It’s in our NATURE

Management Plan for the York Regional Forest

2019-2038

Ian Buchanan and James Lane
Natural Heritage and Forestry
Environmental Promotion and Protection

York Region
Purpose:

Present the new “It’s in Our Nature: York Regional Forest Management Plan”

Outline:

2. The Forest today
3. Engaging stakeholders and Forest users
4. The Plan – It’s In Our Nature
5. Achieving the Vision – next steps
• For 10,000 years Indigenous peoples lived in harmony with the productive landscape

• 1800’s European settlement with forested lands being cleared for farms and homes

• Forest removal resulted in environmental devastation – ‘blow sands’

• 1920’s Provincial government Agreement Forest Program - focus on land acquisition, planting trees and restoring forests

• York County first acquired land in 1924 – Hollidge tract, Town of Whitchurch Stouffville
Late 1990’s Agreement Forest program ended by Province

1998 Council adopted York Regional Forest Management Plan and assumed management

1998 – 2018 Management Plan focused on:
  - ecological sustainability
  - recreation and educational use
  - silvicultural management

Key links to Regional Official Plan, Forest Stewardship Council certification, and Green Infrastructure Asset Management Plan

Guides Excellence in Forest Management
The Forest has grown and flourished:
- planted forests transitioning to native diverse forests
- 23 tracts totaling 2,400 hectares
- 148 kilometers of trails – with 4.3 km accessible trails

The Forest hosts more than 600,000 visits annually

Residents from across the Region and beyond make the Forest a destination
Top Public Uses - 2016 - 17 Forest User Survey

- Multi-use trails support outdoor recreational activities
- All season interest and use
- Recreational uses compliment amenities provided by local parks and Conservation Areas

Note: Most recent survey results. Respondents could select more than one activity (percentages add up to more than 100%).
Engaging Stakeholders and Forest Users

Regional Forest Advisory Team:
Core user groups

Organizations Engaged:
Local Municipalities, Indigenous peoples, Non-governmental Organizations

Technical Advisory Team:
Expert input

Forest User Survey
Oct 2016 - Aug 2017
- Understand forest uses, trends, and needs (2,307 of responses)

Feedback Survey
2017 - May 2018
- Online public survey (857 of responses)

Key Stakeholders Meeting #1
September
- Background research
- Online survey results

Management Plan
September
- Background research report

Management Plan Draft #1
February
- Key Stakeholders Meeting #2
April
  - Vision and goals
- Public Information Sessions
  May
  - Whitchurch-Stouffville, Georgina, and Newmarket
  (180 people)
- Management Plan Draft #2
June
- Final Public Comment Period
  October
  - Plan available online for comment
- Management Plan Final Draft
  October
- Review and Approval
  - Committee and Council

2016 2017 2018 2019
• Existing management practices are sound
• Balancing environmental protection while providing benefits to residents is key
• Need to manage increasing use
• Address impacts of climate change and invasive species
• Existing rules work well and focus should be on education
• Management of dog walking activities needs to be reviewed
Vision for the York Regional Forest

As the heart of the Region’s natural landscape, a healthy and ecologically diverse York Regional Forest sustains its communities and inspires its people.

- Forest Vision achieved through three goals
Goal 1 - Strengthen Ecological Integrity

Continue to strengthen the health, diversity, resiliency and sustainability of the York Regional Forest.

- Protect ecological features and improve ecosystem integrity and biodiversity
- Use innovative practices to restore and protect the Forest
- Implement best practices to prevent and mitigate impacts of invasive species
- Increase ecological resilience and minimize impacts of climate change
Demonstrate that the Forest provides a wealth of environmental and social benefits, making it key to the Region’s vision of healthy, thriving communities.

- Review and assess environmental and social benefits of the Forest

- Ensure the Forest continues to demonstrate leadership through science, innovation and sharing best practices

Studies have shown that forests improve:

- Air quality
- Water quality and quantity
- Migratory bird habitat
- Carbon sequestration
- Mental health and well-being
- Stormwater interception
- Local biological diversity
- Natural shade

Studies have shown that forests reduce:

- Flood risk
- Urban heat island effect
- Energy consumption
- Climate change
- Airborne pollutants
Encourage public use that inspires respect for the Forest and a connection with nature.

• Provide an exceptional visitor experience

• Ensure that public use and facilities are managed to protect the Forest and keep visitors safe
## Providing an Exceptional Visitor Experience

### Acceptable Uses
- Walking, running, hiking
- Dog walking
- Cycling and mountain biking
- Horseback riding
- Cross-country skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Snowmobiling (only on OFSC trails)
- Nature appreciation and wildlife viewing
- Hunting (limited to specific tracts in the Town of Georgina)
- Fishing
- Permitted activities by clubs, associations, services groups, for profit organizations (requires a Forest Use Permit)
- Scientific research (requires a Forest Use Permit)
- Geocaching

### Prohibited Uses
- Lighting fires
- Smoking
- Cooking or heating devices (use of BBQ or other portable cooking devices is prohibited)
- Littering or Dumping
- Camping
- Use of unauthorized vehicles, including ATV’s and dirt bikes
- Damaging or removing trees, plants, fungi or other materials
- Alcohol consumption
- Paintballing, air gun, or pellet gun use
- Fireworks
- Property and trail altering or trail creation
- Encroachment
- Private Access/ entranceways
- Operation of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones)

### Compliance is achieved through education and enforcement including:
- Forest Festivals and Events promoting education and stewardship
- Natures Classroom education programs
- Regional Forest Advisory Team advocacy
- Legislation (e.g. Trespass to Property Act, Dog Owners Liability Act)
- York Regional Police liaison officer
### Summary of Proposed Fees and Charges

#### Not-for-Profit (charitable) organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest Use Permit application fee</td>
<td>no charge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### For-profit (commercial) organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest Use Permit application fee</td>
<td>$460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-intensive coordinated events/activities</td>
<td>no additional fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive events/activities e.g. Film production</td>
<td>additional $1,100 per day fee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Rationale for permits, fees and charges is to help regulate activities, minimize risks and offset costs
- All activities are subject to the rules and guidelines regarding permitted uses, as set out in the Plan
- If Regional staff need to be present during the event, the Forest Use Permit holder may pay additional fees
### GOAL 1: Strengthen Ecological Integrity

**SHORT TERM ACTIONS (2019-2023)**
- Assess the vulnerability to climate change and develop an adaption and mitigation plan
- Update invasive species inventories, review mitigation practices, and develop an invasive species action plan

**MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS (2024-2028)**
- Review Legacy Conservation Forest Strategy
- Review science-based silvicultural practices to inform management and operating procedures
- Develop an Information System to capture ecological features, species at risk, invasive species and infrastructure assets

### GOAL 2: Foster an Understanding of the Broader Benefits

**SHORT TERM ACTIONS (2019-2023)**
- Develop a comprehensive monitoring framework that includes ecological and social values

### GOAL 3: Inspire People

**SHORT TERM ACTIONS (2019-2023)**
- Review dog walking practices and options to better balance visitor experience with ecological integrity
- Develop a visitor experience plan to enhance residents’ connections with nature

**MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS (2024-2028)**
- Review and refine forest stewardship and education programs to capture the broad benefits of the Regional Forest
- Develop a trails strategy to guide management of trail infrastructure, support wayfinding and contribute to an exceptional visitor experience
Council Recommendations


• Council approve the fees for permitted activities in the York Regional Forest, as set out in Attachment 3 and authorize Schedule A of the fees and charges bylaw (Bylaw 2010-15) to be amended to implement these fees

• The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities and Conservation Authorities for information