



2019 Annual Report



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2019 Simcoe County Forest Annual Report

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Introduction

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.

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 13,378 ha (33,064 acres).

Acquisitions:

Township	Location	Tract	Area (ha)	Notes
Springwater	CON 1 OS W PT LOT 62 W PT; LOT 63	Orr Lake Tract	32.4	
Tiny	CON 3 S PT LOT 18	Wildman Tract	18.0	

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 control, 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.

Timber Sales Summary:

Forest Type	Sales	Area (ha)	Volume (m ³)	Revenue
Conifer	32	673	39,187	\$2,129,832
Hardwood	4	109	5,471	\$96,684
Total	36	782	44,658	\$2,226,516

The total softwood area and volume harvested in 2019 is well above annual averages and very near to an all-time high. This is primarily due to the aging red pine growing stock established in the first few decades of the establishment of the County Forest. 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 still has considerable room to increase 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

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 2019:

Tract	Comp	HCV Type	HCV Notes	Contract
Miller	371D	Species at Risk / Regionally Rare Species	Butternut	18-07-027
Wildman	33C,D	Significant Habitat	Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas of Canada (Tiny Marsh)	18-11-031
Museum	433B,G	Cultural	Museum Use	18-11-029
Stoney	480A, 474A	ANSI	Fergusonvale North Provincial Life Science	18-05-009
Crawford	112C	Species at Risk / Regionally Rare Species	Butternut	18-07-021
Modrits	343B	Species at Risk / Regionally Rare Species	Butternut	17-07-014

Reforestation:

2019 was a significant year for tree planting. 175,000* seedlings were established on a range of sites, which is the highest annual total since 1974. Most of these trees (152,800) were planted at the Museum Tract as part of the final phase of the Forest Restoration and Habitat Creation project. Planting at Orrock Creek North Tract was conducted as part of an effort to restore interior forest cover, and included the removal of non-native Scot's pine trees and the incorporation of several native species through seeding. Lawden, Packard, Smith, and Tottenham tracts were infill and/or understory planting to improve forest regeneration. 2,400 seedlings were planted at the former Tiny Stump Dump as part of a site remediation effort.

Tree Species	Lawden Tract	Museum Tract	Orrock Creek North Tract	Packard Tract	Smith Tract	Tiny Stump Dump*	Tottenham Tract	Total
Bitternut Hickory	50	50	150		50			300
Black Cherry		3,500	250				200	3,950
Eastern Red-Cedar		600						600
Eastern White Cedar						800		800
Jack Pine		104,860						104,860
Red Oak	50	3,800	750		400			5,000
Red Pine	300	30,100	4,950	3,900				39,250
Shagbark Hickory	50	50	150		50			300
Tamarack						800		800
White Oak		1,100	250		50			1,400
White Pine	620	8,740	3,200		3,180	800	1,300	17,840
Total	1,070	152,800	9,700	3,900	3,730	2,400	1,500	175,100

* 2,400 trees planted on a site operated by Simcoe County Solid Waste Management Dept.

Site Preparation:

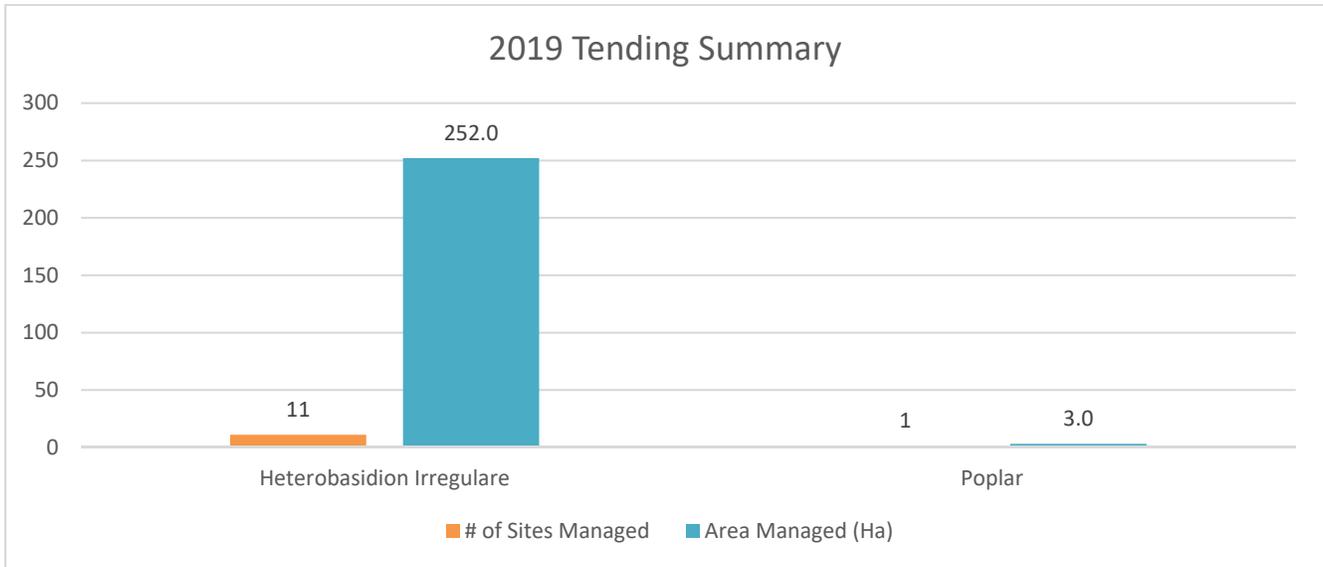
A controlled burn was planned to occur within approximately 47 ha (116 acres) of the Tosorontio Tract as part of a long-term effort to regenerate an oak-dominated woodland. Unfortunately, the required weather indices did not occur within the required time period and the burn had to be postponed to a future date.

No other significant site preparation was required in 2019 for future planting.

Tending / Pre-commercial Thinning:

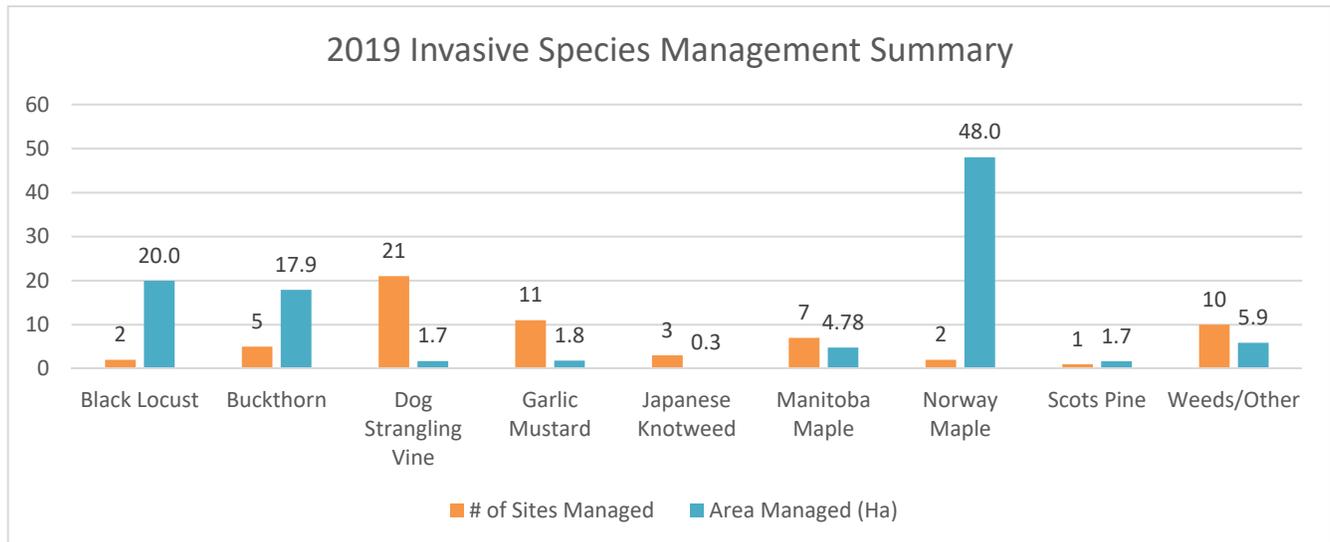
Pre-commercial treatments are conducted to enhance long-term stand quality, productivity, diversity or to mitigate damage or disease. The following tending and pre-commercial activities were completed in 2019:

- Management of poplar in plantations to improve future stand composition and values.
 - Packard Tract (3 ha)
- Application of Rotstop C to control Heterobasidion Root Disease to mitigate productivity losses and mortality in red pine stands (252 ha).
 - Baxter, Crawford, Crawford/Sanderson, DRI, Drury, Foisie, Sinclair, Strachan, Swailes, Vasey & Wildman



Invasive Plant Management:

Implementation of the SCF Invasive Plant Management Strategy culminated in a total area treated of 102 ha. Management continues to focus primarily on reducing the quantity of dog strangling vine, black locust and buckthorn. Most dog strangling vine sites have been managed annually for many years and are under control but still require annual management to limit the spread. Buckthorn continues to be prevalent throughout the SCF and is having significant impacts to the current and future forest composition on some sites. Invasive species management decisions continue to be made on a priority basis with the protection of sensitive natural features and the eradication of small or easier to eradicate infestations being prioritized over larger and harder to control infestations.



Infrastructure Improvements / Maintenance

Entrances:

Limiting vehicular access continued in 2019 to reduce illegal dumping and other unauthorized activities:

Infrastructure	Installed	Repaired
Gates	9	12
Concrete Blocks	0	0

Along with gate installations, fencing was also installed at the Museum, Silver Creek, and Packard Tracts.

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. Approximately 50% of the revised signs were replaced, with the remainder to be completed in 2020.

Access Roads and Landings:

County Roads staff improved and/or constructed parking areas in Silver Creek, Wallwin, Baxter, and the Hutchison Tracts. Assistance was also provided with access road improvements in the Tosorontio, and Baxter Tracts.

A culvert replacement was completed at the Packard Tract for a habitat and restoration reforestation project taking place on this site. A permit was obtained from the NVCA and the work was contracted out and completed in October, 2019.

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 refuse removed was much lower compared to past years, which may be due to increased enforcement including police presence and the installation of additional barriers restricting vehicle access.

Collector	Weight (kg)
Forestry Staff	240
Contractor	5,230
Roads Department	6,550
Total	12,020

Hazardous Tree Removal:

A number of hazard trees were removed by County staff along two trails which are maintained by the County, one in Hickling Tract and a newly built trail in the Museum Tract. Through regular forestry activity, hazard trees within a tree length of trails are marked and removed when operations occur throughout the year.

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 annually 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. Chains and pins were cut at the Hendrie, Stoney, Caston, Wildman, and Phelpston Tracts, and 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 requiring substantial resources to remove.

In order to ensure police support, all major illegal occurrences of property damage and dumping are reported. In 2019 5 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 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 2 in 2019.

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 2019 there were a total of 12 patrols conducted, 361 riders seen, and 42 tickets issued. A year over year improvement with compliance has been noted, with the additional benefit of improving both the knowledge and interest of area OPP Officers in enforcement issues related to off-road vehicles during their normal operations.

An annual meeting was also held with the OPP S.A.V.E. Unit (off-road enforcement) as well as officers from the local Huronia West Detachment to ensure they are aware of problem areas and any changes to permitted uses or designated trails.

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 were no fires reported in the SCF in 2019.

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.



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.

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
York Region District School Board	Mountain Biking Event
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
Horseshoe Hummer Tours	Hummer Tours
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

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 2019.



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

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit again completed surveillance to continue 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. County staff provided assistance with locating suitable sites within the SCF for monitoring which was conducted July 15th and again October 11th and 12th.

Special Projects

The Red Pine House:

The project to construct a display building at the Simcoe County Museum dedicated to telling the history of the forests of Simcoe County and particularly the development of the nearly 100 year history of the County Forests, culminated in the public opening of the 'Red Pine House' in September of 2019.

Kirtland's Warbler Habitat and Forest Restoration Projects:

Museum Tract

The final phase of the three-year forest and habitat restoration project at the Museum Tract was completed in 2019. Main project activities are now complete and the site has been reforested with over 150,000 trees and seeded with 85 different species of grasses, herbs, wildflowers, shrubs and trees. Continued maintenance and monitoring of the site will continue as part of normal forestry operations. The project was funded through the Government of Canada, Forests Ontario and American Forests.

Packard Tract

In 2018, a 42.5 hectare parcel was acquired as a strategic addition to the Packard Tract. The property had significant opportunities for restoration and reforestation including the removal of non-native Scot's pine trees. A project proposal was developed to include this site in addition to existing County Forest lands to create habitat suitable to for the Kirtland's warbler and a variety of other species within the County of Simcoe. Funding was secured for four years (2019 to 2022) from the Ganawenim Meshkiki/Henvey Inlet First Nations through the Eastern Georgian Bay Initiative. Work was initiated in 2019 including the removal of non-native trees and preparations for a controlled burn.

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 \$307,811 has been leveraged with contributions from many other organizations and landowners with the full project value totaling \$1,619,514. This has resulted in a total of 762,964 trees planted on 483 hectares over the previous 13 years. In 2019, a total of 74,768 trees were planted or distributed resulting in a total area planted of 41.2 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 2019.

Forestry Assistance provided to other County Departments:

Forestry staff assisted Transportation and Engineering on several tree health and risk assessments and co-ordinated supplying Solid Waste with some hardwood cut offs for fuelwood at landfill site

Invasive Species Monitoring and Information Transfer:

Forestry staff initiated a monitoring effort in 2014 to track the continued spread of the invasive and destructive emerald ash borer. Although trapping was discontinued following the 2017 season, SCF staff continue to take a leading role in information sharing with local municipalities and residents regarding this invasive pest. An outbreak of gypsy moth in some locations of the County in 2019 prompted surveying of SCF properties to assess the potential for any major impacts in 2020, and some guidance was provided to local municipalities.

Extension Services:

Staff respond to public enquiries on an ongoing basis with regard to questions 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.

The following presentations were conducted by SCF staff:

Organization	Date	Title
Forests Ontario – 2019 AGM and Conference	February 8	Kirtland's Warbler & A Different Spin on Forest Restoration
Huronian Woodland Owners	February 9	Forest Restoration and Habitat Creation
Trailhead; Off-Road Motorized Vehicles Conference	February 21	Simcoe County Forest – Recreation, Partnerships and ORMV's
International Society of Arboriculture Ontario – Invasive Species Workshop	March 19	Simcoe County Forest – Invasive Species Impacts and Management
Ganawenim Meshkiki – Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge Advisory Panel	March 27	Packard Tract Kirtlands Warbler Habitat Project Proposal
Couchiching Conservancy – Carden Forum	April 30	Emerald Ash Borer
Barrie Public Library	June 4	Simcoe County Forest / forestry overview
Simcoe County Conference	June 18	I See Tree of Green - Simcoe County Forest and some Myths and Misconceptions
Barrie District Anglers and Hunters	July 14	I See Tree of Green - Simcoe County Forest
Sir William Osler Public School	October 17	Forestry in the Classroom (Forests Ontario partnership)

The following Tours / Workshops were conducted by SCF staff:

Organization	Date	Title
Elmvale Public School	April 15	Guided forestry walk and field tour; Caston Tract
Simcoe County staff	April 22	Earth Day Forestry tour; Museum Tract
Forests Ontario	May 4	Midland Community Tree Planting Event
Simcoe County - Corporate Performance	June 13	Forest walk and field tour
Simcoe County staff	September 25	Forestry tour; Museum Tract

The following organizations were supported or sponsored:

Organization	Date	Purpose
Forests Ontario	February 8	Sponsorship of annual AGM and Conference

The following meetings were organized and hosted:

Organization	Date	Purpose
SCF Property Use Agreement Holders	February 19	annual meeting of recreation representatives

Staff provided input and/or support:

Organization	Date	Purpose
Great Northern Expedition	September 21	Resident engagement and information
Alliston Potato Festival	August 11	Resident engagement and information
Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry		Ontario Tree Seed Plant – Cultural Heritage Committee (G. Davis)
Ontario Professional Foresters Assoc.		Awards Committee (G. Davis)
Ontario Professional Foresters Assoc.		2020 AGM and Conference Planning Committee (G. Davis, B. Dixon)
York Region		York Regional Forest – Management Plan – Technical Team (G. Davis)
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)