

5

YORK REGIONAL FOREST FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC) CERTIFICATION AND HALL TRACT REFORESTATION PARTNERSHIP

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, March 22, 2005, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council authorize the renewal of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) SmartWood Program, Forest Management Certification Agreement, between the Rain Forest Alliance and The Regional Municipality of York, as outlined in this report.
2. Regional Council enter into the following York Regional Forest Hall Tract agreements:
 - a) a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) with Natural Resources Canada, setting out the framework for cooperation in forest activities associated with the Forest 2020 program; and
 - b) a Project Agreement with Natural Resources Canada for the implementation of a Forest 2020 research trial.
3. The Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to execute the agreements on behalf of The Regional Municipality of York, subject to review by Legal Services.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to obtain Council authority to execute:

1. An agreement to allow for the renewal of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), SmartWood Program Certification of the York Regional Forest with the Rain Forest Alliance, and
2. An MOU and Project Agreement to implement the Forest 2020 tree planting program in partnership with Natural Resources Canada, including a 4 hectares research plot in the York Regional Forest Hall Tract.

These activities are consistent with the goals and objectives of the 20 year Regional Forest Management Plan (1998-2018).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 History of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification

In 2000, the York Regional Forest became one of the first public forests in Canada to obtain FSC Certification. The Rain Forest Alliance is an international non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of forests for the benefit of the global community. Their mission is to develop and promote economically viable and socially desirable alternatives to the destruction of forests.

Following an audit initiated in 1999, the York Regional Forest was certified on February 10, 2000 by the Rainforest Alliance through the SmartWood Program. For the past four years, the Regional Forest has been audited each year to ensure compliance with the conditions of our certificate and maintain our certified status. Our five year certificate expires in 2005.

3.2 Hall Tract Reforestation

In the spring of 2003, as part of the Regional Greening Strategy, the Region acquired a 25 hectare (approx. 60 acres) property adjacent to the Hall Tract (*see Attachment 1*). Some of the property is forested, however, much of the property is former agricultural land and presents a strategic reforestation opportunity. The management plan for this property outlines a reforestation program, signage, and access improvements to help integrate this property into the York Regional Forest.

To facilitate tree planting on these lands, Regional staff have negotiated a cost sharing tree planting partnership with Natural Resources Canada and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. The property is eligible for inclusion in a reforestation initiative with Natural Resources Canada under the Forest 2020 Plantation Demonstration and Assessment Initiative.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The following sections provide an overview of (i) the Forest Certification program which will apply to all of the York Regional Forest properties (18 tracts, 2200 ha), and (ii) the Forest 2020 tree planting program initiative for the Hall Tract.

4.1 Forest Certification

The Region's FSC Certification expires in 2005. Over recent months, staff has facilitated the FSC audit for the renewal of the York Regional Forest Certification. Forest Certification provides a mechanism whereby the Region's commitment to the sustainable

management of the York Regional Forest can be monitored and evaluated by a third party.

Sustainable forest management embodies the following principles, criteria and indicators:

- Recognition of environmental, economic, social and cultural values.
- Conservation of biological diversity.
- Public participation in forest management.
- Development of measurable criteria for sustainable forestry.
- An independent audit of the forest.
- Continual improvement of the management process.

The above noted principles are consistent with the goals and objectives of the “York Regional Forest 20 year management plan (1998-2018)”. The Forest Certification program embodies the criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Becoming FSC Certified identifies the forest as complying with internationally recognized standards for sustainable forest management.

Regional benefits from being FSC Certified include:

- International recognition that the York Regional Forest is being managed sustainably.
- Increased public awareness of the forest and the benefits derived from the forest.
- Public support for the management objectives and management practices.
- Certification of forest products.
- Recognition as an international leader in public forest management.

In March 2005, SmartWood completed their audit report recommending Certification of the York Regional Forest. The final step in the renewal of our Certification is the signing of the Forest Management Certification Agreement between the Rain Forest Alliance and The Regional Municipality of York.

4.2 Forest 2020 Program

Under the Climate Change Plan for Canada, the Canadian Forest Service of Natural Resources Canada is responsible for the Forest 2020 Plantation Demonstration and Assessment (PDA) initiative. Under this program, demonstration forests of fast growing tree species are being established across Canada. Individuals, municipalities, First Nations and private industry typically hold ownership of these lands.

Part of the management of the York Regional Forest Hall Tract, includes reforestation under the Forest 2020 Program. The reforestation of this property is consistent with the Region’s short and long term environmental management objectives. Participation in the Forest 2020 Program involves a partnership between Natural Resources Canada (lead

partner), Trees Ontario Foundation (program coordinator), the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (service delivery agent) and the Region.

Under the Forest 2020 Program the Region will:

- Maintain and manage the trees for a minimum of 15 years.
- Allow for signage indicating the Forest 2020 partnership.
- Allow research assessment of the site for the purpose of data collection and demonstration.

These activities are consistent with our management plan for these lands as part of the York Regional Forest.

In return, Natural Resources Canada or their service delivery partner (Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority) will:

- Provide free trees and cover the cost of forest establishment on the property (10.5 ha) in the old field areas.
- Monitor the growth and development of the trees on the property.

The Government of Canada will reserve the right to claim the carbon sequestered in this plantation to help meet Canada's Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments.

As an additional component of this overall program, the Region is seeking to develop a further research partnership with Natural Resources Canada to conduct specific tree establishment research on an additional 4 hectares in the Hall Tract. This research will require the execution of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Project Agreement.

Under the MOU, both parties agree to cooperate in a broad range of activities which include:

- Forestry applications, techniques and processes.
- Forestry research activities.
- Liaison with industrial academic, professional or other organizations.
- Plantation establishment and management on Region's lands.

The MOU contemplates that an individual project agreement will be entered into to implement the terms of the MOU.

An appendix to the Project Agreement sets out in detail the outline for the research, including factors to be tested in the field plots. The Region undertakes to cooperate in the management of the project, including providing onsite advice and access to the site

for research and monitoring purposes. It is anticipated that the Region will also share in the scientific knowledge from the research trial and receive revenues from the selective harvest of the plantation in future years.

During the fall of 2004, the site was prepared for the tree planting. The tree species selected, in consultation with Region staff, for the forest establishment on this site will include Norway spruce, red pine and some European larch. The tree planting is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2005. Signing of the MOU and Project Agreement will facilitate the tree planting partnership agreement.

In addition to the Hall Tract Forest 2020 tree planting initiative, staff is also planning a public tree planting event with the local community. This event will include 300 students from the Ballantrae Elementary School. This community tree planting event is scheduled for April 22, 2005.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The ongoing sustainable management of the York Regional Forest properties, including the development of strategic partnerships is consistent with Vision 2026 and such key goal statements as:

“In 2026, York Region residents will continue to value and embrace the Region’s unique natural heritage (land, air, water) and cultural heritage (sites and buildings important to our history, faiths and cultures).”

“In 2026, York Region will have grown at a pace that supports healthy communities, economic vitality, sustainable natural environment and effective human services.”

Demonstrating strategic and sustainable forest management strengthens the Region’s commitment to Vision 2026 action areas including:

- Protecting sensitive features such as forests, watersheds, the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Simcoe.
- Promoting a permanent linked Greenlands systems.
- Continuing to develop and build strategies for a green Region, such as the York Regional Forest Management Plan, the Greening Strategy, and the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.
- Taking a leadership role in the development and implementation of environmental strategies and conservation activities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The York Regional Forest was originally FSC Certified following endorsement by Regional Council in 2000. Costs to support the annual audit under the program have been approximately \$1,800 per year. Management activities to ensure compliance with the conditions of the Certification are part of the regularly scheduled operational forest management activities.

The cost of the current recertification audit is approximately \$6,000. These funds were identified in the approved 2005 Transportation and Works, Forestry Operations budget. Subsequent annual compliance audits will be budgeted for on an annual basis, as in previous years. The FSC Certification program has proven to be a significant and credible resource and platform for the Region to demonstrate to the public that our forests are being managed sustainably for present and future generations.

There are no budget implications associated with the partnership implementation of the Forest 2020 Plantation Demonstration and Assessment Initiative. In fact, the Region will benefit from the Federal government expending approximately \$20,000 on the reforestation of 14.5 hectares of the newly acquired portion of the Hall Tract. Subsequent forest management activities on the property are budgeted as part of the Forestry Operations program.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There are no local municipal implications for this report.

7. CONCLUSION

The completion of our 2005 FSC Certification and signing of the Forest Management agreement will allow us to continue to demonstrate to the public and international forums, that The Regional Municipality of York is demonstrating leadership for the sustainable management of the York Regional Forest.

The implementation of the Forest 2020 Plantation Demonstration and Assessment initiative, including the research trial, provides an opportunity for the Federal government to fund the tree planting and establishment for reforestation on the recently acquired additional lands of the York Regional Forest Hall Tract. The additional education, research and demonstration benefits will also help promote the wise use and sustainable management of the York Regional Forest.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.