

New by-law aims to encourage good forestry practices

Lanark County is commencing a public consultation process for its new Forest Conservation By-Law, which is intended to encourage good forestry practices and limit destructive tree harvesting while incorporating certain exemptions for personal use and farm-related activities.

The new by-law replaces an outdated tree-cutting model that was based on diameter limit cutting and is no longer considered to be modern good forestry practices. "This by-law is designed to reinforce practices that encourage forest health while maintaining ecological processes and wildlife habitats," explained Brian Anderson, advisory services coordinator with Mississippi Valley Conservation, which provides professional forest-management services to the county.

The new bylaw has been in development for several years in consultation with a variety of stakeholders and culminating with the county's Community Forest Working Group producing a draft using the "Template for Good Forestry Practices Forest Conservation By-Laws."

"The template was developed by the Provincial Forest Conservation By-Law Committee, led by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and with input from municipalities," Lanark County Facilities Coordinator Jonathan Allen explained. It also helps the county to achieve the objectives of its official plan.

"There has been a long, thoughtful process to come up with the by-law," he added. "Many county councillors have been members of the Community Forest Working Group in recent years, and they've all had a chance to be involved in the creation of the by-law."

The working group is comprised of up to 10 members, including two county councillors and members of the Lanark County Stewardship Council, the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists, the forest industry, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Mississippi Valley Conservation, the county forest manager and the county facilities manager.

Mr. Allen explained the by-law applies to areas of more than two hectares only, where good forestry practices are not followed. "Good forestry practices minimize environmental damage to sites, protect forest components such as species diversity, and minimize damage to or enhance wildlife habitats. Most companies and landowners around Lanark County understand this."

"By encouraging sustainable forest management, we're improving forest health and supporting the local forest industry," Mr. Anderson added. "It also provides for worker safety and for continual and increased economic benefits to landowners."

Enforcement of the by-law will occur if there is a contravention. "The county may need to retain the services of a by-law enforcement officer, preferably with forestry experience, if a party is in contravention," Mr. Allen explained.

The by-law does not reduce the need to comply with other legislation, such as the Endangered Species Act and the Planning Act. It also includes some exemptions around harvesting trees for a woodland owner's own use or removing diseased or infected trees, as well as under certain conditions related to site plan or subdivision approvals, municipal activities or activities licensed under the Crown Forestry Sustainability Act.

"There are exemptions related to farm practices as well," Mr. Allen said, "such as reclaiming farmland." In areas over two hectares an exemption can be granted by the county on application by a landowner.

The county will announce the date and location of a public information centre soon, where comments can be received from interested members of the public. The working group will review the results and a draft of the by-law will be brought to the economic development committee.

More information about good forestry practices is available from conservation authorities, Eastern Ontario Model Forest, the Ontario Woodlot Association, the Ontario Professional Foresters Association the Canadian Institute of Forestry and MNRF.

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