

A Brief History of the Dufferin County Forest

In the beginning, there were forests. Forests of large, tall, white pine, red oak, and sugar maple trees. Throughout the 1800s European settlers arrived – settlers who wanted to and, in some cases, were required to, clear land. Ten acres was the standard requirement for clearing for each land grant.

By 1900, much of Dufferin County had been cleared of trees to facilitate farming. As there had been no reforestation, the trees disappeared, and so did the lumber companies. Many farmers who had supplemented their income with logging fell on hard times. The removal of the tree cover had far-reaching effects. Without stabilization, the thin, sandy soils were eroded by wind and water. This made farming impossible. However, Dufferin was not alone in this predicament. Similar settlement patterns in other parts of southern Ontario had created similar problems. As early as 1908, the Ontario Department of Agriculture had published a *Report on the Reforestation of Waste Lands in Southern Ontario*. This report outlined the development of blowsands that had resulted from large-scale land clearing. It also described the economic and environmental benefits of reforestation:

“The policy of putting these lands under forest management has many arguments in its favour. It will pay as a financial investment; assist in insuring a wood supply; protect the headwaters of streams; provide breeding ground for wild game, provide object lessons in forestry, and prevent citizens from developing under conditions which can end only in failure.”

In Dufferin County, land reclamation through planting began in 1905. Gradually, tree planting gained momentum, as people realized that trees were not primarily a nuisance in land clearing, but had important benefits.

The fourteen-tract 1,066 ha (2,636 acre) Dufferin County Forest was conceived with a motion introduced at Dufferin County Council on June 19, 1930. At its November 21, 1930 meeting, the Council adopted a report from the Committee on Reforestation, which recommended the purchase of properties in Mulmur Township totalling 426 ha (1,013 acres).

Since this auspicious beginning, the County of Dufferin has made additional purchases and received

Lot	Con.	Name	Acres	Price
S $\frac{1}{2}$ of E $\frac{1}{2}$	20	8 Lucy Rankin	50	400 00
E $\frac{1}{2}$	19	8 J. O. Brown	100	550 00
N $\frac{1}{2}$ of W $\frac{1}{2}$	19	8 P. J. Chorman	50	200 00
S $\frac{1}{2}$ of W $\frac{1}{2}$	19	8 Archie Faulkner	50	540 00
W $\frac{1}{2}$	18	8 Bessie Brennan	100	750 00
E $\frac{1}{2}$	18	8 Herbert Brennan	100	800 00
All.....	17	8 Gordon Jamieson	200	1000 00
All.....	16	8 Gordon Jamieson	200	1800 00
Part of W $\frac{1}{2}$	19	7	1 1-3	
E $\frac{1}{2}$ and Part ..		Neil Beaton		1597 32
of W $\frac{1}{2}$	18	7	163	
			1013 1-3	\$7637 32
Average price per acre, \$7.53.				

donations of property, bringing the current area of the Dufferin County Forest up to 1,066 ha (2,636 acres). The last purchase was made on September 17, 1971. It consisted of 40 ha (100 acres) on Concession VI in Mulmur Township acquired at a cost of \$25,000.00 (including a \$19,012.65 grant from the Ministry of Natural Resources). The Leening, Levitt, and Thomson Tracts were acquired by the County through the generous donation of the property owners. The Hockley Tract was originally purchased by the County as the site for a

Initial List of Properties (in Mulmur Township) Purchased for the Dufferin County Forest. (Museum of Dufferin, AR-6792B)



First Tree Planting in the Dufferin County Forest, May 8, 1931. Seedling planted by R.W. Brett, Reeve of Shelburne, while Delmar Gallagher, Reeve of Mulmur and Chairman of the Reforestation Committee of Dufferin County (right) and Warden Ed Watson (back) look on. The identities of the men on the far left are unknown. (Museum of Dufferin, P-0346)

retirement home, but was instead added to the County Forest portfolio in 1995.

Although the Dufferin County Forest is, and always was, owned by the County of Dufferin, until 1995 it was managed by the provincial government on the County's behalf (originally the Department of Lands and Forests, which became the Ministry of Natural Resources in 1972 and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry in the 2014). On November 26, 1930, the County of Dufferin, following the lead taken by the County of Simcoe in 1922, signed its first Forest Management Agreement with the Department of Lands and Forests. The agreement was made under the *Counties Reforestation Act*; later coming

under the jurisdiction of the *Forestry Act*. Subsequent agreements were signed, remaining relatively unchanged until 1991.

When the last agreement expired (April 1, 1991), the County of Dufferin decided that increased demands on the forest properties, as well as changes to the Ministry of Natural Resource's Agreement Forest Program, meant it could not simply sign a new agreement. The County decided that a comprehensive management plan would have to be prepared for the Dufferin County Forest before a new agreement was signed.

In the spring of 1991, the County of Dufferin approached the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto to have the fourth year forestry class prepare plans for the Dufferin County Forest as part of their undergraduate thesis work. These plans were presented to the County of Dufferin and the Ministry of Natural Resources in April, 1993.

In December, 1993 the County of Dufferin and the Ministry of Natural Resources approved the Terms of Reference for a new management plan. Subsequently, the County of Dufferin, in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources, hired a



Modern Day Blowsand Area. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were extensive areas like this across southern Ontario.

management plan author to develop a forest management plan for the period 1995-2015. This management plan would describe in detail the operations for the period 1995-2000 and, more generally, the operations for the period 2000-2015. *Our Forest, Our Future: Dufferin County Forest Management Plan 1995-2015* was passed by Dufferin County Council on June 8, 1995. Throughout the process, there was participation from the Ministry of Natural Resources, a Forest Advisory Team, and the general public, all of whom provided valuable input and comments.

This plan guided the use and management of the Forest, emphasizing three main points, which, at the time, were innovative:

- an ecosystem approach to forest management;
- protection of the provincial interest in natural resources; and
- a community-based approach to the planning and management of the forest properties.

Following the 1995 adoption of the long-term forest management plan by Dufferin County Council, the County took over the control and co-ordination of all activities having to do with the Dufferin County Forest. In order to fulfill this new role, Dufferin hired a County Forest Manager, the first County in Ontario to do so.

On March 13, 1997, the County signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). This Memorandum, which expired in 2002, outlined the County's and the Ministry's responsibilities in the management of the Dufferin County Forest. A new Memorandum will not be signed, thus terminating the formal relationship between the MNR and the County in the management of the Dufferin County Forest.

In 2001, the County was recognized for its management of the County Forest, and for its partnership with the Dufferin Simcoe Land Stewardship Network, with a national award – the Forest Stewardship Recognition Program award.

In 2005, the Dufferin County Forest celebrated its 75th anniversary. As part of the celebrations, red oak was declared as the official tree of Dufferin County.

With the impending expiration of the management plan passed in 1995, in 2013 the County began work on a new long-term management plan for the County Forest. By this time, the recreational use of the forest properties had grown to such an extent, that it was decided that a separate recreational use policy for the County Forest was necessary. The consultative process involved the participation of County Councillors, members of the County's Forest Plan Advisory Team and Forest Operations Review Committee, residents adjacent to the Forest properties, and the general public. *Our Forest, Our Future: Dufferin County Forest Management Plan 2016-2036* was approved by County Council on March 10, 2016. The recreational use policy for the County Forest was approved on May 11, 2017. The recreational use by-law was approved on September 14, 2017. These three documents together now govern the use and management of the County Forest.