

Simcoe County Forest 2020 Annual Report



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Simcoe County Forest - 2020

Established in 1922, the Simcoe County Forest (SCF) is the oldest and largest municipal forest in Ontario. Although many of the objectives have remained consistent since its inception, the current management plan for the period 2011-2030 renewed the goals, objectives, and strategies designed to balance the substantial environmental, social and economic benefits the Forest provides. This report documents annual activities and provides a basis to track progress toward long-term objectives within the plan.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March did not impact forest management operations significantly as the forest sector was declared an essential service. However, a significant increase in recreational uses of all kinds increased challenges related to managing public use around forest operations. Existing infrastructure (primarily parking) was strained, and demand for expanded trail networks from all existing agreement holders resulted. Public outreach normally conducted by Forestry staff was curtailed significantly.

1. Property

The expansion of the SCF continues through the strategic reinvestment of forestry revenues. The property detailed below was approved for acquisition, which brings the total area under management to 13,358 ha (33,015 acres). **(Note that the total area has been adjusted based upon the most current data and does not align with the reported total in the 2019 Annual Report. This discrepancy is due to an error which was introduced several years previously and has been corrected herein).**

An updated 'County Forest Growth, Investment & Protection Policy' was adopted in 2020 which superseded the former 'Acquisition Principles' established in 1996. Adoption established as policy some key practices which have, and will continue to be, critical to future success. This includes that the continued growth of the SCF is the desired state, and that all forestry revenue and assets be reinvested back into the management and continued growth of the SCF. The Policy does not diverge significantly from the general approach which has resulted in the continued expansion of the SCF, however it identifies that increased investment and focus will be required if underrepresented areas of the County are to be addressed. Adopted in parallel, a new 'County Forest Reserve Fund' superseded the former 'Reforestation Reserve Account' which had also been in place since 1996.

1.1 Acquisitions:

Township	Location	Tract	Area (ha)	Notes
Springwater	CON 7 S PT LOT 3	Stoney	5.7	Two landlocked parcels adjacent to the existing Stoney Tract; Greenlands designation and within Provincially Significant Life Sciences ANSI (Area of Natural or Scientific Interest). Contributes to protecting a large, contiguous woodland area.
Ramara	CON 11 S PT LOT 9 S PT LOT;10	Rathburn	85.2	Significant addition to Rathburn Tract; includes marginal farmland suitable for regeneration. Contributes to the protection and enhancement a significant natural area at the headwaters of the Lake Simcoe watershed.

2. Silvicultural Operations

Simcoe County has long recognized that forests and their many benefits and resources are essential to the long-term well-being of our environment, communities and economy. The sustainable management of our forests is therefore critical, not only to balance competing uses in the short term, but to ensure that the many benefits of our forests are available for generations to come. Good long-term planning is key to ensuring continued growth and success, which is anchored by the Simcoe County Forest 20-year Forest Management Plan. Monitoring is conducted at the individual forest stand level, collated into annual reporting, and a further assessment is conducted at five-year intervals. Commercial timber harvesting is just one of the treatments utilized to achieve the environmental, social and economic objectives identified in the Forest Management Plan. Other treatments may include tree planting, invasive species management, controlled burning, pre-commercial thinning, etc. All treatments are designed with ecological principles and the long-term sustainability of the Forest as critical elements of the decision-making process.

Approximately 1,000 hectares of the County Forests are inventoried annually. Each forest compartment identified in the operating plan is assessed by Forestry staff and, if warranted, a prescription is prepared detailing the manner in which it is to be treated. If harvesting is prescribed, trees are marked and tallied according to the prescription, and volume is estimated in order to provide detailed information to prospective buyers. The standing timber is then sold to the highest bidder as per County policy.

Timber sales encompass approximately 700 to 800 hectares annually, which is generally divided into 25 to 40 individual sales. Primarily conducted through an open tendering process, in some circumstances additional sales are conducted by quotation, and negotiated sales may also occur where no bids are received or opportunities arise to salvage low value, declining or storm damaged timber. Staff attempts to distribute the volume of timber as evenly as possible throughout the year and include a variety of sizes and types in each lot to ensure that local operators have an opportunity to purchase a relatively constant supply. All operations are conducted in accordance with the approved 20-year Forest Management Plan (Simcoe County Forests 2011 – 2030).



Compliance monitoring of each harvesting operation is conducted regularly to ensure health and safety guidelines are followed, site impacts are minimized, and to ensure sensitive natural or cultural heritage features are identified and protected. This information is reviewed annually to provide feedback on current processes and to ensure that long range objectives remain on target.

With strong demand for all types of timber, the competitive bidding process resulted in fair to excellent value. The total value of timber sold in 2020 of \$2,366.012 is the highest ever annual sales for the SCF.

2.1 Timber Sales Summary:

Forest Type	Sales	Area (ha)	Volume (m ³)	Revenue
Conifer	28	487	27,350	\$1,743,023
Hardwood	15	377	14,130	\$622,989
Total	43	864	41,480	\$2,366,012

The value of the softwood harvest remains very strong, primarily due to continued high demand for the mature, high quality red pine. As detailed in the 2011 – 2030 management plan, an increasing percentage of these highly valuable stands of timber are nearing the end of their rotation age. As the final harvests are occurring and conversion to mixed natural forest increases, a reduction in timber volume and associated revenue will occur within the next 10 to 20 years. The annual hardwood harvest in 2020 was increased quite substantially over previous years and was above average annual targets as detailed below. This increase was designed to offset the under-utilization which has been the norm for many years and will bring annual averages in line to more closely track estimated growth as detailed in the Management Plan below:

Projected Average Annual Harvest 2011 – 2020 (from Management Plan)

Working Group	Total Area (ha)	Available Area (ha) 2011 - 2020***	Cutting Cycle (years)	Average Annual Area (ha)	Average Annual Harvest (m ³) ****	Estimated Volume Growth (m ³ /year)
Red pine	4233	4106	9	456	20,550	30,901
White pine	971	930	9	103	4,600	7,088
Total conifer*				559	25,100	37,697
Tolerant hardwood	1804	1705	15	114	4,674	5,953
Intolerant hardwood	1044	1000	20	50	2,050	3,445
Upland oak	817	763	20	38	1,558	2,696
Other hardwood**	548	433	20	22	902	1,808
Total hardwood				224	9,184	13,902

* does not include other minor species

** includes all other hardwood working groups

*** for conifer does not include stands < 25 years of age in 2010
for hardwood does not include stands < 40 years of age in 2010

**** based upon historical average volumes per type and age class

2.2 High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF):

HCVF's are those that possess one or more environmental or cultural attributes which is generally of higher significance than timber values. The criteria for these areas are defined within the Management Plan and mapped accordingly. Adjustments are made to HCVF mapping on an ongoing basis as new information becomes available such as the discovery of a species at risk (SAR). Operations are monitored to ensure that the feature or value is not adversely impacted, and the criteria and designation of all HCVF's are reviewed at each 5-year renewal of the management plan.

Operations within High Conservation Value Forests Completed in 2020:

Tract	Comp	HCV Type	HCV Notes	Contract
Freele	156B	Cultural	Archaeological Site	19-11-036
Hardwood Hills	447A, 445B	ANSI / Cultural	Martin Farm South ANSI / Exclusive Use Agreement	20-10-043
Oro	483C	Species at Risk / Regionally Rare Species	Butternut	20-06-009
Stoney	450A	ANSI	Fergusonvale North Provincial Life Science	20-03-006
Tosorontio	268B	ANSI	Oak Ridges South Slope Forests Provincial Life Science	19-08-025
Wildman	295C	Significant Habitat	Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas of Canada (Tiny Marsh)	20-07-019

2.3 Reforestation:

Although modest amounts of tree planting within existing forest stands is conducted in most years (generally referred to as 'under planting' and generally designed to enhance natural regeneration within mature plantations), none was scheduled for 2020. Further, most significant tree planting activity hinges on land acquisition and restoration projects and with nothing scheduled in 2020 there was no tree planting conducted.

2.4 Site Preparation:

A spring controlled burn was planned to occur within approximately 47 ha (116 acres) of the Tosorontio Tract as part of a long-term effort to regenerate an oak-dominated woodland. Unfortunately, Due to COVID 19 the burn had to be postponed to a future date.

A controlled burn was completed in the fall within 11 ha (27 acres) at the Packard Tract in Essa Township. This burn was completed to prepare the site for tree planting in 2021 as part of a habitat creation and reforestation project described in Section 8.

No other significant site preparation was required in 2020 for future planting.

2.5 Tending / Pre-commercial Thinning:

Pre-commercial treatments are conducted to enhance long-term stand quality, productivity, diversity or to mitigate damage or disease. The following tending and pre-commercial activities were completed in 2020:

- Application of Rotstop C to control Heterobasidion Root Disease to mitigate productivity losses and mortality in red pine stands (183 ha).
 - Barton, Brentwood, Caston, Crawford, Hendrie, O'Neil, Orr Lake, Tosorontio, Waverley, Welsh and Wildman Tracts

2.6 Invasive Plant Management:

Management of invasive plants continued in 2020 with numerous management activities throughout the year. Dog strangling vine and garlic mustard continue to be the most common invasive plant species managed with the pathogenic fungus, Heterobasidion Irregularare also being common.

Species Managed	Tracts
Autumn Olive	2
Black Locust	7
Buckthorn	7
Dog Strangling Vine	22
Giant Hogweed	2
Garlic Mustard	14
Heterobasidion Irregularare	12
Goutweed	1
Himalayan Balsam	2
Honeysuckle	3
Japanese Knotweed	5
Common Lilac	1
Manitoba Maple	9
Norway Maple	2
Mouse-eared Chickweed	1
Periwinkle	1
Phragmites	1
Scots Pine	1

3. Infrastructure Improvements / Maintenance

Entrances:

Limiting vehicular access continued in 2020 to reduce illegal dumping and other unauthorized activities. A total of 8 additional gates were installed and 10 repaired.

The existing entrance to the Ward Tract in Adjala Tosorontio was moved to a safer location with assistance provided by the County Roads Department.

Signage:

Ongoing replacement and repairs occurred throughout the year due to vandalism, deterioration, and theft. Also, as a result of the Recreation Policy update, the permitted use signs that are installed at all entry points were redesigned. Installation of the remaining updated signs was completed in 2020.

Parking:

Increasing use throughout the County continues to necessitate expanded parking to ensure user safety. Parking areas were enhanced and expanded in the Oro, Strachan, and Orr Lake Tracts.

Winter maintenance was first initiated in 2019 to provide safe parking in high use areas. In 2020 the number of plowed lots increased through assistance from both County Roads and local municipalities.

Tract	Municipality	Contracted	County Roads	Local Municipality
Amos	Oro Medonte	x		
Oro		x		
Strachan (2)		x		x
Orr Lake	Springwater	x		
Williams		x		
Hendrie			x	
Hickling			x	
Smith			x	
Martin's Valley	Midland			x
Sinclair	Bradford WG			x
Web	Innisfil	x		

Ongoing assessments will be made and discussions with other partners will follow to enable safe winter access to other locations as needed.

Internal Access Roads:

Significant access road improvements were completed within the Graham and Rathburn Tracts to facilitate access for planned harvesting operations.

Garbage:

In addition to typical garbage collection conducted by Forestry staff and a contractor, County Roads staff assisted with heavy equipment to clear additional refuse at the Rathburn Tract. The total volume of garbage removed was 12,130 kg which is relatively consistent with totals from recent years.

Hazardous Tree Removal:

Through regular forestry activity, hazard trees within a tree length of trails are marked and removed during harvesting operations. Other hazards which may be identified by users or County staff are removed as required. In 2020 a number of hazards were identified and removed along the Hickling Tract trail.

4. Property Monitoring / Enforcement

Property Monitoring:

The control of unauthorized and illegal activity on SCF property is accomplished through a range of measures, which begins with establishing permitted uses through the approved Recreation Policy and enabling enforcement with the associated by-law. Information is provided to the public through the website, direct notifications, and through signs installed at standard locations on all properties. Ensuring the visibility of property boundaries is also key to reduce both incidences of trespass onto neighbouring private land and to limit encroachment.

Due to the scale and distribution of properties, staff utilize all available opportunities to monitor activity in the SCF including help from neighbours, contractors and recreation partners. In addition to ongoing staff visits when completing a range of forestry activities, formal property checks are also completed at regular intervals which includes an assessment of the condition of all infrastructure.

Enforcement:

Property Damage / Theft / Dumping

Property damage continues to occur primarily to gates in order for trucks to gain entry. In some instances, gates are destroyed and must be replaced entirely. Dumping of garbage and yard waste occurs throughout the County, from very minor amounts to significant illegal dumping events requiring substantial resources to remove. There were fewer significant dumping occurrences in 2020, which may be due to increased public use. Two abandoned vehicles were left in the Lawden Tract.

In order to ensure police support, all major illegal occurrences of property damage and dumping are reported. In 2020, three incidence reports were submitted. Required repairs and removal of debris are completed as quickly as possible to reduce reoccurrence. In problem areas, surveillance cameras may be utilized and photos are provided to police if evidence is obtained which may support laying charges.

Unauthorized Use (as per Recreation By-law)

An educational approach has primarily been taken to improve compliance since the approval of the first Recreation Policy in 2006, however enforcement is required and has been increased in recent years. Several staff are authorized to issue Part 1 tickets under the by-law; issuing over a dozen in 2020.

The most common infraction is related to unauthorized motorized use; ATV's, off-road motorcycles, and snowmobiles are all permitted provided they are operating on club operated trails and have permits in place. A very effective partnership has been in place for several years between the County, Simcoe County Off-Road Riders Association and Central Ontario ATV club to improve compliance with respect to off-road motorized vehicles. Off-duty OPP Officers are hired to conduct patrols in the attendance of one or more club members. In 2020 there were a total of 15 patrols conducted, 787 riders seen, and 103 tickets issued. A year over year improvement with compliance has been noted, however, due to the increased use with the pandemic this trend was reversed in 2020.

5. Fire Protection

In 1996, the former agreement between the County and the Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry (MNR) to manage the Simcoe County Forest ended. Also, at this time, the MNR terminated agreements with municipalities to provide forest firefighting services in Southern Ontario. Until this time, municipal fire departments had provided initial response to fires within County Forests, however MNR was primarily responsible for fire suppression including all associated costs.

As a result, a 'Wildland Firefighting Agreement' was drafted in 1999 and agreements were formalized with local municipalities. Under this agreement, the Simcoe County Forestry Dept. purchased five 'Wildland Equipment Caches' which are a collection of specialized firefighting equipment used to extinguish wildland fires. These caches have been stored and maintained at municipal fire departments with equipment replacement funded on an as-needed basis through the Forestry Dept.

In 2017, County staff and area Fire Chiefs initiated a collective effort to review and update the agreements to improve clarity regarding the terms and conditions under which firefighting services are

provided. This culminated with the signing of updated agreements with all local municipalities in 2019, which included provisions for the addition of one additional equipment cache plus annual funding for wildland firefighting knowledge and skills training.

Fire prevention measures were much more important and prevalent in the early years in the development of the SCF. The extensive young, primarily coniferous plantations originally established were highly susceptible to fire; as a result the installation of fire breaks was standard and maintenance occurred annually. As these plantations mature, however, the influx of primarily deciduous species means that over time, fire risk declines. There was one minor fire in 2020 attended to by Springwater Fire Dept. in the Smith Tract.

6. Recreation

One of the primary roles of the County Forests is to provide for a full range of recreational activities. Distributed throughout the County, the many forest tracts provide an opportunity for residents to enjoy these benefits close to home.

The number of residents and tourists that are enjoying that County Forest have increased over the years and will continue to grow. A Recreation Policy was established in 2006 and later revised in 2018 to ensure that all responsible users of the County Forest are able to continue to enjoy their recreational pursuits.



In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a significant increase of users of all kinds, with the resulting increase in unauthorized use, trespass, and strains on infrastructure such as parking. Parking enhancements and enforcement activity is described separately.

6.1 Property Use Agreements:

As the County has not historically developed or maintained trails, trail construction has been enabled through partnerships with organizations and clubs as per the Recreation Policy. Property Use Agreements are renewed annually with each interested party to ensure roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and County liability is minimized. Primarily driven by volunteerism through not-for-profit groups, recreational opportunities are enhanced for many different types of users. Organized events also require similar agreements.

In 2020, although most agreements for events were in place, most were cancelled or postponed due to the pandemic. One commercial operator under agreement for many years is no longer in business.

Non-Profit Agreements:

Organization	Activity
Wilfred Laurier University	Archaeology
Central Ontario ATV Club	ATV Trails
Ontario Competitive Trail Riders Association	Equestrian Trails
Ontario Trail Riders Association	Equestrian Events
Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association	Hiking Trails
Simcoe County Mountain Bike Club	Mountain Biking Trails
TeamVanGo	Mountain Biking Trails
Halton Off-Road Rider Association	Off-Road Motorcycle Event
Ontario Federation of Trail Riders	Off-Road Motorcycle Trails
Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs	Snowmobile Trails
Dufferin Simcoe Land Stewardship Network	Guided Walk

Commercial Agreements:

Organization	Activity
Leo St. Croix	Horse Drawn Sleigh Rides
Spoke O'Motion	Mountain Biking Trails
Hardwood Ski and Bike	Mountain Biking Trails
Smart Adventure Program	Motorized Off-Road Vehicle Training

Municipal Trail Agreements:

Township	County Tract
Clearview	Lawden
Essa	Rippon

7. Research

Permanent Sample Plots (PSP's):

Forestry researchers have utilized 'permanent sample plots' for decades to provide invaluable information on the growth and development of our forests over time. This involves the detailed measurement of trees, and in some cases associated soils and other data, in the exact same location over a period of many years. The data gathered and collated from these plots has been used to develop information critical to foresters to predict growth and make informed management decisions.

Although extremely valuable, the very long-term nature of this work has created challenges as staff and priorities have changed over the years. In 2008, County staff began working collaboratively with the Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry to assess old research plots, refresh and retain those which remain valuable and integrate the locations into the County database. All retainable plots have now been measured at least once with County staff assistance.



Due to staffing restrictions and changes at the provincial level, no measurements were completed on any permanent sample plots in 2020. One PSP was identified to be retained in the Orr Lake Tract.

Surveillance for the presence and spread of black-legged ticks (carrier of Lyme Disease):

The County has been providing assistance to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit by providing survey locations to update Public Health Ontario's Lyme Disease Map. Estimated risk areas are identified through active surveillance led by the local health unit, otherwise known as 'tick dragging'. These areas are calculated from the location where black-legged ticks are found and include communities within a 20-kilometer radius surrounding that location. Tick dragging was not performed in SCF in 2020 due to constraints from Covid-19.

8. Special Projects

Kirtland's Warbler Habitat and Forest Restoration Projects:

Packard Tract

2020 was the 2nd year of a multi-year forest restoration and habitat project at the Packard Tract. This project is funded for 4 years through the Eastern Georgian Bay Initiative and Ganawenim Meshkiki/Henvey Inlet First Nations.

Work on the site in 2020 included acorn planting, invasive species removal, plowing and tilling, road re-alignment, stream crossing construction and a controlled burn. Tree planting is scheduled for 2021 to re-establish native forest cover.

9. Partnerships / Extension Services

Planting Partnership:

One of the objectives of the County Forest has always been to 'encourage private landowners in their reforestation efforts'. The Simcoe County Tree Planting Program was initiated in 2007, with funds provided annually through the Forestry Dept. budget to increase reforestation on private lands by offsetting the cost of tree seedlings and/or tree planting services. The 'Delivery Partners' include the Nottawasaga Valley and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authorities, Severn Sound Environmental Association, and the Dufferin South Simcoe Land Stewardship Network.



Program funding to date of \$337,811 has been leveraged with contributions from many other organizations and landowners with the full project value totaling \$1,706,103. This has resulted in a total of 789,274 trees planted on 497 hectares over the previous 14 years. In 2020, a total of 26,310 trees were planted or distributed resulting in a total area planted of 14.0 hectares.

Private landowners will continue to contact the appropriate agency directly to determine eligibility. The subsidy level varies depending upon the type of planting and the environmental benefit provided as per the guidelines within the MOU.

Forestry Services provided to member municipalities:

Forestry staff have traditionally provided woodlot management expertise and assistance to local municipalities upon request. This generally includes initial site assessments, detailed inventories and completion of silvicultural prescriptions, tree marking, tendering, and forest operations supervision. No significant assistance was requested or required in 2020.

Forestry Assistance provided to other County Departments:

Forestry staff assisted the Solid Waste Dept. with planning and implementation of the Compensation Planting Plan for required ecological offsetting for the Environmental Resource Recovery Centre.

Forestry staff planted trees for the Roads Dept. adjacent the Beeton and Midhurst garages.

Invasive Species Monitoring and Information Transfer:

Forestry staff continue to update and manage a webpage for information on the European gypsy moth and its impacts to the area. This website provides an updated and consistent information source for residents. Staff also provide updates to local municipalities on the status of the infestation and possible management options. Forestry staff have also continued a monitoring program that began in 2019 to assess current and potential future impacts from the insect. Collaboration with other partners including conservation authorities and Severn Sound Environmental Association ensures a consistent approach and reduces duplication.

Extension Services:

Staff respond to public enquiries on an ongoing basis pertaining to the Forest Conservation By-law, good forestry practices, and forest insect and disease issues. Information or advice is provided, however no site visits are conducted.

The County continues to support the involvement of Forestry staff in extension and outreach in the community, resulting in productive working relationships with a wide range of organizations and an increased understanding of the many benefits realized through the sustainable management of our forests. Efforts also continue to work collaboratively with the full range of recreational interests utilizing the SCF, and to improve the understanding and respect between groups.

In 2020, the usual variety of outreach through presentations, tours, workshops, and school visits was substantially curtailed due to COVID.

The following presentations were conducted by SCF staff:

Organization	Date	Title
Sir William Osler Public School	February 7	Forestry in the Classroom (Forests Ontario partnership)
Kawartha Woodlot Association	February 8	Participated as guest speaker in panel discussion

The following organizations were supported or sponsored:

Organization	Date	Purpose
Forests Ontario	February 14	Sponsorship of annual AGM and Conference

The following meetings were organized and hosted:

Organization	Date	Purpose
SCF Property Use Agreement Holders	February 10	Annual meeting of recreation representatives

Staff provided input and/or support:

Organization	Date	Purpose
Ontario Professional Foresters Assoc.		Awards Committee (G. Davis)
Ontario Professional Foresters Assoc.		2020 / 2021 AGM and Conference Planning Committee (G. Davis, B. Dixon)
Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority		Climate Change Strategy development input (G. Davis, W. Cox)
Tree Marking Certification Program		Steering Committee (B. Dixon)
Community Forest Managers group		Annual Meeting Steering Committee (B. Dixon)
Forests Ontario		Simcoe County District School Board Envirothon Forestry Section Expert (B. Dixon)