

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole

Environmental Services

April 16, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Environmental Services

2019 Greening Strategy Achievements

1. Recommendations

The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

2. Summary

This report provides Council with an update on activities, partnerships and significant 2019 Greening Strategy achievements.

Key Points:

- Since 2001 the Greening Strategy has delivered on-the-ground actions that contribute to the Regional Official Plan goal of a sustainable natural environment, including increasing woodland cover to 25% by 2031
- In addition, York Region's Forest Management Plan identifies a target to increase overall canopy cover to 35% by 2031
- 2019 achievements include planting 102,332 trees and shrubs, securing nine hectares of environmentally significant lands, and inspiring residents to take action through 292 Region and partner events
- Strategy is delivered through successful partnerships with local municipalities, conservation authorities and non-government organizations, leveraging an additional \$890,000 in funding during 2019
- \$10 million in funding was secured (over eight years) through Infrastructure Canada's Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to support urban tree planting and new woodland creation across the Region

3. Background

Engaging communities and partners since 2001, Greening Strategy programs protect, restore and enhance the natural environment

The Greening Strategy was developed to facilitate on-the-ground action in support of the Region’s goal of a sustainable natural environment. The strategy supports healthy natural environments and sustainable communities for current and future generations through its four action areas: Stewardship and Education, Enhancement and Rehabilitation, Environmental Land Protection and Preservation, and Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge. The success of the program is built upon strong partnerships and engaging residents to take action. The Strategy continues to be an important delivery mechanism for increasing tree canopy and woodland cover in the Region.

Achievements contribute to increasing tree canopy and woodland cover toward Council adopted targets

The York Region Forest Management Plan, approved by council on [November 17, 2016](#) confirmed the Regional Official Plan objective to increase woodland cover to 25% by 2031, and established a Regional tree canopy cover target of 35% by 2031. Canopy cover includes all woodlands, individual trees and small treed areas (Figure 1). Woodlands are heavily treed areas that are at least 0.2 hectares in size. Woodland and canopy cover were last reported to Council on [March 23, 2017](#) as 23.2% and 31% respectively. An updated assessment of tree canopy and woodland cover is scheduled to be completed in 2020 and reported to Council in the 2021 State of the Forests report.

Figure 1

Canopy Cover Measures the Contribution of All Trees and Shrubs



4. Analysis

2019 Greening Strategy achievements continue to demonstrate the Region's leadership in protecting and enhancing the natural environment

Greening Strategy achievements are delivering results and building healthier sustainable communities through strong partnerships (Table 1). Efforts to preserve and protect the natural environment continue to provide a range of recreational, environmental and health benefits to the Region's residents, contributing to a high quality of life. The Regional Greening Strategy supports the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan priority to build sustainable communities and protect the environment. Attachment 1 showcases 2019 Greening Strategy achievements.

Table 1
Greening Strategy Action Areas, Goals, Annual Targets and Achievements

Action Area	Goal	Target (Minimum)	2019 Achievement
Stewardship and Education	Educate residents about the value of green infrastructure and provide opportunities to connect with nature and inspire action	100 outreach events Engage 50,000 residents	292 outreach events Over 50,000 residents engaged
Enhancement and Rehabilitation	Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on both public and private lands	Plant 70,000 trees and shrubs	102,332 trees and shrubs planted
Environmental Land Protection and Preservation	Protect core natural areas and restore linkages	Increasing area (hectares) of environmental lands secured	Nine hectares of environmental land secured
Leadership, Innovation and Knowledge	Share knowledge, demonstrate leadership and be innovative in the protection of the natural environment	Host four technical regional forums Present at two science and technology forums	14 forums hosted with agencies and local municipalities Seven presentations at science and technology forums

Forest Management Plan short term actions targeting increased tree canopy and woodland cover are on track

The York Region Forest Management Plan (2016) identified 34 short term actions to be implemented in 2017-2019 with a focus on increasing tree canopy and woodland cover. Twenty-one of these actions are being delivered through existing programs and 13 have been completed through new initiatives. Ten of the 13 new initiatives have been completed and only three actions remain in progress and are expected to be completed in 2020.

New initiatives included the development of a prioritized planting plan for York Region and preparation of the “It’s in our Nature” York Regional Forest 20 Year Forest Management Plan for 2019-2038. Through these actions, programs and partnerships have been refined to increase resident awareness regarding trees and forests, and increase uptake in planting programs. Attachment 2 summarizes the details and progress on the 34 short term actions. In 2020 work will begin on delivery of the 31 medium term actions identified in the plan. Medium term actions will build on the short term achievements and will include utilizing the results of the prioritized planting plan to inform future tree planting and exploring new tree planting partnerships targeting industrial and commercial land uses.

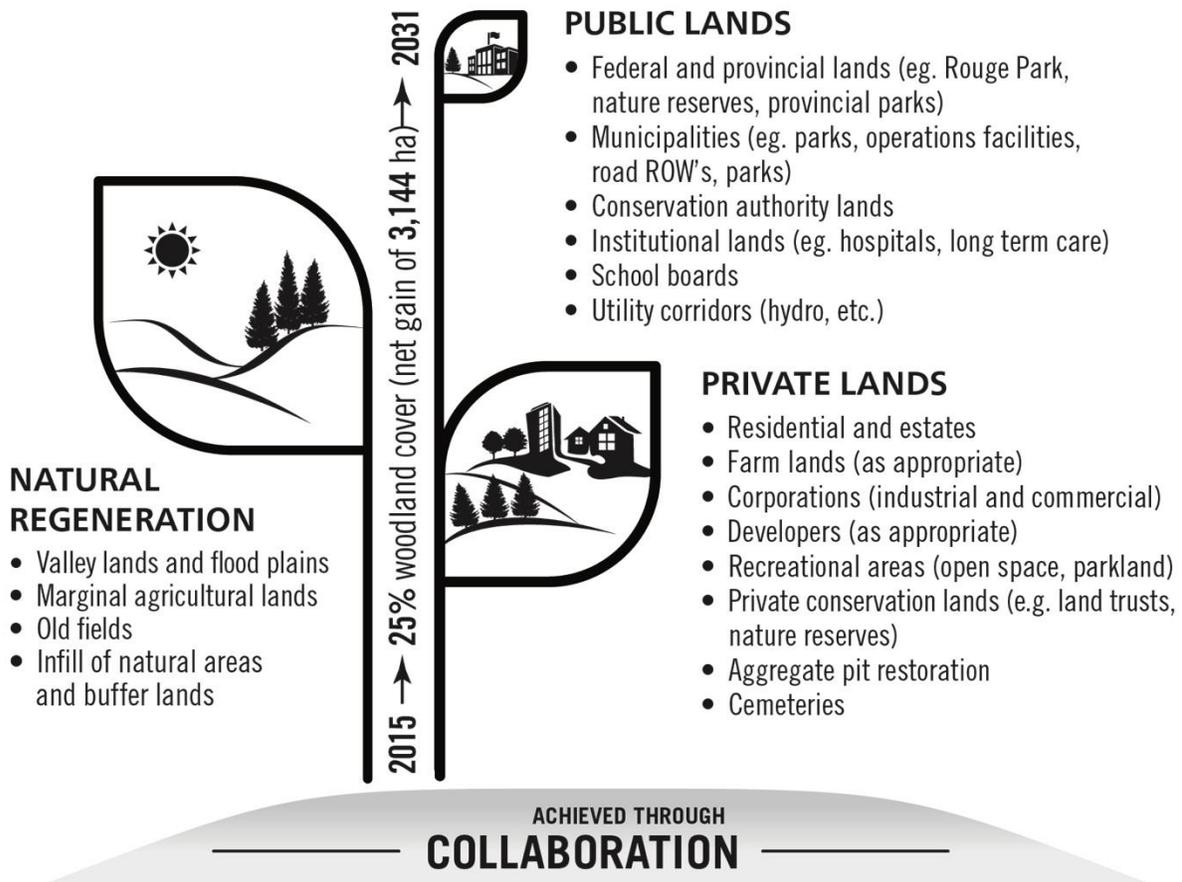
Progress towards tree canopy and woodland cover will be re-assessed in 2020

Woodland cover was last assessed in 2015 at 23.2%. To achieve the Official Plan target of 25% woodland cover by 2031 a net gain of almost 200 hectares per year is required. Increases in woodland cover are achieved through natural expansion of existing woodlands and establishment of new woodlands through tree planting (Figure 2). Each year Greening Strategy initiatives create 25-50 hectares of new woodland through programs and leveraging partnerships. Tree canopy and woodland cover are currently being re-assessed with results being reported to Council in 2021.

Opportunities to close the gap and reach the 2031 target include natural forest regeneration and planting on public and private land. Tree planting efforts from our conservation authorities, local municipalities and private residents help to increase woodland cover. As an example, tree planting efforts in Rouge National Urban Park over the past decade will mature into quantifiable woodland cover. Natural regeneration and growth of these woodlands will contribute to achieving the Region’s target.

Figure 2

Opportunities to Achieve 25% Woodland Cover by 2031



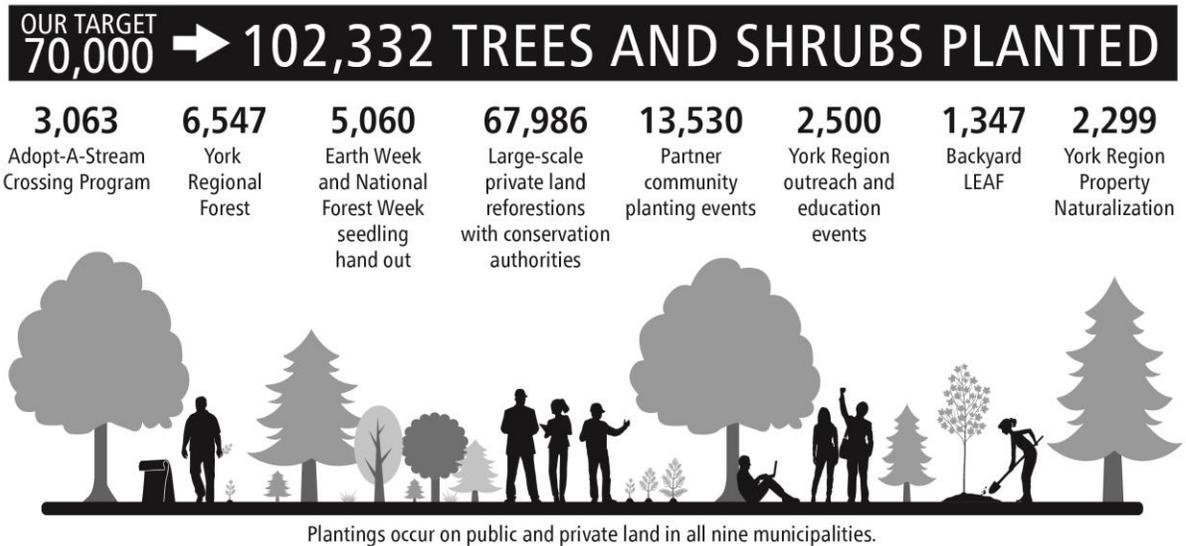
A total of 102,332 trees and shrubs were planted on public and private lands creating an additional 47 hectares of woodland cover

York Region and its partners continued to deliver strong results in 2019 with 102,332 trees and shrubs planted through a number of initiatives (Figure 3). Partners are able to use the Region's contribution to leverage additional resources through other funding opportunities.

Planting efforts created 47 hectares of woodland cover, primarily located in the Regional Greenlands System. Over 67,000 trees were planted through Grow Your Legacy, a subsidized large-scale planting program delivered by conservation authorities. Collaboration between Regional departments resulted in the planting of 14,180 trees on Regional property through a combination of programs including Adopt-A-Stream, York Regional Forest planting, large-scale private land reforestation and naturalizing of Regional non-forest properties. These actions exemplify the Region's commitment to increase tree canopy and woodland cover.

Figure 3

2019 Tree and Shrub Planting Accomplishments



Land securement protected nine hectares of environmentally significant lands in 2019

In 2019 a nine hectare property was secured in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville to expand an existing York Regional Forest, the Davis Drive Tract. Acquisition of this property provides opportunities to increase woodland cover through tree planting and promotes outdoor recreation opportunities through an expanded trail system. With this acquisition a total of 1,376 hectares of land have been secured through the Greening Strategy since 2001.

Funding provided through Infrastructure Canada’s Disaster Mitigation and Adoption Fund will be used to acquire and reforest an additional 100 hectares of land over the next eight years. Managed as York Regional Forest these lands will allow the expansion of existing trail networks, promoting healthy active lifestyles for Region residents.

Communities moved to action through strong partnerships, creating 292 environmental outreach and education opportunities for 13,061 participants

Communities coming together can inspire residents to take personal actions to protect and preserve the natural environment. The Greening Strategy engages residents through education and outreach programs including interpretive forest walks, presence at local festivals/events, and a variety of environmental outreach activities delivered by partners. In 2019, over 50,000 residents were engaged through a variety of media and activities, including 13,061 residents participating in 292 outreach events. More than half of these events were delivered by partners; feedback from participants indicates a strong interest in learning more about the natural environment.

York Region is recognized as a global leader in protecting the natural environment

The Region's Green Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (2017) was recognized on the global stage as a silver award winner at the Green World Awards for environmental best practices. This award is presented in 2019 by the Green World Organization, which is an international, independent, non-profit, non-political, environment group, dedicated to recognizing, rewarding and promoting environmental best practices around the world.

In 2019, York Region was approved for \$10 million in funding through Infrastructure Canada's Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to implement a natural infrastructure project. The project will result in over 400,000 trees and shrubs being planted across the Region, including the establishment of 100 hectares of new woodland. The goal of the project aims to mitigate the risk of flooding and lessen the impact of extreme heat events in urban areas.

5. Financial

Through partnerships, the Greening Strategy leverages significant resources and funds for each action area. In 2019, \$1,840,000 was allocated to the Greening Strategy, including a \$825,000 contribution to the Land Securement reserve. The remaining \$1,015,000 supports a number of programs and partnerships including large scale reforestation, backyard tree planting, outdoor education and land securement partnership agreements. The Region's investment in the Greening Strategy leveraged an additional \$890,000 in funding for program delivery.

6. Local Impact

Greening Strategy programs provide local municipalities and residents with opportunities to enhance the natural environment. Sustainable communities are built and supported through greening initiatives that prioritize protection of Regional and local natural heritage systems.

Local municipalities have a long history of partnering with York Region on natural environmental projects and programs, and have benefited directly from the Greening Strategy. Local Municipalities are consulted or involved in the development and implementation of many programs and projects related to outreach, tree planting and environmental land protection and preservation initiatives. Local municipal staff are active on Greening Strategy working groups including the Land Securement Working Group, Invasive Species Working Group and Urban Forestry Forum. Collaborative forums provide an opportunity for information sharing, alignment and experience sharing.

7. Conclusion

A sustainable natural environment built through partnerships and community engagement is key to delivering Greening Strategy programs and projects. Success continues to be made towards increasing tree canopy and woodland cover with 102,332 trees and shrubs planted in 2019. Continuous improvement, leadership and innovation allow the Greening Strategy to adapt, and create stronger programs and partnerships. These achievements demonstrate the Region's leadership and the value of the Greening Strategy as a proactive strategy supporting a healthy sustainable Region.

For more information on this report, please contact Laura McDowell, Director of Environmental Promotion and Protection 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75077 or James Lane, Manager, Natural Heritage and Forestry 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75271. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Erin Mahoney, M. Eng.**
Commissioner of Environmental Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

March 27, 2020
Attachments (2)
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