

Item for the Information of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, September 22, 2021 Meeting

FROM: Anil Wijesooriya, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure

RE: TRCA FOREST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

KEY ISSUE

To inform the Regional Watershed Alliance of the initiation of the update to the TRCA Forest Management Strategy and seek opportunities for partner engagement.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the staff report and presentation on the update to the TRCA Forest Management Strategy be received for the information of the Regional Watershed Alliance.

BACKGROUND

TRCA manages over 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of forested lands within its jurisdiction (**Attachment 1**). These forested areas are composed of conservation parks, education field centres, resource management tracts, conservation reserves, forest and wildlife areas, and other conservation lands. These lands may be owned and managed by TRCA directly or through agreement with local municipalities, partners, or private owners.

The expertise of TRCA's staff and the delivery of TRCA's Forest Management programs are recognized region wide, and are accessed by our partner municipalities, neighbouring conservation authorities, as well as public and private partners. Active management of forests helps achieve long-term forest sustainability and greatly improves forest health including biodiversity and resilience to insects, disease, and climate change, and includes secondary benefits such as improved wildlife habitat, source water protection, stormwater management and public use and appreciation of our forests.

TRCA's management programs can be generally grouped into the following Program areas including:

- Monitoring, Inventory, and Assessment
- Sustainable Management and Harvest
- Plantation Management
- Hazard Tree Program and Abatement
- Invasive Species Management
- Planting and Restoration

Monitoring, Inventory, and Assessment

TRCA partners with key forestry organizations including the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (NDMNRF), Canadian Forest Service (CFS), Ontario Woodlot Association (OWA), the Regional Municipalities of York, Peel and Durham, as well as the lower tier municipalities to ensure the protection and coordinated management of forestry resources across our jurisdiction. This also involves additional partnership with many other private woodlot owners who seek our support for forest management and monitoring.

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TRCA conducts a wide variety of independent and partnered monitoring and inventory programs to base its forest management decisions on current sound science and data. Forest Resource Inventories (FRI's) form the basis of forest health, growth, and development plans however TRCA also conduct and utilize extensive forest plant, animal and community inventories including long-term fixed plots and site-specific data.

TRCA staff also participate in many forestry working groups, technical advisory committees, and round tables, to address current and future threats and to evaluate forest health on a continuous basis.

Sustainable Management and Harvest

TRCA has over a long history of undertaking sustainable forest management throughout our jurisdiction. In Ontario, the NDMNRF is responsible for the management and long-term health of Crown forests, as well as privately owned forests under the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP), or the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program (CLTIP). Under these programs, TRCA prepares 10-year Forest Management Plans for approval by NDMNRF. While the TRCA does not engage in large scale harvest programs, some of our specialty wood products are marketed as a result of forest health management work, stand improvements, but primarily through regular plantation management described further below.

Plantation Management

The majority of TRCA woodlots that require active management fall into a category known as cultural plantations. These are typically even aged pine and spruce plantations that were planted extensively across our region to help stabilize soils after the "Dust Bowl" days of the 1930s. This type of reforestation, also known as afforestation, has been the dominant method of forest regeneration since the 1950s. Under this management regime, conifer plantations are gradually converted to mixed hardwood stands over an 80-year period involving periodic thinning to create gaps in the canopy to support the natural regeneration of species such as sugar maple and black cherry.

Hazard Tree Program and Abatement

All TRCA forested lands require regular and proper inspection and abatement to reduce risk to people and property, as well as to maintain an excellent visitor experience to our lands. Currently TRCA is updating our hazard tree policies and have been implementing the widely accepted International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) program to assess tree hazards, and public risk on our properties. Trained forestry staff assess trees and only remove those that pose a significant risk to public health and safety in active use areas, along trails, and around our property boundaries.

Invasive Species Management

A critical part of forest management involves ensuring that regeneration in a woodlot is composed of the appropriate native species. This often requires active control and treatment of invasive species and pests. Key target invasive species in woodlot management include common buckthorn, Manitoba maple, and dog-strangling vine, however specific plans may target a larger number of species.

Planting and Restoration

Perhaps the most noticeable recent change to our approach regarding forest resources, is the reforestation and restoration of formally forested lands. In support of our tree planting initiatives, TRCA propagates and supplies native trees and shrubs at its own native plant nursery. Since

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2001, TRCA has supplied and planting 5.9 million trees and shrubs across our jurisdiction to restore forest habitat and improve tree canopy.

RATIONALE

TRCA has over 16,000 hectares (ha) of greenspace secured throughout its watershed, and forest or woodland habitat represents the largest proportion of this land. TRCA does not currently have a region wide forest management strategy. Instead, since the early 1990s, TRCA has been managing forests under an operational statement supporting management for biodiversity, forest health and public safety. A comprehensive forest management strategy is needed to address the needs and complexity of its vast land holdings which span a variety of political and ecological boundaries.

Many of our project partners have updated tree canopy strategies and forest management plans or are developing climate change responses and natural cover targets. TRCA continues to play strong role in supporting our partners in the implementation of these strategies, plans and responses, however a region wide approach is needed to ensure watershed health, and resiliency is achieved.

Forests are experiencing increased biotic and abiotic stressors including further urban expansion, increased public use, invasive species, increased forest pests, and many other emerging impacts of climate change. The combined effects of these stresses are having an increasing impact on the overall health and quality of forest resources and their ability to sustain ecological functions.

Additionally, TRCA and its partners have been working collectively to coordinate and update forest resource inventory data collection and hazard tree work-planning and abatement. This necessitates the update of data management and work planning systems as part of a data modernization program.

Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

Strategy 9 – Measure performance

Strategy 12 – Facilitate a region-wide approach to sustainability

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Funding for Forest Management is obtained through both capital and operational budgets including Forest Management accounts, and Hazard Tree Management accounts. Funding is also provided through fee-for-service agreements, with municipalities and private woodlot owners.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA has been meeting with its project partners to develop a work plan for the update to its Forest Management Strategy with the goal of completing the strategy by the end of 2022. The Strategy will seek TRCA Board of Directors approval for the 2023 operating season.

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Timeframe	Milestone description
Summer 2021	Work with staff and partners to consolidate existing data including; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• forest management, forest resource inventory, hazard tree, tree canopy, ELC, invasive species and reforestation/planting
Fall 2021	Complete consultation and communication plan.
Fall 2021	Initiate the internal staff steering committee.
Winter 2022	Initiate a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed of staff from various divisions as well as external partners, stakeholders, and agencies.
Spring-Summer 2022	Work with the TAC to develop management strategies, goals and objectives and develop Management framework.
Fall 2022	Seek feedback and consultation with wider stakeholder groups, and the public.
Winter 2022	Finalize the TRCA Forest Management Strategy and seek senior management and tack endorsement.
Winter 2023	Seek Board of Directors endorsement and initiate implementation of the strategy beginning in 2023.

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Date: September 9, 2021

Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: TRCA Property and Forest Habitat within the TRCA jurisdiction

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