

Committee of the Whole
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It's in our
NATURE

Management Plan for the York Regional Forest

2019-2038

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York Region

Purpose and outline

Purpose:

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

Outline:

1. History of the Forest 1924 -1998
2. The Forest today
3. Engaging stakeholders and Forest users
4. The Plan – It’s In Our Nature
5. Achieving the Vision – next steps



History of the York Regional Forest

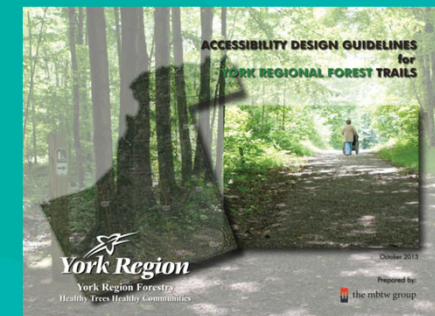
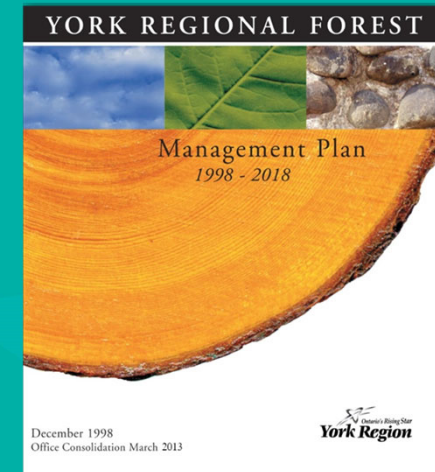
- For 10,000 years Indigenous peoples lived in harmony with the productive landscape
- 1800's European settlement with forested lands being cleared for farms and homes
- Forest removal resulted in environmental devastation – 'blow sands'
- 1920's Provincial government Agreement Forest Program - focus on land acquisition, planting trees and restoring forests
- York County first acquired land in 1924 – Hollidge tract, Town of Whitchurch Stouffville



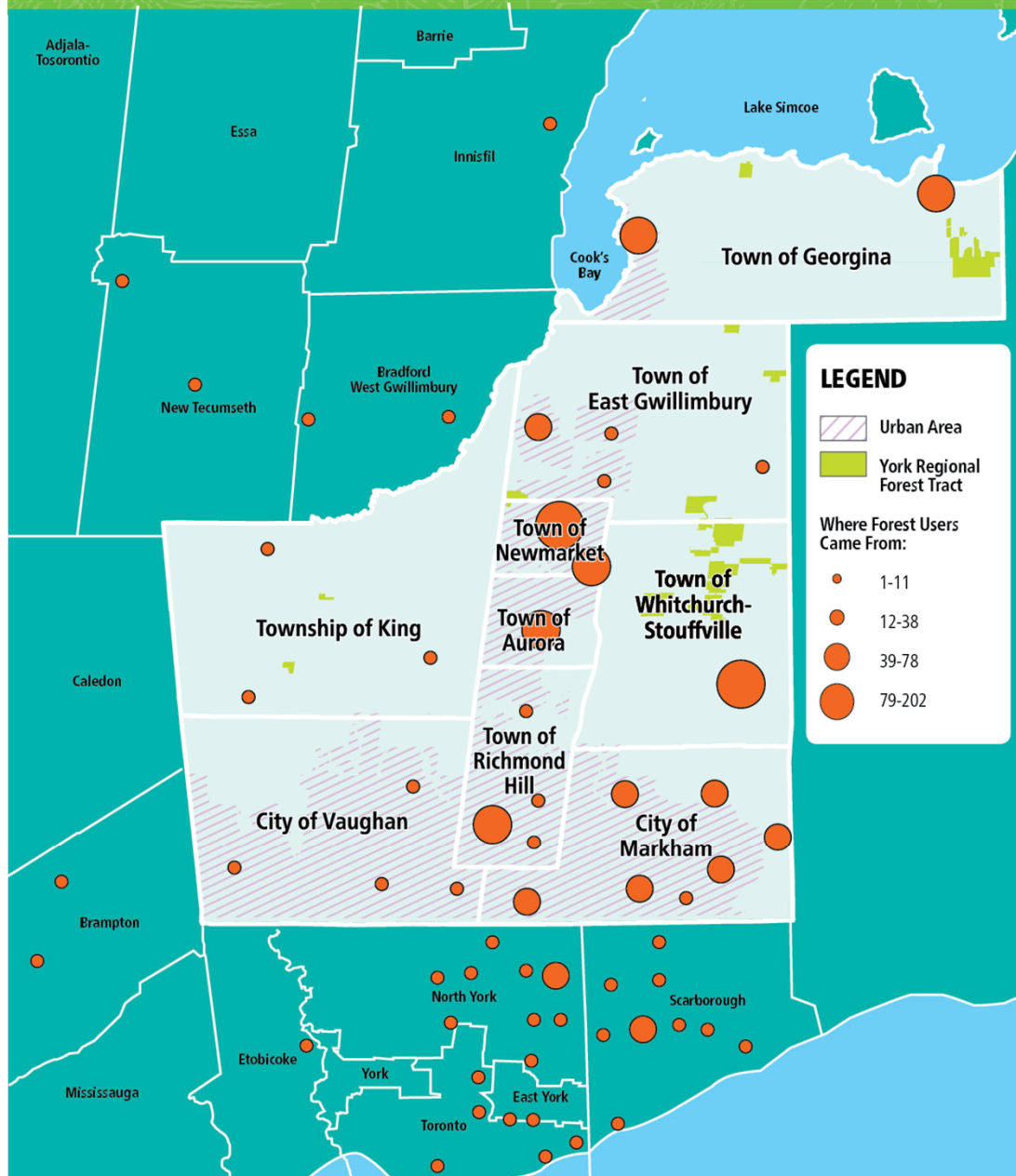
Why we have a management plan 1998 - 2018

- 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

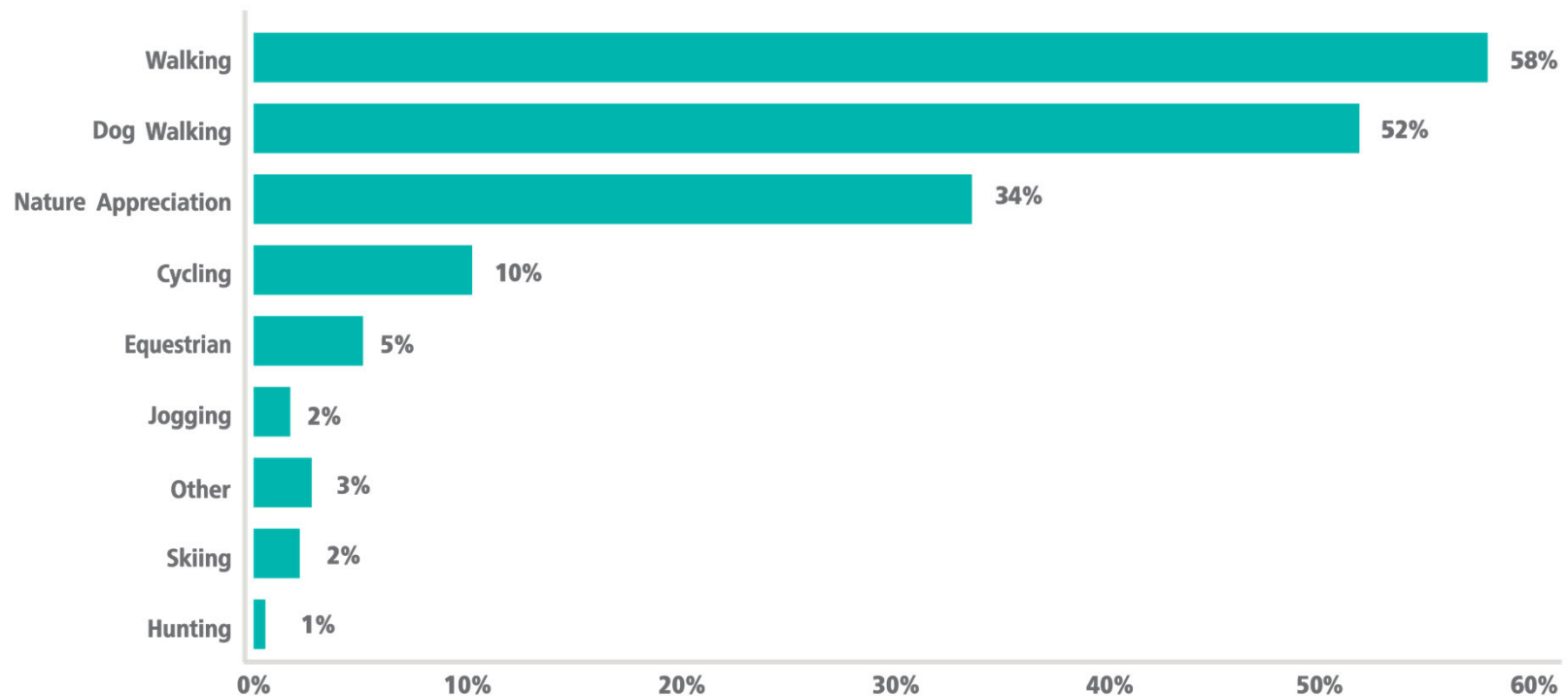


York Regional Forest - today



- 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



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

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

Engaging Stakeholders and Forest Users

Regional Forest Advisory Team:

Core user groups

Organizations Engaged:

Local Municipalities, Indigenous peoples,
Non-governmental Organizations

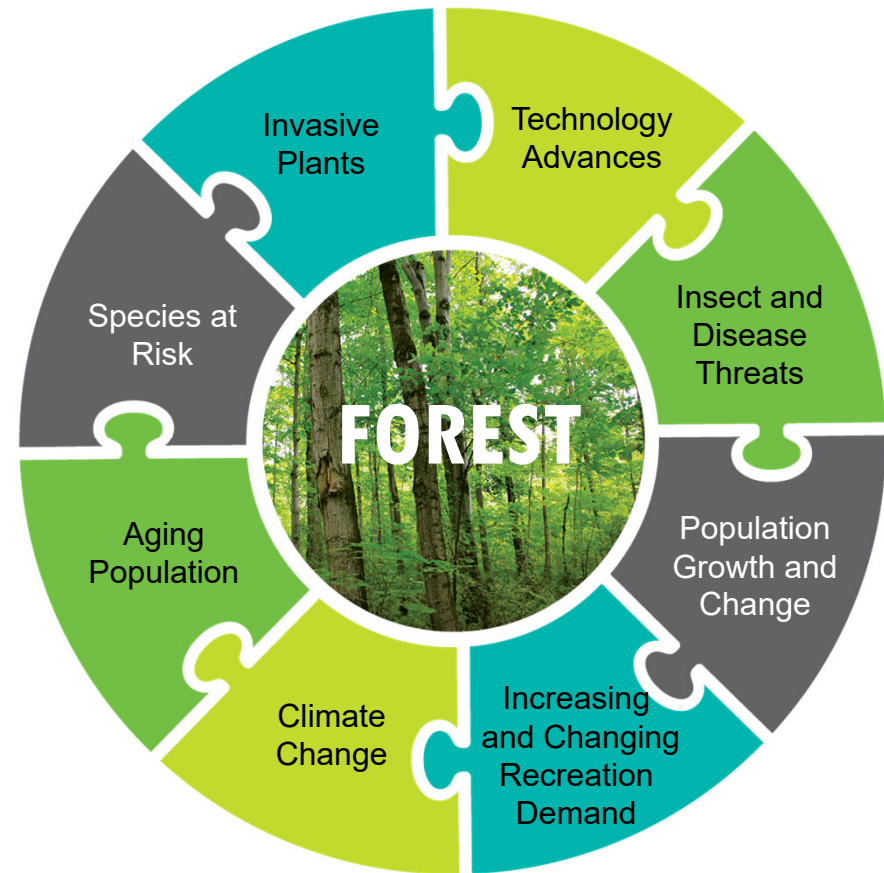
Technical Advisory Team:

Expert input



What we heard

- 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



*Multiple Drivers and Risks
Shape the Forest's Future*

Continuing the Legacy with an Updated Vision

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



Goal 2 — Foster an Understanding of the Broader Benefits

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

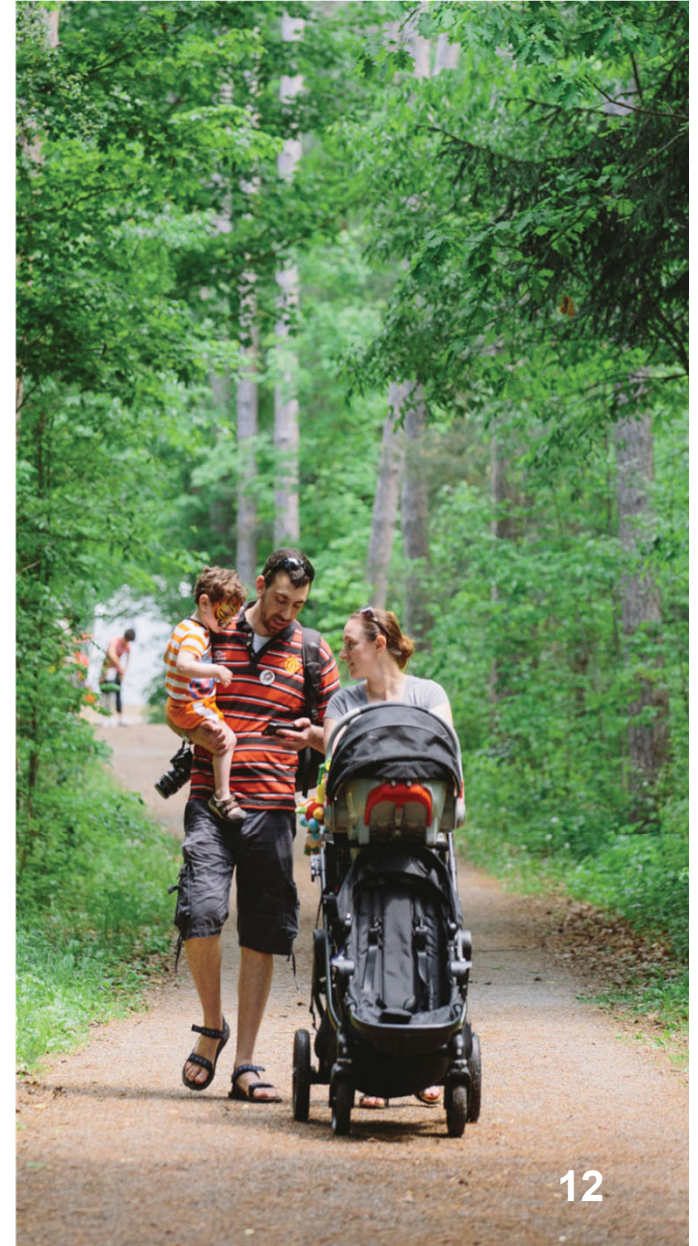
Studies have shown that **forests reduce:**

- Flood risk
- Urban heat island effect
- Energy consumption
- Climate change
- Airborne pollutants

Goal 3 — Inspire People

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

Forest Use Permit application fee: no charge

For-profit (commercial) organizations

Forest Use Permit application fee: \$460

- Non-intensive coordinated events/activities: no additional fee
- Intensive events/activities e.g. Film production: additional \$1,100 per day fee

- 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

Putting the Plan into Action

GOAL 1:

Strengthen Ecological Integrity

GOAL 2:

Foster an Understanding of the
Broader Benefits

GOAL 3:

Inspire People

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

- Develop a comprehensive monitoring framework that includes ecological and social values

- 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 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

- 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 “It’s in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest (2019 – 2038)”
- 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

