

OUR FOREST



forestsontario.ca

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FALL-WINTER 2023-24



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A Message from our CEO

Collaboration and partnership are the keys to long-term sustainability and success

I always cherish this time of year. The beautiful colours of fall and first snowfall of winter only make our natural surroundings even more inviting along with the growing anticipation of soon celebrating the holidays with family and friends. It is also the perfect time to reflect on what an extraordinary year it has been for our Forests Ontario family.

With roots going back to 1949, Forests Ontario has built strong relationships with a trusted network of experienced partners who understand the transformative power of healthy forests. We are proud of the connections we have formed with youth and educators, seed collectors and nurseries, as well as planting partners and property owners who have all helped support the long-term health and resiliency of our forests and the people and communities they benefit.

Over the past 20 years, Forests Ontario has been responsible for creating close to 51,000 acres of new and restored forests across more than 8,000 project sites. While we are proud of our accomplishments, including planting 2.5 million trees this year alone, we know full well the work we do wouldn't be possible without the generous support of individual donors, corporate partners, our members, and all levels of government.

On October 30 in Ottawa, the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources announced an investment of over \$61 million that will see 31 million trees planted across Canada by 2031

through Forests Ontario's national division, Forest Recovery Canada. The Government of Canada's financial contribution comes from the 2 Billion Trees program and covers 50 per cent of project costs.

With this new investment covering a portion of the costs needed to properly plant those 31 million trees, we know there is still plenty of work to be done, and that we can't do it alone. Our comprehensive infrastructure of trusted nurseries and seed collectors, expert planting professionals, Indigenous community partners, local groups, and conservation authorities have been with us for the long haul and are ready to join us on this next journey that will see millions of trees planted over the coming years.

The last piece of the puzzle is you, our members, potential donors and corporate partners, who are committed to improving climate resilience and biodiversity in our urban and rural natural environments.

Our children and generations to come deserve a world and a future that is equitable and healthy and vibrant. At Forests Ontario, we believe that collaboration and partnership are the means to that end.

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday season from our Forests Ontario family to yours,



Jess Kaknevicius

CEO, Forests Ontario and Forest Recovery Canada



Pictured (left to right): The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources; Member of Parliament Adam van Koeverden, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity; and Jess Kaknevicius, Chief Executive Officer, Forests Ontario, at the 2 Billion Trees program announcement on October 30, 2023, in Ottawa. Photo courtesy of Natural Resources Canada.

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OUR FOREST

Vol. 63, No. 4, Fall-Winter 2023-24

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On the cover: Beausoleil First Nation community member Julianna Monague planting a Yellow Birch tree on the grounds of a fast-housing site located on Christian Island during a Reconciliation Community Tree Plant and gathering on October 4, 2023.

Across the land we now call Canada, we live and work on the traditional, treaty and unceded territories that are part of Turtle Island, which is still home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Forests Ontario's office is located in the City of Barrie, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg people, which include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. We also acknowledge the Wendat Nation (Huron), who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century.

BECOME A MEMBER

Become a member of Forests Ontario for \$50 a year, and receive **Our Forest** in your mailbox. To join, go to forestsontario.ca.

STAY IN TOUCH

We do more than just plant trees, we grow forests for greener and healthier communities. Follow Forests Ontario on social media for the latest news and daily updates on all our programs.



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Forests Ontario



Forests Ontario

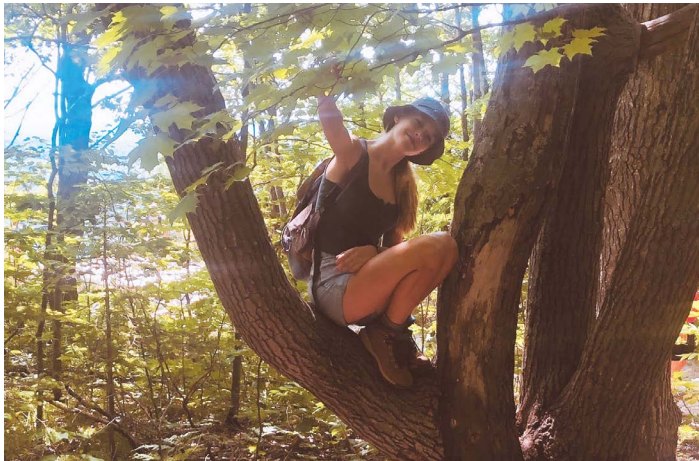
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Forging a Path to an Environmental Career

2023 James S. Miller Scholarship Winner Announced

BY ALLISON HANDS



Anna Noseworthy-Turgeon, 2023 James S. Miller Scholarship winner, hiking the Cup and Saucer Trail (near M'Chigeeng) on Manitoulin Island. Photo courtesy of Mya Kay.

The James S. Miller Scholarship is awarded annually to a graduating high school student from Northern Ontario who will enter the first year of a post-secondary environmental program – a pursuit which the scholarship's namesake saw as critical to current and future generations. This year's winner is Anna Noseworthy-Turgeon of Elliot Lake, a small town between Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie.

Anna is currently studying towards a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Sciences at the University of Guelph, with plans to work as an ecologist or in environmental policy, or possibly even environmental law.

Dividing her free time between the library and exploring the forests and lakes in her community, Anna developed a deep appreciation for nature and learning. The environment became part of her career considerations more recently when her Grade 11 biology teacher encouraged her to explore the sector. Participating in her school's Environment SHSM (Specialist High Skills Major) program, as well as a co-op term at a summer camp, added further motivation. To narrow the scope, Anna undertook extensive research watching career videos, exploring classes offered through post-secondary programs and reviewing online job boards.

The selection criteria for the James S. Miller Scholarship considers a demonstrated desire and commitment to natural resource stewardship in addition to academic achievement. You can learn more about the James S. Miller Scholarship at forestsontario.ca.

Forests Ontario Announces new Partnership with Resorts of Ontario

Highlights the importance of healthy, resilient forests and their role within the tourism industry

BY MATTHEW BROWN

On October 2, Forests Ontario announced a new partnership with Resorts of Ontario aimed at advancing environmental sustainability and forest conservation within Resorts of Ontario's member resorts and tourism communities across the province.

"Resorts of Ontario is thrilled to partner with Forests Ontario to promote responsible and sustainable practices within our industry, and restoration in general within the province," Kerri King, Executive Director of Resorts of Ontario, says. "So much forest land was impacted in the summer wildfire season. Our association members recognize their roles as stewards of the land, and this collaboration is an important step in making meaningful change and setting a new standard for environmentally conscious tourism in Ontario."

Over the coming months, the two organizations will develop opportunities to amplify their impact on forest conservation and sustainable tourism through

joint awareness campaigns, events, and tree planting and restoration projects for resort visitors and local residents alike.

To mark the beginning of this collaboration, Resorts of Ontario joined forces with Forests Ontario to distribute seedlings at the Resorts of Ontario 30th annual golf tournament at Monterra Golf at Blue Mountain.



Left to right: Jo-anne Snyder, Board President for Resorts of Ontario; Jess Kaknevicius, CEO of Forests Ontario; and Kerri King, Executive Director of Resorts of Ontario, at their 30th annual golf tournament at Monterra Golf at Blue Mountain. Photo courtesy of Resorts of Ontario.

New Site Development Course a Success

Two-day event brings planting partners together

BY JOANA CARREIRA

This past September, Forests Ontario hosted over 20 of our planting and nursery partners for a two-day, in-person *50 Million Tree Program Site Development Course* at Jokers Hill in Newmarket, Ontario.

The course covered the importance of site-plan preparation and explored potential obstacles and solutions for 50 Million Tree Program projects. Special guest Peter Neave, Seed Biologist at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, discussed seed and soils before everyone ventured into the field for some hands-on activities with Forests Ontario's Restoration Programs Manager Nick Courtney and Restoration Programs Coordinator Amber Brant. The course ended with all participants coming together and planting an oak tree at the top of Jokers Hill.

Forests Ontario would like to thank all our partners and guests who joined us for this annual event, and looks forward to hosting the course again in 2024.



Photos by Forests Ontario.

National Forest Week

Out and about at TimberFever and the Escarpment Corridor Alliance Summit

BY TERI HOANG

The Forests Ontario team was out and about during this year's National Forest Week (September 17-23), including a visit to TimberFever, annual wood-building competition held at the Toronto Metropolitan University. The event drew around 200 students from across Ontario who squared off to build structures out of wood.

"When builders choose sustainably sourced wood as a construction material, they are making a better choice for the environment," CEO of Forests Ontario, Jess Kaknevicus, told architecture and engineering students at the TimberFever competition. "Wood has a unique capability to store carbon, which helps to minimize the effects of climate change."

To learn more about the event and this year's winners, please visit timberfever.com.



Left to right: Bruce Harbinson, President, Escarpment Corridor Alliance; Jack Contin; Edward Burtynsky; Jess Kaknevicus and Mike Robbins. Photo by Forests Ontario.

Also in September, Forests Ontario took part in the Escarpment Corridor Alliance Summit, an event centred around the preservation of natural landscapes in the southern Georgian Bay region.

Held at The Historic Gayety Theatre in Collingwood, the event blended art and environmental action. Panelists included Edward Burtynsky, the celebrated environmental photographer, documentary filmmaker and advocate for conservation; Mike Robbins, a responsible tourism expert; Jack Contin, Midland's Deputy Mayor, and Forests Ontario's CEO, Jess Kaknevicus.

The discussion highlighted key issues impacting the escarpment, including the importance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, and creating a sustainable conservation economy that will benefit residents and visitors alike. Forests Ontario provided insight into sustainable management as a way to maintain forest cover on the landscape and the important role education has on community engagement.

It is with great sadness that Forests Ontario learned about the passing of Jack Contin on November 9, 2023. We were privileged to witness firsthand his dedication to community and his commitment to our natural environment. Our sincere condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues.



Forests Ontario CEO, Jess Kaknevicus, presents to a group of students at TimberFever 2023. Photo by Forests Ontario.

Reconciliation Community Tree Plant on Christian Island

Forests Ontario teams up with Beausoleil First Nation

This past October, Forests Ontario partnered with Beausoleil First Nation, Lands & Forests Consulting, and community members to plant 150 trees and shrubs across two sites on Christian Island in southern Georgian Bay.

From youth to elders, participants of all ages came together in support of the community's commitment to environmental values and stewardship. The intergenerational collaboration on-site made the planting event even more

special and highlighted the collective efforts of the community to enhance their natural environment to the benefit of residents and visitors alike for generations to come.

A special thanks to everyone who participated in the event, and to TD Bank Group for its generous support of Forests Ontario's Reconciliation Community Tree Plant program.



Above: Aerial photo of Christian Island, October 2023. All photos by Forests Ontario.

Participants planting trees and shrubs on Christian Island.





A Holiday Message from Forests Ontario

As we near the holiday season, we would like to take a moment to thank our dedicated members, donors and corporate supporters, together with our incredible planting delivery agents, seed collectors and nursery partners, for your continued collaboration and valued support.

Thank you for contributing to another successful tree planting season, and for helping to ensure our new and restored forests grow into healthy and resilient natural landscapes that create much needed wildlife habitat and improve biodiversity in our communities.

Thank you for showing your environmental leadership by supporting our educational programs, encouraging the next generation to learn from and care for our forests.

And **thank you** for contributing to our community-led programs that help foster a connection to our forests and an appreciation for all the benefits our natural world provides. We have accomplished so much this year, but we also know there is still so much more to do.

During this holiday season, we would be incredibly grateful if you considered making a donation to Forests Ontario, either for yourself or as a gift. **Your gift today will make a world of difference tomorrow and for years to come.**

We wish you all the very best for the holiday season, and a healthy and happy new year!

With thanks from the Forests Ontario team to yours.

Planting a Lasting Legacy

Green Leaders make a difference through the 50 Million Tree Program

BY ANDI DARELL ALHAKIM

A love of being in nature propelled John and Betty Ann Asher to reforest their property in Loretto, Ontario. “There’s a certain freshness, sweetness, and calmness when you breathe the air out here,” John says of his forest 50 kilometres northwest of Richmond Hill. “It’s a different, indescribable feeling that you can’t get anywhere in the city.”

John’s admiration for the forest sparked a desire and commitment to improve his natural surroundings, actions he knows will be enjoyed by generations to come. “I’m now sitting by my front window and looking at my Tamaracks, which are 25-30 feet high. It was just a few years ago that you’d be bigger than them as you walk past. Now, they’re proper bush size,” John says.

He also describes his favourite spot at the farmhouse. “It’s raining now, and out on the back steps, you can just smell that sweetness and see all the greenery. You can’t help but be immersed in it.”

It certainly takes a lot of love and dedication to have 45,000 trees planted on your property. John and Betty Ann, two of Forests Ontario’s newest Green Leaders, had always envisioned a larger environmental role for their property. That dream came true thanks to four years of participation in the 50 Million Tree Program.





Above: Betty Ann Asher's ancestors, the Kelly family, pose at the farmhouse on the farm in Loretto in 1905. Betty Ann now owns the farm with her husband, John Asher. The farm has been in the family for six generations.

Opposite page: John and Betty Ann Asher's granddaughter Ashley poses with Mousse, the Ashers' dog, in front of White Spruce trees planted in 2011 with help from Forests Ontario. The Ashers planted 45,000 trees from 2011-2014 through the 50 Million Tree Program. Photos courtesy of John Asher.

The Asher property was part of an original homestead granted by the province of Upper Canada to Betty Ann's family, the Kellys, immigrants from Ireland. At the time, the British Crown took control of significant Indigenous territory and was granting this land to settlers for cultivation. The Kellys received 100 acres in 1826, and over the subsequent decades increased it to 350 acres.

As happened in much of Southern Ontario, the settlers of two centuries ago set out to cut down most of the existing trees to clear the land for farming. "In fact, the original homesteader, Hugh Kelly, was killed in 1829 as he was cutting down a tree to build the local church," John shares.

Betty Ann had been living on the farm before her 1968 wedding to John, a secondary school educator. After the pair wed, the couple built a second farmhouse together. They shared a deep desire to someday reforest the property back to its natural state.

The land had been farmed and taken care of by Betty Ann's father, Francis Kelly, until the late 1980s when he retired at 87. Ownership passed on to her and her city-

dwelling siblings and the property was eventually put up for sale in the early 2000s when John and Betty Ann jumped at the opportunity to purchase the farm from them. "We used it occasionally for recreation with the grandkids. It was mostly rented out to farmers and in production, so you couldn't go on it to truly enjoy it," John recalls.

Having briefly moved away during this period, the Ashers eventually returned as their daughter Elizabeth wanted to live on the property with her own children, Oscar and Ashley, and her husband Justin. "Now we see them most every day," John says. The property has always been a family affair. "My grandkids are the seventh generation living here," he adds.

The Ashers decided to reforest in 2010 after seeing much global coverage on deforestation and environmental pollution. "Why should I only consume oxygen if I can help produce it? It's the same with carbon," John reflects. He and Betty Ann contacted the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority and were connected with Rick Grillmayer, their Manager of Forestry, who directed them to Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program.

"Rick's the expert. I told him that I wanted to reforest the property back to how it looked before all the farming. We worked together on a site plan and found which tree species would work well in the area," John says. "He even made sure that our tenant planted certain crops during that final year of farming to ensure healthy, fertile soil for our tree planting the following year."

The property now boasts an impressive tree lineup. "Sprinkled throughout our conifers are hardwoods," John says. "We have Red Oaks, Pin Oaks, Black Cherry, Hackberry, and a lot of Black Walnut. We also have Tamaracks, which look wonderful in November as their bright yellow go against the green backdrop of spruce and pine."

Since planting started in 2011, the Ashers have seen diverse wildlife come to their property, including wild turkeys, geese, deer, squirrels, ducks, rabbits, coyotes, foxes, robins, cardinals, and blue jays. "My walnuts are getting big enough that the squirrels always take them, while the deer tend to nibble at the Hackberry and oaks," John says.

"With all its benefits, the Ashers credit Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program for making reforestation feasible in the first place."

With all its benefits, the Ashers credit Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program for making reforestation feasible in the first place. "It's a great incentive for landowners to do good," John says. "The return you get from it increases every year as your new forest grows. You also get a tax rate that reflects this," John adds, referencing the province's Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program.

John has some advice for interested landowners. “First, talk to your local conservation authority. Don’t have certain expectations yet. They’ll come do a site survey and share what the possibilities are for your property,” he says. In his experience, letting the thought simmer for a year or so has its benefits.

“As you get older, you start thinking about legacy. Most would want to create something positive for their family but also the broader community and the environment. It’s just our natural inclination.”

Reforestation is how he and Betty Ann do their part. “The serenity you feel when wandering through a bush is unparalleled,” John says. “As you get older, you start thinking about legacy. Most would want to create something positive for their family but also the broader community and the environment. It’s just our natural inclination.”

John Asher with his dog Mousse on his property in Loretto, along with White Pine and White Spruce trees planted under Forests Ontario’s 50 Million Tree Program.

As John walks along his dense forest, he thinks back on Hugh Kelly’s story and suggests that his wife’s family, the Kellys, have been “Green Leaders” for 200 years. “They had respect for the land and what it could produce,” he says. While trees had been cut down on the property to grow their crops and feed their livestock, the Kellys also owned bush property used as a cool refuge for cattle in the hot summer. Wood from their trees was used to build the farmhouse, at least four barns, outbuildings, and all of the split rail fences on the farm.

Each generation considered themselves stewards as they maintained the bush for future generations. “And so, I guess Betty Ann and I are now stewards since 2000 for the 6th and 7th generations.”

Meanwhile, 70 kilometres south of Woodstock, another two of Forests Ontario’s newest Green Leaders, Mike and Mary Deelen, have their own story to tell about reforestation of their property in Southwestern Ontario.

The Deelens purchased the 96-acre property in 2019. Twenty-two acres are farmable with cash crops on it most months. On a separate four acres, Mike and Mary decided early on that reforestation was the answer. But on their fertile soil, the trees they have planted faced fierce competition from weeds.

“Weeds are common in the area. I’ve been treating my property for weeds for up to two years prior,” Mike says. “When we started planting this spring, the soil looked perfect. But then, the weeds came with a vengeance.”

For the Deelens, caring for their new forest is a team effort. “Between us, I’d have to say it’s a tie. I’m out there most days of the week, while Mary is doing a bulk of the land maintenance as well,” Mike says.





Mike (left) and Mary (right) Deelen putting tree guards around the seedlings planted on their property in Southwestern Ontario. Photos courtesy of Mike and Mary Deelen.

For parts of their property, growing a new forest is the most sensible option. “There’s a section here that’s all hills. Though it used to have corn on it, naturally, it’s quite challenging to rent it out for production or to even go out there and cut it every now and then,” Mike says. “The previous owners belonged to the Amish community and had farmed cattle there, so it kept the soil nice and fertile. It was in a good condition to plant trees.”

Nowadays, the property boasts Red Oak, White Oak, Bur Oak, White Birch, Trembling Aspen, Hackberry, Tamarack, pine, and White Cedar. This is thanks to Forests Ontario’s 50 Million Tree Program, which helped plant 3,200 trees in spring 2023.

“When it comes to choosing the tree species, we always went back to what would benefit the wildlife here,” Mike says. “Out here, I see a lot of turkeys and deer who love the acorns from the oak, for example.”

Paul Gagnon from the Long Point Region Conservation Authority, a Forests Ontario planting partner, had been involved from the start. “I had full trust in Paul to advise me which tree species would best survive on the terrain,” Mike says. “I had heard about the 50 Million Tree Program on television and through an excavator working on some washouts on my property. I was introduced to Paul, and after a site visit, we chatted about what’s possible.”

Planting took three days and five planters. The Deelens were pleased with the early growth they had seen, thanks to heavy rain in the first few weeks. “Being the outdoors person that I am, I’d be quite disappointed if my trees didn’t survive,” Mike says. His hard work has certainly started to pay off. “You can especially see it now with

the evergreens like pine – that little bit of growth is visible now,” Mike says.

To landowners considering Forests Ontario’s 50 Million Tree Program, Mike encourages them to dive in. “There’s no guesswork. They work with you at every step, making it an excellent program,” Mike says. “The subsidies alleviated the financial burden from landowners – that’s when I became certain of the program.”

For him and Mary, the return of diverse wildlife is what makes planting trees worth it. “I just get out there and have conversations. Most people are surprised at the amount of support I’m getting with my property. I’m also learning about what other exciting programs are out there,” Mike adds. “Bobolinks, or the R2-D2 birds as I call them, are now here. As are red-tailed hawks because of the meadows. I’m stoked to see what other wildlife will come once the forest really grows.”

For landowners like the Ashers and the Deelens, Forests Ontario’s 50 Million Tree Program has been instrumental in helping them realize their dreams of growing new forests on their properties and experiencing the benefits that come with it. The financial and technical support the program provides helps landowners do a world of good for their communities and the environment.

“John, Betty Ann, Mike, and Mary exemplify what Green Leaders are,” says Jess Kaknevicus, Forests Ontario CEO. “They’re dedicated landowners eager to make a difference, care for their new trees as they grow into healthy diverse forests and inspire others in the process.”

To learn more about the 50 Million Tree Program, visit forestsontario.ca/50MTP.

2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE DATE: February 28, 2024

LOCATION: Universal EventSpace, Vaughan, Ontario

NEW EVENING SOCIAL: February 27, 2024 from 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Come for an evening of networking and laughter with comedian Graham Chittenden! Drinks and food included.

Canada's forests are facing unprecedented challenges – including climate change, increased fires, and invasive species – so it's more important than ever that we connect, network and share.

Join us at Ontario's largest forestry conference for expert speakers, engaging discussions, and valuable networking opportunities that will empower and inspire real change in our communities. Together, we can ensure a future with healthy forests that sustain biodiversity, healthy people and a healthy economy.

BUY YOUR TICKETS TODAY!

Visit forestsontario.ca/conference to learn more!



Celebrating 30 Years of Environmental Education

High school students to examine habitat loss and climate change in 2024 Ontario Envirothon

BY MADELEINE BRAY AND ALLISON HANDS

The Ontario Envirothon program will celebrate a milestone in 2024 - an impressive 30 years of environmental education. Participating high school students from across the province will become experts on the current issue, *Biodiversity in a Changing Climate*, as they study, attend skill development workshops, and take part in competitions.

Biodiversity is the diversity of life within an area or within populations of plants and animals. By focusing specifically on how a changing climate affects a range of systems, ecosystems and species, students will put a magnifying glass to this complex topic as they learn about existing issues and challenges and look ahead to potential solutions.

Biodiversity loss and climate change are frequently referred to as twin crises threatening the survival of up to a million species (including humans). From managing large-scale tree planting programs, to working with landowners on stewardship, to leading education initiatives such as the Ontario Envirothon, Forests Ontario is working to improve ecosystem restoration in our communities and bring about positive change that can benefit everyone.

To learn more about the 2024 Ontario Envirothon, please visit forestsontario.ca.



Clockwise from top left: Iris in bloom, Turkey tail fungus, Snapping turtle, Bald eagle, Students walk through a forest. All photos by Allison Hands, Forests Ontario.



Why Seed Sources Matter in a Changing Climate

Growing healthy, resilient forests with the City of Toronto

BY SANDRA IACOBELLI

This fall marks the second year of Forests Ontario's 10-year partnership with the City of Toronto's Tree Seed Diversity Program, and progress is well underway.

Earlier this year, Forests Ontario supplied its second shipment of source-identified and appropriate hardwoods, conifers and shrubs that were planted by the City of Toronto to enhance the genetic diversity and resiliency of the city's forests, parks, ravines, river valleys, meadows and wetlands. Another allotment of stock was planted this fall by the City of Toronto's field crews and volunteers in restoration programs.

While the focus of this important collaboration is to secure and provide a reliable and consistent supply of source-identified, adaptive native plant material for the city's Urban Forestry division, the program also includes native seed forecasting, seed collection, tracking, monitoring, and coordination to grow the stock. In fact, Forests Ontario has so far banked close to two million viable seeds for Toronto's Tree Seed Diversity Program, sourcing them from a variety of appropriate areas (ecodistricts) that will benefit the landscape of Canada's biggest city for years to come.

Right: One-year starter plug that will be upgraded into a two gallon pot. Photo by Forests Ontario.

Below: Early season establishment at the NVK Nursery following upgrading. Photo by Forests Ontario



Above: City of Toronto community volunteer restoration planting at Hullmar Park using stock grown through the Tree Seed Diversity Program, fall 2023. Photo courtesy of City of Toronto.

Right: City of Toronto community volunteer restoration planting at Hague Park using trees and shrubs grown through the Tree Seed Diversity Program, fall 2023. Photo courtesy of City of Toronto.



“There is security in knowing where the supply of trees and shrubs are coming from, and feeling confident in their quality...”

“There is security in knowing where the supply of trees and shrubs are coming from, and feeling confident in their quality,” says Kim Statham, Director of Urban Forestry with the City of Toronto. “Source-identified plant material is key to ensuring the thousands of units we are planting each year have a greater chance of survival and are more resilient to the multiple stressors of severe weather and wildfires, invasive species and climate change. We hope this project will inspire other municipalities to request source-identified materials from their suppliers.”



Top: Forests Ontario's Seed & Stock Specialist Mark McDermid (left), on a site visit at Centennial Park with City of Toronto Natural Resources Management staff, October 2023. Photo by Forests Ontario.

Underneath: Left to right: Kristen Vincent and Nousheen Ahmed with the City of Toronto, Mark McDermid with Forests Ontario, City of Toronto's Kaylyn Crawford, and Forests Ontario's Andi Darell Alhakim in Centennial Park, October 2023. Photo by Forests Ontario.



Left: City of Toronto Natural Resource Management staff planting source-identified stock in Centennial Park in Etobicoke, spring 2023. Photo courtesy of City of Toronto.

Below: City of Toronto Natural Resource Management staff organizing plant material grown for the Tree Seed Diversity Program to be planted in City parks and ravines. Photo courtesy of City of Toronto.



Above: City of Toronto Natural Resource Management staff unload program grown stock at the City's Unwin Nursery where the plant material will live temporarily until they are planted in City parks and ravines. Photo courtesy of City of Toronto.



While some species of trees and shrubs may be more difficult to acquire due to the natural cycle of seed crops, seed quality, environmental factors or wildlife pressures, Forests Ontario works with our network of seed collectors and nursery partners to ensure alternatives are considered and readily available to meet the same objectives, site characteristics, and growing schedules.

"Our long-term collaboration with the City of Toronto is a great example of the multi-faceted approach and expertise needed to ensure the new trees and shrubs planted in our urban centres have the greatest chance for survival," says Jess Kaknevičius, CEO of Forests Ontario. "Our ultimate goal is to grow healthy and resilient urban forests for residents and visitors to enjoy and benefit from for years to come, and that all starts with a seed."

In late October 2023, the City of Toronto was named a restoration champion by the United Nations Environment Program and #GenerationRestoration leader in ecological restoration and urban forest management. As an official Restoration Implementer of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, Forests Ontario is proud to partner with the City of Toronto to advance its Tree Seed Diversity Program and congratulates Toronto on this important acknowledgement as we work together to help restore nature's rightful place in urban areas.

To find out more about Forests Ontario and the Seed Diversity Program, please visit forestsontario.ca.

Stronger Together

The Story of the Eastern Ontario First Nations Working Group

BY AMBER BRANT

There is a small town in Ontario between Cornwall and Ottawa called Monkland where Henry Lickers often stops whenever he heads north towards the Ottawa River. Henry is a Haudenosaunee citizen of the Seneca Nation, Turtle Clan, and Director of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Commissioner on the International Joint Commission.

“Maybe I should go and see my Anishinaabe friends because I’m getting deep into their territory.” Lickers says. “Then when they come south, they would say: ‘We’re getting towards the St. Lawrence, maybe we should go down and see Akwesasne.’” Modern geographers and land managers tend to want to establish a border that is a millimetre thick separating the two land management units, but this approach doesn’t reflect traditional Indigenous values for the relationship with Mother Nature.

Shifting the focus away from land claims and territory rights, and towards personal responsibility and duty to the land, is the backbone of the Eastern Ontario First Nations Working Group formed two decades ago by Lickers with Larry McDermott (Shabot Obaadjiwan, Algonquin First Nation and Executive Director of Plenty Canada) and Chris Craig (Pikwakanagan, Algonquin First Nation and Senior Forestry Technician at South Nation Conservation Authority). The three land stewardship professionals sought to share a meal and talk about how they can collaborate. Over time, a deeper relationship was formed, and more traditional teachings became the foundation of the Working Group.

The work of the group, open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, is guided by two wampum belts: 1) The Three Figure, referring to the agreement between the first Europeans and the Algonquin people to work and live in harmony with each other; and 2) The Dish with One Spoon, under which those using the land share resources in a spirit of mutual co-operation. The group also gains guidance from the Great Law, the constitution of the Iroquois Nations.

Twenty years ago, those forming the Working Group saw a need to strengthen ethics in land stewardship, especially in response to natural resource management decisions that lacked a commitment to identify and share Indigenous values and knowledge and excluded Indigenous communities. In recent years, there has been a greater effort by settlers to learn about the intergenerational trauma caused by colonialism and the residential school system. Through Truth & Reconciliation, there has been some improvement in the efforts by modern land managers to consult with Indigenous Peoples. “What motivated me was the absence of active engagement at the local level of Indigenous Peoples and other organizations responsible for caring for the land,” McDermott says.

The Working Group members noted that First Peoples and settlers are all victims of an education system that has been extremely weak about teaching their shared history. Promises have been made throughout Canadian history about how to care for the land, including in the Canadian Constitution Act which talks about the Proclamation of 1763, then the Treaty of 1764. At that time, treaties and methodologies served as a framework for how we would share this land, including a commitment to the Natural Law. In practice, colonialism has served “to jeopardize a future, Mother Earth’s capacity to renew life, and put all of our children’s future in jeopardy,” McDermott adds.



Meeting of the Eastern Ontario First Nations Working Group, summer 2023. Photos by Amber Brant, Forests Ontario.



Left to right: Founders of the Eastern Ontario First Nations Working Group including Chris Craig, Pikwakanagan, Algonquin First Nation and Senior Forestry Technician at South Nation Conservation Authority; Henry Lickers, Haudenosaunee citizen of the Seneca Nation, Turtle Clan, Director of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Commissioner on the International Joint Commission; and Larry McDermott, Shabot Obaadjiwan, Algonquin First Nation and Executive Director of Plenty Canada.



Larry McDermott, Executive Director of Plenty Canada, speaks at a Reconciliation Community Tree Plant event at The Healing Place located in Shanly, Ontario on the traditional territories of the Algonquin and Mohawk Nations, September 2020. Photo by Forests Ontario.



Community members plant trees and shrubs at The Healing Place. Photo by Forests Ontario.

McDermott compares western science and land management to, “playing with half a deck.” By contrast, the Indigenous practice of Two-Eyed Seeing joins Indigenous knowledge systems and western science.

Over the years, the Working Group and its founding members have brought Two-Eyed Seeing into formal practice. This includes influencing the Eastern Ontario Model Forest and forest certification practices (particularly the Forest Stewardship Council’s *Principle 3: To identify and uphold Indigenous Peoples Rights*). Indigenous content has also been integrated into the required skills and competencies needed to graduate from an accredited Canadian post-secondary forestry program with the Canadian Forestry Accreditation Board.

Craig seeks to restore South Nation’s forests to a higher quality for future generations. In the past, forest management may have included taking the best timber out of the forest, with only the low-quality regeneration left on-site. Today, traditional Indigenous worldviews have helped influence modern forest management to take a more holistic approach, incorporating long-term ecosystem health and plans for decades into the future.

The Working Group has also improved Black Ash management in Eastern Ontario. Akwesasne looked for ways to find Black Ash (“ehsa” in Ahkwesáhsne) and Craig wanted to help. They realized that the ash was mis-identified in the historical inventory for forests surrounding the area. Working together, the group not only became experts in identifying and inventorying Black Ash using Akwesasne traditional knowledge, but they were also able to support Akwesasne’s basket-making practices. “Certain habitats weren’t good for basket making,” Craig explains.

“We looked at them instead for seed production for future times. Sometimes there may be half a dozen trees that we want to identify and harvest for the Mohawks, for basket making.” This integration of Indigenous values into forest management is similar to birch management for canoe-building by the Algonquins wherein forest inventory, policy, and management works with traditional knowledge and values of the trees shared by local knowledge keepers.

South Nation Conservation Authority has provided administrative support, technology and a physical meeting place for the Working Group. This group succeeds because its members speak from their personal experience, knowledge and values, and don’t lead first with their organizational hats. Among the group’s accomplishments is the inaugural location for The Healing Place (Tsi Tehshakotitsénhtha | Endajimino-pimaadizi | Lieu de guérison), built in partnership with Ontario Power Generation and Forests Ontario, among other supporters. Located in Eastern Ontario, it serves as a gathering place of reconciliation and relationship-building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.

Thomas King, Cherokee Nation, once wrote “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are.” Storytelling connects people and communities through shared experiences and knowledge. This Working Group is very special and serves as an example of what other communities in Turtle Island can do to come together for the greater good of the inhabitants of the land that surround them.

Amber Brant, Restoration Program Coordinator with Forests Ontario, is a Haudenosaunee citizen of the Tyendinaga Kanyen’kehá:ka community, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, and is committed to learning more about the culture of the ancestors that preceded her.

Member Spotlight

Forests Ontario Member in Quebec has a long history of planting trees

BY PETER KUITENBROUWER & BROOKE MCCLELLAND



“...People who make it their business to care for our forests need and deserve our support.”

Marianne Dekking in her yard alongside the Rivière de la Petite Nation in St. André Avellin, Québec. She wears a feather necklace and a shawl given to her at a Métis potlatch in Ottawa. Photo by Sue Mills.

Marianne Dekking, a self-described “city slicker” before moving from Holland to Canada, became passionate about the natural world over time after moving out to the country in Western Quebec near Gatineau in 1971.

She had never thought about forests before but joining the back-to-the-land movement led her and her husband to live a simpler life, using their natural surroundings to grow their own food, produce maple syrup from their sugar bush, and use wood from their own trees to heat their home.

After purchasing multiple abandoned farms in the 1970s, Marianne recalls that previous owners had cut down the trees on the properties to try and farm the land. Over the years, the Dekkings planted more than 100,000 little trees. At the time, the Quebec government provided the seedlings at no charge and the couple planted some trees themselves with a planting machine loaned by the province. In other cases, government programs also covered planting costs. “It now is a big forest again,” Marianne says.

When talking about why taking care of our natural surroundings is important, Marianne indicated that alongside the health benefits, planting a tree and watching it grow is very satisfying. “We all have to do our best to help repair the damage that we have done to the planet,” Marianne says.

Marianne has nothing but good things to say about Forests Ontario, praising its planting programs as well as its education programs such as *Forestry in the Classroom* which connects people from the forest sector to teach children about the value of the forest and opportunities for careers in the sector. She also appreciates the copy of *Our Forest* magazine that she receives as one of the benefits of being a member. “I enjoy reading about nurseries growing millions of tree seedlings and of people who go out to gather cones that hold the seeds,” Marianne adds.

We asked why is membership with Forests Ontario important? Marianne’s response was simple. “United we stand, divided we fall. People who make it their business to care for our forests need and deserve our support,” she said – and we couldn’t agree more.

Forests Ontario would like to thank Marianne Dekking and all our members for their valued support. Your contribution continues to make our urban and rural communities healthier through the creation, preservation and maintenance of new forests and grasslands. Forests Ontario will be highlighting our members in each issue of Our Forest magazine. If you are a Forests Ontario member and would like to share your story in our magazine, please contact bmcclelland@forestsontario.ca.

Birds, Bees and Bats

Grasslands Ontario helps reinvent park to become wildlife haven

BY HEATHER LANG

Tucked away along the shores of the Madawaska River, halfway between the town of Arnprior and the village of White Lake, lies a remarkable, untapped treasure. Just over 20 hectares in size, the newly reinvented Clay Bank Nature Park for Outdoor Learning is home to a diverse range of insect, bird, and plant species — all attracted to a habitat that features a small woodland, grasslands, river, and creek.

As a former Member of Council for the Township of McNab/Braeside, which owns the park, I began working in 2015 to turn the park from its sole use as a boat launch into something so much more. My first job was to develop a trail system through the woodland that follows the river and creek. Next, staff and volunteers created a link to the trail from the parking area.

A beehive demonstration site set up by a local beekeeper was next, then the development of a community garden complete with a few fruit-bearing trees, as well as the creation of a “learning” pad where educational demonstrations, lectures, presentations and activities regarding moths, bats, dragonflies, and various creepy crawlies can take place.

In the spring of 2021, focus turned to the 10 hectares of grasslands that make up half of the park. Home to nesting Eastern Meadowlark and Northern Bobolink bird species, the grasslands were once hay fields that had gone fallow.



Left to right: Rod Smith, Chair, Environment Committee, Rotary Club of Arnprior; Heather Lang, former councillor and visionary of the park; Township of McNab-Braeside Mayor Mark MacKenzie. Photo by Kathy MacKenzie.

Given the growing recognition and positive benefits of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism, my colleagues and I wanted to preserve and enhance the grasslands, as well as connect the dots between preservation and education, providing an opportunity to both improve ecological conditions and engage park visitors in stewardship experiences.

The Township connected with the Rotary Club of Arnprior, which has a strong environmental focus. Together, we were successful in bringing in Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program to plant over 15,000 native tree species in the municipality, including 1,500 at Clay Bank.

That work led to an exciting new partnership with the Grasslands Stewardship Initiative of Grasslands Ontario, a division of Forests Ontario. A grant secured in 2022 funded a plant study to identify native and non-native plants growing in and near the grasslands, as well as helped with haying the fields, building nesting boxes for bluebirds and American Kestrels, and buying a mix of native forbs and grass seed. The local Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club also conducted a spring and fall bird survey. In 2023, local volunteers planted the rest of the seeds after the fields had been harrowed.

The park currently hosts an annual *It's the Bees Knees* event in late June, a BioBlitz in mid-summer, and a Nature Fest in the fall, along with regular star gazing

nights, bird walks, and foraging treks.

Clay Bank Nature Park for Outdoor Learning offers tremendous potential as an educational incubator site. It also serves as an example of how even a small rural municipality can do its part to preserve local native grasslands.

Heather Lang is a contract editor and writer and a former member of council for the Township of McNab/Braeside.



Above Right: Volunteer Marilyn Misener sowing native grass and forb seeds in fall 2022. Photo by R. Smith.

Above Left: Volunteers Chris Payne (on tractor) and Jenna Smith. The pair used a tractor to roll the soil after broadcast seeding of native grass and forbs in November 2022. Photo by R. Smith.

The Sweet Smells of the Holidays

Invite aromas into your house when you buy a real Christmas tree

BY PETER KUITENBROUWER

TOP TIPS:



- Look for a tree that does not have brown needles.
- Look for a tree that doesn't have a lot of needles falling out – test it out by pulling the needles out or dropping the stump to the ground and look for needles that fall.
- Make sure to make a fresh cut on the bottom before you put the tree in the stand.
- Water the tree daily.
- Put up your tree away from heat sources.
- Choose LED lighting and natural decorations to boost your environmental benefits.

Let the festivities begin! It's that time of the year again... holiday decorations, handmade crafts and ornaments passed down over generations make their way out of storage to brighten up our homes. It is also the time when we all think about whether we want to put up an artificial tree or get a real one.

Many people buy artificial trees - often because of some sense that a multi-use plastic tree protects the environment compared with cutting down a real tree. However, the debate still stands – which option is better.

Real Christmas trees provide many benefits. Christmas tree farms can be havens for wildlife, including chickadees, grosbeaks, sparrows, coyotes, foxes, mice, squirrels and voles. There's other good stuff too: real trees use the sun's energy and carbon dioxide from the air to grow and in turn provide oxygen. In fact, according to the Ontario Farm-Grown Natural Christmas Tree Education Site, each hectare of a tree farm emits enough oxygen for 44 people. The trees, often grown on shallow, sandy soil not suitable for food crops, absorb rainwater and stabilize soil, and sequester carbon as they grow. Tree farms are also close to our urban centres – providing all these benefits right back to local communities.

Plus, for every tree that is cut, 10 others are at some stage of growth to take its place. Growing trees also creates jobs for Canadians and a source of revenue for farmers in winter. And, when the holiday season is over, most municipalities collect discarded natural Christmas trees and chip them into mulch to help other plants to grow.

By contrast, artificial trees are non-biodegradable, and their manufacturing process and transportation requires large amounts of fossil fuels. These artificial trees will one day end up in landfills and take millennia to break down. Although the tree can be used for years, families often choose to change their tree long before the end of life.

Let's face it: real Christmas trees also smell nice. Fir and spruce trees typically grown for the holidays produce resins that protect them against pests and disease. When you bring a tree indoors, the warmth causes the resins to evaporate, producing aromas of citrus, camphor and mint.

Visiting a Christmas tree farm to cut down your own tree can also be a fun experience. But even if you pick up a tree at your local supermarket, and you squeeze among the rows of pines, spruces and firs, the experience can't help but be uplifting.

Therefore, feel good about your real Christmas tree and know your choice provides benefits far beyond the glittering scented glow we have all come to cherish in our homes at this time of year.



Forests Ontario Chief Operating Officer Elizabeth Celanowicz with Christmas trees and wreaths. Photo by Forests Ontario.

Butternut Recovery Effort Continues

Forest Gene Conservation Association and Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority host groundbreaking ceremony at new orchard

BY HEATHER ZURBRIGG

The Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA) has taken a further step to help protect the endangered butternut tree with a groundbreaking event this past summer for their sixth five-acre butternut seed orchard, part of their butternut archiving program.

This orchard is located near Exeter, Ontario, near the shore of Lake Huron, about 200 kilometres east of Toronto and is hosted and managed by the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA).

Butternut is a species at risk throughout its natural range in Canada and the United States. Butternut is impacted by butternut canker, a fungal pathogen that impacts the cambial tissue of the tree and often causes mortality. Once a common tree throughout eastern North America, butternut is now much more uncommon and is listed as endangered under the Ontario's provincial Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Healthy butternut are very rare and now considered too few and too far apart for natural recovery. Butternut trees on the landscape that are showing a tolerance

to the butternut canker are the foundation of the FGCA's archiving recovery efforts. FGCA works with partners and landowners to find healthy butternut on the landscape across Ontario. These butternut seed orchards are planted with grafted trees grown from scions (twigs) collected from healthy butternut trees. Establishing these new orchards will enable cross-pollination and future seed production between potentially tolerant trees to aid in the re-introduction of healthy butternut.

"The Butternut was an important tree for wildlife and for people," Ian Jean, Forestry and Land Stewardship Specialist with ABCA, said to those gathered at the groundbreaking event. He added that the nuts were a food source for First Nations Peoples and settlers. "Butternut was quite common locally and grows very well on our local soils," he added. "We believe this Butternut Archive Orchard site should grow very nice butternut and we hope it will contribute to the recovery of this species."

The creation of the seed orchard was made possible thanks to species-at-risk funding from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The new butternut orchard sits on a tract of land donated to the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority by the Triebner family.

Heather Zurbrigg is Manager of Species Conservation for the Forest Gene Conservation Association.

Left to right: Ian Jean, Forestry and Land Stewardship Specialist with Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority; Heather Zurbrigg, Manager of Species Conservation with Forest Gene Conservation Association; and Corey Gent, Butternut Technician with the Forest Gene Conservation Association at the Butternut Archive Orchard at Triebner Tract (near Exeter, Ontario), during the seed orchard groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, August 18, 2023.



Plans Improve the Health of Forests

Participants in the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program do more to control invasive plants

BY PETER KUITENBROUWER

Purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, buckthorn, dog strangling vine and reed canary grass, also called phragmites, are several of the most aggressive plants invading the forests and landscapes in Ontario.

Southern Ontario is the most biodiverse place in Canada. But as intruders spread, they threaten wetlands, forests, lakes, rivers and streams, and crowd out native plants, including plants used for medicine by Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Because most land in the province's south is in private hands, one effective control tool is a forest management plan. Studies show that landowners are more likely to plant native species and to take action to control invasive species on their properties when they enroll their properties in the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP). The program reduces property taxes by up to 75 per cent on eligible forest land.

To join the program, a landowner must develop a forest plan. They can either write the plan or hire a professional forester or Managed Forest Plan Approver to write the blueprint, which spells out ways to look after their forested areas. Plan approvers steer landowners towards resources to remove invasive trees and plants.

Researchers at the University of Waterloo mailed out a survey to landowners who had participated in the MFTIP and hundreds of landowners responded. The authors published the results in the journal *Conservation Science and Practice*. The replies to the survey revealed that those who registered for the MFTIP did more to control invasive species than those who did not take part in the program.

Forest plans, the researchers wrote, “create strong opportunities for landowners to become educated about environmental processes and natural resource management, to consider longer-term effects of their management actions during the 20-year forest management plan horizon, and to adhere to best management practices.”

Forest plan approvers also encourage landowners to plant native trees through programs such as Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program. Woodlots with a mix of native trees not only improve the health of the forest, but they also show resilience to invaders and provide greater biodiversity, as well as attract more native wildlife such as birds and amphibians.

A landowner in Hastings County walks in his forest, registered in the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP). Studies show landowners are more likely to take action to control invasive species on their properties when they enroll their properties in the MFTIP. Photo by Peter Kuitenbrouwer.



Stumped

What Is the Tallest Tree in the World?

Forestry in the Classroom participants asked, and we answered!

During National Forest Week, Forests Ontario presented a Forestry in the Classroom livestream for students in grades four through eight. More than 500 students and educators logged on to learn about forest biodiversity

and the importance of oak trees in Ontario ecosystems, as well as ask our team many excellent questions. Here are just a few of their questions, and some answers from Forests Ontario staff.

Question from Cadence: How many types of trees are in the world?

Answer: University of Michigan researchers estimate that Earth contains 73,000 tree species, including roughly 9,000 not yet known to science.

Question from Shantoash: Why do leaves fall every autumn?

Answer: When the days get shorter, trees have less sun to turn into energy and leaves cannot do their job below the freezing point. No longer useful, the leaves fall to the ground.

Question from Behfujmt: What is the tallest tree in the world?

Answer: A Coastal Redwood in California, known as Hyperion, is the world's tallest known living tree, measuring 115.92 m (380.3 ft). Taller than New York's Statue of Liberty, Hyperion is over 800 years old.

Question from Indie: How many trees are in the world?

Answer: The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences estimates that our planet has three trillion trees, or 422 trees for every person on Earth.

Question from Michaela: What is the reason for the bark on a tree?

Answer: The bark on a tree acts like a thick jacket. The bark protects the tree from pests, such as insects or animals, and diseases, and for some species the bark is essential in protection from fire.

Question from Araf: How do trees produce air?

Answer: Through a process called photosynthesis, leaves pull in carbon dioxide and use the energy from the sun and intake water from the roots to convert these to sugars that feed the tree. As a result, trees release oxygen into the atmosphere for us to breathe.

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