

Lanark County's Community Forests demonstrate sustainable management

Lanark County's Community Forests continue to be an excellent example of professional, sustainable forest management enjoyed by the public.

The forests consist of 4,583 hectares across 40 properties. The first land was purchased in 1938 under the provincial Lands and Forests (which later became the Ministry of Natural Resources) "Agreement Forest" program. Under the program, many acres of properties are available for public access across southern Ontario. They were purchased for forest management purposes.

"Many properties were pioneer farms that were not practical after farmers moved to mechanized machinery," explains Brian Anderson, advisory services coordinator with Mississippi Valley Conservation.

The Baird property was purchased in 1963 from the Baird family. It consisted of former fields and pasture. Lands and Forests planted red pine and white spruce using local tree planters. Tamarack was also planted.

"Red pine is planted as a 'nurse crop' to capture the site and shade out invading species," Mr. Anderson explained. "Over time, the red pine is thinned for forest products. The resulting opening of the crown allows for regeneration of 'tolerant hardwoods,' which are species requiring some shade to thrive."

Examples of tolerant hardwoods include native hard maple. "Over time and with successive thinnings, the plantations will revert to pre-settlement hardwoods or natural forests," Mr. Anderson added.

Over the years, Lanark County developed trails, boardwalks and forest interpretive signage for the Baird property, and it is used as a demonstration site for forest management for school groups and youth groups. It is used daily by the public.

"Many groups helped the county with the project," said Jonathan Allen, Lanark County Public Works facilities coordinator. "These groups include the Junior Rangers, Stewardship Rangers, conservation authorities, the Lanark County Stewardship Council and others."

Forest management today is undertaken by the county through an agreement with the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority. "We use modern professional forestry standards, have a 20-year forest management plan and five-year operating plans," Mr. Allen said. "The Lanark County Community Forest is also Forest Stewardship Council certified."

In natural forests, life science studies carried out by consulting ecologists help guide harvesting and management planning to ensure natural heritage values are preserved or enhanced.

"Responsible use maintains the overall health and ecological integrity of the forests," Mr. Anderson said. "

Recent red pine thinning of the Baird Trail property was carried out by Lavern Heideman & Sons Limited, which is a forest products company that also handles forest management for company holdings, private and Crown properties. It has been certified as a "Safe Workplace of Ontario" by the Ontario Forestry Safe Workplace Association, has been a family-owned business since 1974 and is a partner in the Eastern Ontario Model Forest.

The next thinning on the Baird property will take place in 15 to 20 years. Commercial thinnings on red pine plantations have been taking place for the last 10 years.

"We invite everyone to come out and enjoy the property and see forest management at work from 1963 to today and beyond," Mr. Anderson said.

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