

Our Forest, Our Future: DUFFERIN COUNTY FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN 1995-2015 ~

In the beginning, there were forests. Forests of large, tall white pine trees. And there were settlers - settlers who had come to clear the land for farming. They cleared the land until, at the beginning of this century, the large-scale clearing had caused blowsands to develop. The soil was eroded by wind and water, making farming impossible.

Then, in 1930, James Henderson, County Treasurer, inspired by what had been started in Simcoe County in 1922, had an idea. On July 3, 1930, he introduced a motion to County Council which led to the first purchase of land for the Dufferin County Forest.

From that first purchase off Airport Road in Mulmur Township, a resource has grown of which Dufferin County can be proud. Today, the Dufferin County Forest covers an area of 1,048 hectares (2,590 acres) distributed over twelve tracts in all six of Dufferin County's townships. The forest properties provide erosion and water control, recreation, outdoor education, natural heritage protection, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and revenue through timber production.

Since 1930, the Dufferin County Forest has been managed on behalf of the County under the agreement forest program, first by the Department of Lands and Forests and later by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Past management activities have included tree planting (particularly in the early years), thinning, pruning, fire protection, road maintenance, and pest control; until the last decade the focus has been on timber management. Recently, management of the forest has become more integrated, with the release of wild turkeys; a land use agreement with the Mansfield Outdoor Centre; and the establishment of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) trail system.

In 1991, when the most recent agreement with the MNR expired, the County of Dufferin decided that a new, comprehensive, long-term management plan would have to be written for the forest properties before a new agreement was signed. The new plan would recognize that the Dufferin County Forest has a variety of uses: recreation, natural heritage protection, erosion and water control, provision of wildlife habitat, outdoor education, and protection of biodiversity, as well as being a source of revenue for the County.

This new forest management plan "*Our Forest, Our Future*" emphasizes three main points:

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

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

1. made the protection of the quality and integrity of the natural environment the primary goal of the plan;
2. sought the input of the MNR regarding the provincial interest in natural resources;
3. surveyed the public, both groups and individuals, through questionnaires, open houses, and meetings and;
4. established a Forest Advisory Team, representing the main user groups and the public, to advise the County throughout the planning process.

The *Dufferin County Forest Management Plan* outlines the goal, objectives, strategies, and management

activities and projects that will guide the Dufferin County Forest over the next twenty years.

During the twenty-year period of the plan, the focus will be on community involvement in the management of the Dufferin County Forest. Several reasons support this approach: there is a growing interest in the natural environment amongst the general public; the ratepayers of Dufferin County are the true owners of the forest; the County must be accountable to the public for its management of the forests; and in the future there will be increased pressures on the forest properties that will have to be dealt with in a public forum.

The greater degree of community involvement has begun with the preparation of the management plan. Throughout the planning process, input was sought from the community at large. This was done through two sets of open houses and associated questionnaires that participants were asked to complete. The first set of open houses dealt with the background information regarding the Dufferin County Forest and an assessment of the issues involved in developing a management plan for the Forest. The second set presented the draft plan to the public for review. A Forest Advisory Team was also formed, which included representatives from the following groups: the County of Dufferin, the Township of Mulmur, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Huronia Woodlot Operators, Dufferin-North Peel Anglers' and Hunters', Mansfield Outdoor Centre, Dufferin Drift Busters Snowmobile Club, Upper Credit Field Naturalists, Camp Dufferin, Ontario Trail Riders Association, Ontario Competitive Trail Riders Association, Halton Off-Road Riders Association, and two representatives of the general public. This team, along with a group of MNR resource advisors, formed the core of advice and comment throughout the planning process. This degree of community involvement ensured that the public's comments and concerns about the Dufferin County Forest were taken into account and addressed in the management plan.

The Dufferin County Forest has been managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources since 1930. This Management Plan marks the beginning of an important process wherein control and coordination of all management activities in the County Forest will be transferred to the County of Dufferin during 1995-96. A new and important era in the history of the Dufferin County Forest has now been initiated; an era in which our community, more than ever before, claims *Our Forest for Our Future*. That future promises excitement and innovation.

Goal

To protect the quality and integrity of ecosystems in the Dufferin County Forest, including air, water, land and biota; and, where quality and integrity have been diminished, to encourage restoration or remediation to healthy conditions; while providing a variety of social and economic benefits to the public.

Plan Highlights

In preparing this forest management plan, a strategic planning approach was used. First, an overall goal was developed for the future thrust of the forest properties. Within the scope of the goal, there are three objective streams: public use and relations, environmental and resource management, and administration. In turn, each of these objective streams consists of a number of individual

Objective Streams

- ~ Public Use & Relations
- ~ Environmental & Resource Management
- ~ Administration

objectives. The objectives will be achieved by means of a number of strategies. Finally, the strategies are broken down into management activities and projects for the five years of the operational plan (1995-2000) and for the twenty years of the management plan (1995-2015).

Management Activities and Projects

Public Use & Relations

- ~ formation of the *Friends of the Dufferin County Forest*, a group that will advise and assist the County in the management of the Dufferin County Forest
- ~ proposal of projects under the Community Wildlife Involvement Program, Community Fisheries Involvement Program, and similar programs
- ~ production of signs, maps, and pamphlets to inform the public about the forest properties
- ~ increased enforcement and involvement in management by the County
- ~ handling of requests for information, comments, and complaints about the Dufferin County Forest in a timely manner
- ~ establishment and communication of access procedures for large groups and researchers
- ~ making users aware of hunting seasons through signs, advertisements, and public service announcements

Environmental & Resource Management

- ~ all forest management activities will emulate natural disturbances; specifically protecting and encouraging natural regeneration and protecting snags, mast, downed, and cavity trees
- ~ forest management activities in Little Tract, evaluated wetlands, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, and areas where vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species are known to exist will be limited
- ~ healthy wildlife populations will be maintained through the maintenance of a diversity of habitat types
- ~ sustainable timber production

Administration

- ~ a business plan that shows the Dufferin County Forest to be financially self-sustaining
- ~ investigation of new funding sources including government programs, private foundations, corporations, and groups such as Ducks Unlimited
- ~ attempt to improve the natural heritage and socio-economic significance of the Dufferin County Forest through the acquisition and possible disposal of properties
- ~ establishment of a use plan that divides the forest properties into Dufferin County Forest Natural Area (management activities and recreation restricted) and Dufferin County Forest Resource Management Area (management activities and recreation in accordance with the objectives of the plan)

If you have any questions, or would like further information, please contact:

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