



Report of the Commissioner of Public Works

2025 Annual Regional Greening Strategy Achievements and State of the Forest

1. Recommendation

The Regional Clerk circulates this Report to Clerks of the Region's nine local municipalities, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

2. Purpose

This Report updates Council on significant Greening Strategy achievements for 2025 and progress towards canopy and woodland cover objectives.

Key Points:

- In 2025, the Greening Strategy supported 150,320 trees and shrubs planted, 133 resident engagement events and utilization of over \$2.6M in external funding
- Planting through the Greening Strategy supported strong progress on key Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) deliverables, including planting 52,635 trees and shrubs in urban areas and 50,520 seedlings on land secured through DMAF
- York Region is the first municipality to achieve Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Urban and Community Forest Sustainability certification
- Canopy and woodland cover have increased to 33.9% and 24.8%, respectively

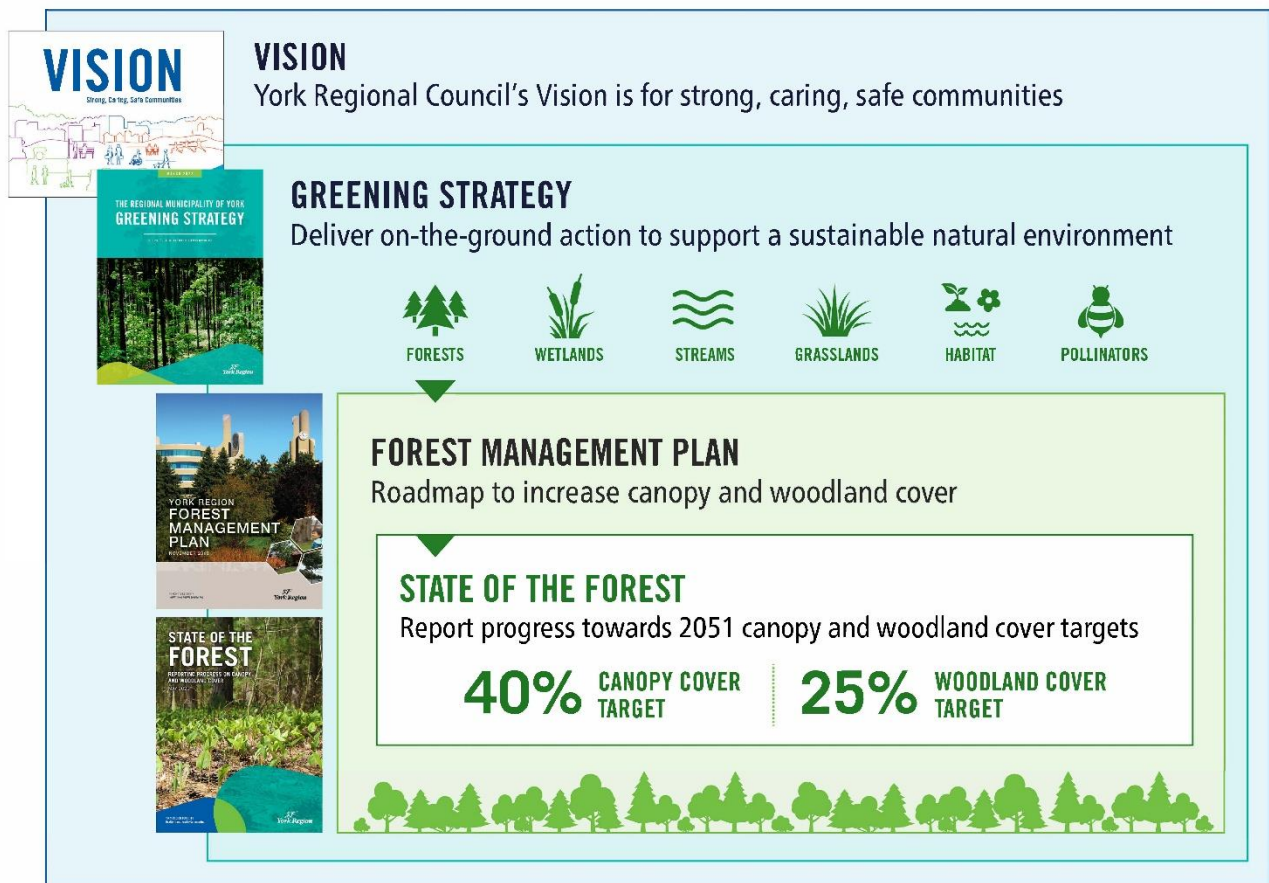
3. Background

Greening Strategy continues to grow a greener York Region

The Greening Strategy (the “Strategy”), originally approved by Council in 2001 and updated in [2022](#), supports achieving the Region’s goal of sustainable and resilient communities. The Strategy delivers results through partnerships with community partners and local municipalities to protect and improve the natural environment, including trees, forests, streams, wetlands, grasslands and other essential habitats (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Key Strategies and Plans Deliver on the Region’s Goal for a Sustainable Environment



Ecosystem services provided by trees and forests and progress towards canopy and woodland cover targets are reported through the State of the Forest

Trees and forests provide a multitude of environmental, health and economic benefits that make communities more sustainable and contribute to the Region’s efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Council approved York Region Forest Management Plan on [November 17, 2016](#), to

recognize the important role of trees and forests. The Plan established objectives to increase tree canopy cover to 40% and woodland cover to 25% by 2051. Progress towards canopy and woodland targets is reported to Council through the State of the Forest report (Attachment 1) and was last reported on May 13, 2021, at 33.4% and 23.6%, respectively.

4. Analysis

Greening Strategy achievements contribute to a healthy and sustainable York Region

In 2025, targets were met or exceeded in all Greening Strategy action areas (Table 1). Appendix A presents a more detailed summary of 2025 achievements.

Table 1
Greening Strategy 2025 Achievements

| Action Area | Goal | Target (Minimum) | 2025 Achievement | |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| Enhancement and Rehabilitation | Enhance and rehabilitate the natural environment on public and private lands | Plant 70,000 trees and shrubs | 150,320 trees and shrubs planted | ☑ |
| Environmental Land Protection and Preservation | Protect and enhance natural areas and create and strengthen connections and corridors | Increasing area (hectares) of environmental lands secured | Secured 1.4 hectares of environmental land | ☑ |
| Community Stewardship and Education | Inspire stewardship and action through education and facilitating connections with nature | 100 outreach events 10,000 residents participated in programs | 133 outreach events 15,783 program participants | ☑ |
| Innovation and Knowledge | Seek and transfer knowledge and demonstrate leadership and innovation in the protection and promotion of the natural environment | Lead or present at 15 professional learning events | Led or presented at 20 professional learning events | ☑ |

Through new and existing Greening Strategy Programs, York Region planted a record high 150,320 trees and shrubs resulting in creation of 56.6 hectares of new woodlands. This exceeded the Region's target to plant 70,000 trees and shrubs annually. The target is set according to base program funding. Through external funding, including DMAF and Growing Canada's Community Canopies, the Region has been able to complete additional planting beyond its target. With DMAF funding ending in 2027, the Region expects that planting numbers will align closer to target. Trees and shrubs are planted through several programs that support planting projects for schools, private residents, municipalities, conservation authorities, Regional streets and the York Regional Forest. Trees planted through the Greening Strategy support progress towards the Region's canopy and woodland cover objectives.

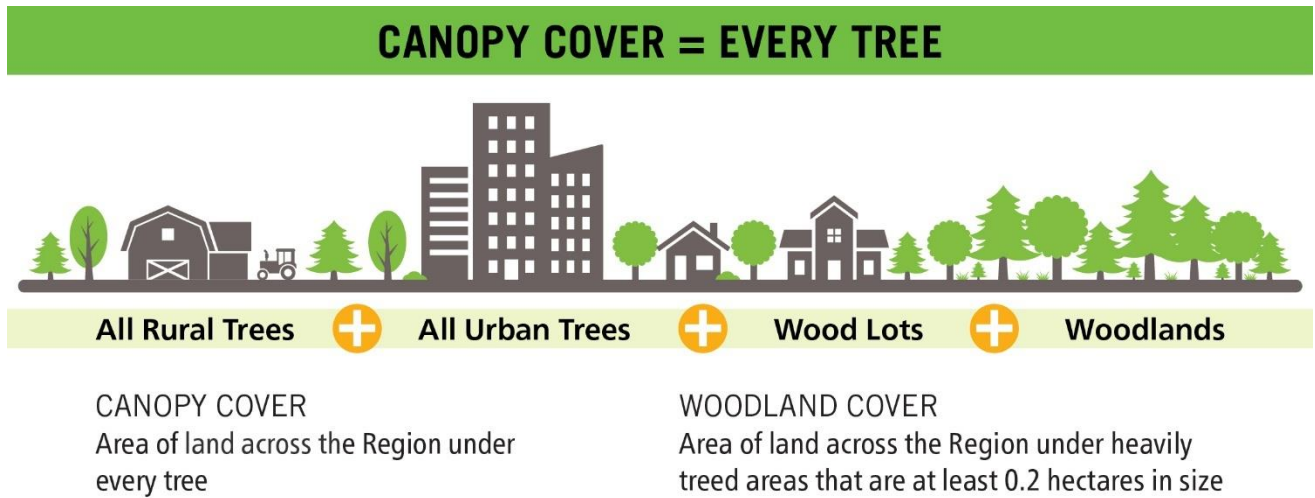
Canopy and woodland cover have increased to 33.9% and 24.8%, respectively

In recognition of the vital role that trees and forests play, Council approved the York Region Forest Management Plan on [November 17, 2016](#), including objectives to increase canopy cover to 40% and woodland cover to 25% by 2051. The Plan expands on the Greening Strategy, identifying a series of short, medium and long-term actions focused on increasing canopy and woodland cover. Progress towards these targets is reported every five years through a State of the Forest report.

The 2026 State of the Forest (Attachment 1) provides an updated assessment of canopy and woodland cover across the Region, and outcomes of forest studies completed in partnership with local municipalities and conservation authorities between 2021 and 2025. These studies, completed every 10 years, provide a better understanding of what trees the Region has, vulnerabilities of trees and forests, and quantify the benefits they provide.

Canopy cover refers to the area of land under all trees, including all urban and rural trees, and woodland cover (Figure 2). Woodland cover represents more densely treed areas that are at least 0.2 hectares in size.

Figure 2
Canopy and Woodland Cover



Canopy and woodland cover estimates were updated using sophisticated methods that included high resolution multi-spectral satellite imagery and LiDAR. The Region has adopted a revised LiDAR-based woodland cover methodology to ensure greater accuracy and enable more detailed assessments across the Region. This approach reduces discrepancies caused by manual interpretation, aligns with the current LiDAR-based canopy cover assessment, and supports future reporting.

Canopy cover is 33.9% (59,478 hectares), an increase of 0.5 percentage points (786 hectares) since 2021. Tree planting and growth of young trees contributed to most of this increase. Woodland cover currently accounts for 73% (43,399 hectares) of total canopy cover across the Region. The 2026 State of the Forest measured woodland cover to be 24.8%, a change of 1.2 percentage points (1,898 hectares) since 2021. Most of this change is attributed to improved assessment methods with a modest portion coming from natural succession and plantings.

Continued commitment and steady incremental growth will help achieve goals

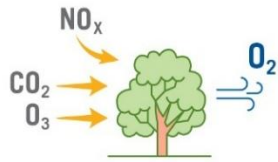
To achieve the Region’s goal of 25% woodland cover, a net gain of 416 hectares is required. Attaining the woodland cover target by 2051 is realistic, given that annual growth from the first assessment in 1999 to present day has averaged 51 hectares. Continued implementation of tree and woodland protection and restoration projects, combined with natural succession, is required to support continued progress toward the goals.

Regional trees and forests provide many services and benefits to residents

The State of the Forest report highlights several of these key forest-based benefits (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Benefits of Forests to Residents



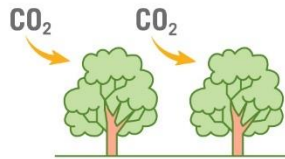
BETTER AIR QUALITY

Our forests remove **2,000 tonnes** of air pollutants annually and produce oxygen. This benefit is valued at **\$17 million** in reduced healthcare costs.



COOLING OF COMMUNITIES

Trees help reduce the urban heat effect by shading streets and buildings. This can lower temperatures by **up to 5°C**.



CLEANER AIR AND CLIMATE PROTECTION

Trees in York Region remove about **500,000 tonnes** of carbon dioxide each year — similar to taking 111,000 cars off the road. This is worth about **\$151 million** in reduced healthcare and property damage costs.



STORMWATER CONTROL

Trees and shrubs help manage rainwater by reducing **3 million cubic metres** of runoff every year, equal to 1,200 Olympic-sized swimming pools. This saves about **\$8 million** in stormwater treatment costs.

A new Forest Master Plan will improve protection, restoration, and enhancement of the Region’s natural heritage system, including trees and forests

The Forest Management Plan and Greening Strategy have complementary and sometimes overlapping goals and actions. To reduce this duplication and improve program delivery, a new Forest Master Plan is proposed that will combine existing strategies and plans into a single document. Planning for the Forest Master Plan has begun and work on its development will begin in late 2026.

Partner collaboration key to managing impact of invasive species on York Region's trees and natural areas

Ontario has more invasive species than any other province or territory in Canada. York Region's trees and woodlands are now being threatened by emerging invasive species such as hemlock woolly adelgid, oak wilt and spotted lanternfly (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Emerging Invasive Species of Concern



Hemlock woolly adelgid is a tiny aphid-like insect native to Japan that feeds on and kills native eastern hemlock trees. This species was most recently discovered in the Rouge National Urban Park in May 2025. Oak wilt is a fungal pathogen that infects and kills native oak trees. Oak wilt was confirmed for the first time in Ontario in 2023 in the City of Niagara Falls and the Township of Springwater. No new detections have been found since 2023. Spotted lanternfly, a very colourful flying insect originally from Asia, will feed on more than 100 species of trees and plants and is a direct threat to grape, fruit tree and forestry industries. Presently, spotted lanternfly has not been confirmed in Ontario. More information on these invasive species can be found on the [Invasive Species Centre](#) website.

Staff are preparing threat assessments for these emerging species to understand potential impacts and mitigation options to help protect Regional assets while promoting increased awareness among residents and visitors to York Regional Forest, in hopes early detection will allow for control and potential eradication.

Staff continue to collaborate with local municipalities and surrounding jurisdictions in monitoring, prevention, education and outreach activities as well as sharing latest science.

York Region is the first municipality in the world and first organization in Canada to achieve Sustainable Forestry Initiative Urban and Community Forest Sustainability certification

On April 17, 2025, York Region became the first municipality in the world to achieve SFI's Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard [certification](#). This recognition reflects York Region's

environmental leadership and commitment to sustainable forest management. This historic milestone was achieved after successfully completing a rigorous audit process and applies to over 7,700 hectares of urban and community forests, including 4,610 hectares along Regional road rights-of-way, 416 hectares of Region owned properties and the 2,673 hectare York Regional Forest. On April 17, 2026 the Region was also presented with a 2025 Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Excellence in Conservation for the York Regional Forests' 100th anniversary celebrations.

5. Financial Considerations

Greening Strategy leverages partner support and additional funds to deliver strong results

This report does not present current or anticipated financial changes to the Region's budget or fiscal position.

In 2025, \$3.8M was spent on Greening Strategy programs, including \$2.6M to support large-scale reforestation, backyard tree planting, outdoor education, and contribution to Land Securement Reserve. The remaining \$1.2M supported DMAF urban tree planting and environmental land purchases and was funded from the Land Securement Reserve. Natural Heritage and Forestry assets, including those related to the Greening Strategy, have a replacement value of \$2.1B and continue to appreciate each year.

Through partnerships, the Greening Strategy leverages in-kind resources and external funding for each action area. In 2025, the Region and partners leveraged a total of \$2.7M in additional funding toward projects and programming, including \$1.2M in funding received by the Region from DMAF and \$61K from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Green Municipal Fund for Growing Canada's Community Canopies (GCCC). The balance of leveraged funding was received directly by partners. The Region is exploring an application to GCCC to support additional street tree planting in 2027.

6. Local Impact

Through Greening Strategy programs and actions, local municipalities and residents take action to protect and enhance the Region's natural environment. Local municipalities and non-government organizations have benefited directly from the Greening Strategy through on-the-ground actions or direct support for their programs. Local municipalities and residents remain key stakeholders in the development and implementation of new programs to support a sustainable York Region.

Forest studies and canopy and woodland assessments support implementation of forest management planning and programs at the Regional and local municipal level. Results of these studies and assessments are shared with local municipalities to plan and manage trees and forests locally.

7. Conclusion

With over 150,000 trees and shrubs planted in 2025, York Region continues to achieve high levels of success in growing the Regional tree canopy and woodland cover. York Region's receipt of SFI certification reflects the Region's environmental leadership and commitment to sustainable forest management. The Regional Clerk will circulate this Report to Clerks of the Region's nine local municipalities, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

For more information on this report, please contact Lindsay Milne, Director, Waste Management and Forestry, Operations and Services, Public Works at 1-877-464-9675 ext.75714. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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April 21, 2026

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Appendix A – Greening Strategy Achievements Summary

Attachment 1 – State of the Forest Report (17151262)

2025 GREENING STRATEGY ACHIEVEMENTS

York Region's Greening Strategy puts into action the Region's commitment to a healthier, more resilient natural environment.



ENHANCEMENT AND REHABILITATION

Planting trees, shrubs and pollinator plants, restoring streams and wetlands, and establishing new forests, hedgerows and meadows ensure a sustainable environment for future generations.

PLANTED 150,320 TREES AND SHRUBS
EXCEEDED TARGET OF 70,000 PLANTINGS

150,320 trees and shrubs were planted through more than **20 partnerships**:

- 28,138 Grow Your Legacy
- 485 Backyard Trees
- 4,777 Ontario Streams Program
- 5,981 Green Action Partnership Fund
- 103,155 Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund
- 7,784 Other Programs

Plantings occurred on both public and private land in a variety of habitats.

56.6 HECTARES
OF WOODLAND COVER CREATED IN 2025

| TARGETS | | | |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| WOODLAND COVER | | CANOPY COVER | |
| 2026* | 2051 Target | 2026* | 2051 Target |
| 24.8% | 25% | 33.9% | 40% |

*Woodland and Canopy cover is assessed every five years.

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION

Inspiring stewardship and action through education and facilitating connections with nature is one of our strongest tools.

133 OUTREACH EVENTS

Residents reconnected with nature and learned about the natural environment through a variety of events hosted by York Region and partners. These events were delivered through in-person and digital media.

15,783 RESIDENTS
PARTICIPATED IN GREENING STRATEGY SUPPORTED PROGRAMS

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FOREST SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD CERTIFICATION



York Region became the first municipality in the world to achieve the Sustainable Forestry Initiative's (SFI) **Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard certification**. This recognition reflects York Region's environmental leadership and commitment to sustainable forest management.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION

A healthy, extensive and connected natural heritage system is essential for biodiversity, and public green spaces are important amenities that provide recreation opportunities and support the physical and mental well-being of residents.

1,629 HECTARES
OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT LAND PROTECTED

1.4 Hectares of protected land added to the York Regional Forest in the Town of Georgina.

ESTIMATED 30 MILLION
TREES TOTAL IN YORK REGION

INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE

York Region remains a leader in the protection and promotion of natural environment through its policies, programs and use of innovative strategies.

Exchanged information, shared accomplishments, and continued innovation at **10 Regional Forums** and **10 technical presentations** throughout the Region.

\$1,936,505 LEVERAGED
TOWARDS GREENING STRATEGY PROJECTS



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