recreational uses that can be accommodated, uses can be separated both geographically and through time. For example, some activities are only permitted in certain trails/tracts and/or during certain days/seasons. However, these separations should not be made too complicated, as they become difficult to explain and be understood by users.

3. General Approach

To date, the general approach to recreational activities has been to determine timing/activity restrictions rather than attempting to provide an extensive list of activities that are allowed. With this approach, when new activities come along (e.g. geocaching, fat biking), they can be permitted unless there are compelling reasons to consider restricting them.

Public Consultation

There was extensive public consultation conducted in 2013 and 2014 on the forest management plan and recreation policy, during which the majority of comments focused on the recreational use. A summary of this process and the comments received is attached. (Attachment 2.)

In light of this recent public consultation, the Committee may wish to develop a draft recreation policy that can be brought forward at a public meeting, followed by an appropriate time frame for public comment. Taking into consideration the public input, a final recreation policy could then be developed for the consideration of the Community Services/Dufferin Oaks Committee and Dufferin County Council.

Other public consultation elements (open houses, surveys etc.) can be added to the process at appropriate stages.

An outline of the process decided on by the Committee, including public consultation and approximate timelines, will be forwarded to the Community Services/Dufferin Oaks Committee and Dufferin County Council for approval prior to proceeding.

Financial, Staffing, Legal and IT Considerations

None at this time.

Strategic Direction and County of Dufferin Principles

The consideration of a possible recreational use policy for the Dufferin County Forest by the Forest Operation Review Committee promotes communication and connections by encouraging direct public comment and input in a dedicated forum. Good governance is displayed in the improvement in policies, practices and procedures resulting from the development of a recreational use policy for the County Forest based on public consultation and the review and input of the Forest Operation Review Committee. The Dufferin County Principles are adhered to as follows:

1. We Manage Change - by proactively undertaking a review of the purpose of, and need for, a recreational use policy for the Dufferin County Forest;
2. We Deliver Quality Service – by working to ensure an appropriate balance and relationship among the ecological, economic and social benefits that the County Forest provides;
3. We Communicate – by ensuring that information about the County Forest properties, and review process, is readily available;
4. We Make Good Decisions – by working with public members of the Forest Operation Review Committee to make informed and thoughtful recommendations that are reflective of the needs of the County Forest and community.

RECOMMENDATION:

For consideration of committee.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Original signed by,

Darrell Keenie, General Manager
Dufferin County Museum & Archives and Dufferin County Forest

Attachments:

1. DCF - Recreational Uses Currently Permitted.
2. DCF – Summary of Public Consultation, 2013-2014.

1. ATTACHMENT 1 - Recreational Uses Currently Permitted in Dufferin County Forest

Tract & Compartments	Land Use Class	Area (ha)	Low Impact Activities			Non-Motorized Activities		
			Hiking/Running	Nature Appreciation	X-Country Skiing Snowshoeing	Fat (Winter) Mountain Biking	Mountain Biking	Horseback Riding
Amaranth (42a), Laurel Wetland Complex	natural	12	y	y	y	n	n	n
Amaranth (43b, 43c), Farmington Swamp	natural	10	y	y	y	y	y	y
Amaranth (43a)	managed	2	y	y	y	y	y	y
Gara-Gore (44a)	managed	15	y	y	y	y	y	y
Hockley (49), Orangeville Wetland Complex	natural	20	y	y	y	n	n	n
Leening (50)	natural	8	y	y	y	n	n	n
Levitt (51)	natural	4	y	y	y	n	n	n
Little (48)	natural	47	y	y	y	n	n	n
Main (7-10, 12-19, 21a, 22, 23a, 23b, 24b, 24c, 25b, 25c)	managed	316	y	y	y	y	y	y
Main (11, 20a, 21b, 23c, 24a, 25a, 26-30, 31a, 31d), Oak Ridges South Slope Forest	natural	266	y	y	y	y	y	y
Main (31b, 31c)	natural	24	y	y	y	y	y	y
Melancthon (32a, 32b, 32c, 33a, 33b, 33d)	managed	12	y	y	y	y	y	y
Melancthon (33a, 33c, 33d, 34a, 35a), Melancthon 1	natural	48	y	y	y	y	y	y
Mono (39-40, 46)	managed	68	y	y	y	y	y	y
Randwick (1-4c, 5-6)	managed	115	y	y	y	y	y	y
Randwick (4d), Walker's Creek Wetland	natural	2	y	y	y	y	y	y
River Road (45)	managed	3	y	y	y	y	y	y
Riverview (36, 37b, 37c, 37d, 37e, 38a, 38b)	managed	27	y	y	y	y	y	y
Riverview (37a, 38c, 38d), Melancthon 2	natural	13	y	y	y	y	y	y
Simmons (47)	managed	42	y	y	y	y	y	y

			Non-Motorized Activities			Winter Motorized Activities	Non-Winter Motorized Activities	
Tract & Compartments	Land Use Class	Area (ha)	Mushroom Picking	Dog Sledding	Hunting	Snowmobiling (locations currently used)	ATVing	Off-Road Motorcycling
Amaranth (42a), Laurel Wetland Complex	natural	12	y	n	n	n	n	n
Amaranth (43b, 43c), Farmington Swamp	natural	10	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Amaranth (43a)	managed	2	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Gara-Gore (44a)	managed	15	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Hockley (49), Orangeville Wetland Complex	natural	20	y	n	n	n	n	n
Leening (50)	natural	8	y	n	n	n	n	n
Levitt (51)	natural	4	y	n	n	n	n	n
Little (48)	natural	47	y	n	n	n	n	n
Main (7-10, 12-19, 21a, 22, 23a, 23b, 24b, 24c, 25b, 25c)	managed	316	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	y	n	n
Main (11, 20a, 21b, 23c, 24a, 25a, 26-30, 31a, 31d), Oak Ridges South Slope Forest	natural	266	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Main (31b, 31c)	natural	24	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Melancthon (32a, 32b, 32c, 33a, 33b, 33d)	managed	12	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Melancthon (33a, 33c, 33d, 34a, 35a), Melancthon 1	natural	48	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Mono (39-40, 46)	managed	68	y	y	n	y	n	n
Randwick (1-4c, 5-6)	managed	115	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	y	n	n
Randwick (4d), Walker's Creek Wetland	natural	2	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
River Road (45)	managed	3	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Riverview (36, 37b, 37c, 37d, 37e, 38a, 38b)	managed	27	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	y	n	n
Riverview (37a, 38c, 38d), Melancthon 2	natural	13	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	n	n	n
Simmons (47)	managed	42	y	y	y (except June 1-Sept 1)	y	n	n

ATTACHMENT 2 – DCF Public Consultation 2013-2014

Surveys

In order to maintain this emphasis throughout the planning process, the County of Dufferin:

1. Made the protection of the quality and integrity of the natural environment the primary goal of the plan;
2. Surveyed the public, both groups and individuals, through surveys and open houses;
3. Established a Forest Plan Advisory Team (FPAT), representing the main user groups and the general public, to advise the County during the initial planning process and;
4. Established a Forest Operation Review Committee (FORC) to conduct a high level review of the County Forest operation prior to continuing the development of the forest management plan and recreation policy.

A user survey was conducted online from April, 2013 to March, 2014. This was supplemented by onsite surveys at some of the tracts during the summer of 2013. In total, there were 786 responses to the survey.

In order to capture attitudes about the County Forest from non-users, a notice asking people to complete an online survey (or phone in for a paper copy) was distributed to 2,800 randomly chosen property owners distributed over all eight municipalities in numbers relative to total population. There were 105 responses to the survey.

Forest Plan Advisory Team

In the fall of 2013, the Forest Plan Advisory Team was formed. The purpose of the Advisory Team was to ensure that the interests of stakeholders in the Dufferin County Forest were represented and effectively communicated to the County of Dufferin through:

1. Reviewing and commenting on the goals, objectives, principles, strategies, options and targets of the draft management plan and;
2. Assisting in various aspects of the public consultation process.

The team consisted of representatives from the following groups:

1. Alliston and District Snowmobile Club, Dufferin Drift Busters Snowmobile Club, Orangeville Snowmobile Club (snowmobilers);
2. Dufferin Northern Peel Anglers' and Hunters' Association (anglers and hunters);
3. Huronia Loggers Association (loggers);
4. International Mountain Bicycling Association Canada (mountain bikers);
5. Mansfield Outdoor Centre (neighbour, lessee);
6. Ontario Competitive Trail Riding Association, Ontario Trail Riders Association (horseback riders);
7. Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicle Clubs (ATV riders);
8. Ontario Federation of Trail Riders (off-road motorcyclists);
9. Upper Credit Field Naturalists (naturalists);
10. Dufferin County Museum & Archives & Heritage Lands Board; and
11. general public (two members)

The Forest Plan Advisory Team held a number of meetings to discuss various elements of the management plan and the recreation policy, all of which were open to the public.

Open Houses and Public Meetings

Two open houses were held in the spring of 2014, in Orangeville (May 9) and at the Dufferin County Museum & Archives (May 10), to give the public the opportunity to view the draft forest management plan, draft recreation policy, and proposal for access from the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders (off-road motorcyclists), comment on these documents, and speak with staff regarding the documents and the ongoing process.

An open public meeting was held on June 17 in Shelburne in response to demands that there were not enough opportunities for public consultation/comment built into the process.

Review Period

The open houses were followed by an almost 90-day review period which ended on July 31, 2014. This time was for the public to review the documents in detail and provide comments to County staff.

Committee and Council Meetings

Throughout this time, members of the public also attended meetings of the Dufferin County Museum & Archives and Heritage Lands Board and County Council with comments and deputations on the draft forest management plan, draft recreation policy, and proposal for access from the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders (off-road motorcyclists).

Consultation Results

User Survey

The questions that were asked on the survey were:

1. Types of activities conducted. Mountain Biking was number one.
2. Secondary activities. Hiking/Walking was number one.
3. Number of visits, days of week of visits.

Household Survey

The questions that were asked on the survey were:

1. Types of activities. Hiking/Walking was number one.
2. Day of the week visited, number of visits in total.
3. Suggestions for change.

Written Comments:

During the public review period (May 1-July 31) 406 written submissions were received; 361 of which were identifiably unique.

Two main issues came out of the public review:

1. Access to the County Forest by off-road motorcycles and, more generally, off-road vehicles of any type (227 submissions in favour of off-road motorcycle access, 179 against)
2. Whether trails in the Forest (in particular the Main Tract) should be multi-use or designated exclusively for individual uses (12 submissions in favour of exclusive use, 3 against)