

To:	Warden McQueen and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	February 27, 2020
Subject / Report No:	PDR-CW-09-20
Title:	Forest Management Plan - Draft
Prepared by:	Sarah Johnson
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW53-20; endorsed by County Council March 12, 2020 per Resolution CC35-20;

Recommendation

1. **That Report PDR-CW-09-20 regarding the draft Forest Management Plan be received; and**
2. **That staff be directed to solicit input from the public, the forest industry, agencies, and municipalities on the draft Forest Management Plan; and**
3. **That following consideration of stakeholder input, a revised Forest Management Plan be presented to the Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee and County Council for its consideration.**

Executive Summary

The Forest Management Plan describes how the County Forests are to be managed over a 20-year period. The current Forest Management Plan was adopted by County Council in 2003 and requires updating

A Forest Management Plan update has been completed by Grey Sauble Conservation Authority staff in consultation with County staff and the Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee. This draft Plan is now ready for public consultation, subject to any further feedback from the Committee of the Whole. Following public, stakeholder and agency input, a revised draft of the Plan can be prepared for consideration by the Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee, and later County Council.

Background and Discussion

The Forest Management Plan (FMP) applies to the management of Grey County's approximately 8,400 acres of forest over a 20-year period. It has no bearing on privately owned forests. Since the approval of the 2003 FMP the County Forests have become certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) through the Eastern Ontario Model Forest. FSC requires an advisory committee to be established to provide input into a Forest Management Plan or update.

A key component of the FMP is ensuring that the County Forests can be harvested sustainably, such that they generate some income, while also ensuring the long-term health of the Forests. The County's Forests are an asset to the County, not only in terms of income, but much more so for the recreational and environmental benefits they offer.

Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, the contracted manager of the County Forests, is working closely with Grey County staff on an update to the FMP in consultation with a Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee (FMPAC). A large portion of the work is updating the forest inventories in each of the County Forests which has been completed by Grey Sauble staff over the past couple of years. The FMPAC was established to provide input and advice into the completion of the updated FMP. Staff report PDR-CW-12-19 (link included in the Attachments) established the terms of reference for the FMPAC.

Based on the feedback from FMPAC, Grey Sauble and County staff completed a draft FMP in January 2020. A summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as it relates to the County Forests are listed below.

Strengths

Grey County is currently about 40 to 45% forested and therefore supports a strong local forest economy. The County Forests are an integral part of the overall forest cover and help to contribute to the local forest economy. This Forest Management Plan will ensure that the County Forests are managed using good forestry practices which will be aimed at maintaining or enhancing all values within a forest stand. The values associated with healthy County Forests include not only monetary values, but also social values such as employment and recreation opportunities, and other ecosystem service values such as carbon sequestration, water quality and quantity management, and wildlife habitat. Properly managing the County Forests will ensure that these benefits can be enjoyed for generations to come.

Weaknesses

Historically, forests have been managed around economics rather than through an ecosystem approach. This has led to depleted resources not only in Grey County forests but in fact around the world. This updated Forest Management Plan will ensure that the health of the forests are returned to an ideal state and will leave the County's forests in better overall health at the end of the planning period.

Existing signage, property identification (fencing), and access (gates, roads, trails, etc.) may need to be improved to prevent illegal activities in some of the County's forests. This is something that has also been flagged as part of the Recreational Trails Master Plan.

Opportunities

Grey County Forests provide wildlife with natural sources of food, water, shelter, lifecycle habitat and travel corridors. These significant woodland areas provide long-term certainty that portions of the core green areas and linkages in the County's Official Plan will exist in perpetuity for the benefit of the County and its residents.

Healthy diverse forests are more resilient to the effects of climate change more than unhealthy (unmanaged) forests and therefore it is important that forests are properly managed.

Tending activities including tree girdling in hardwood stands and pruning in plantations were historically done by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to improve the quality of forests or to control insect or disease problems. MNRF had the staffing and financial resources to tend the forest up until 1995. Since 1995, tending has not been undertaken due to available resources. We want to explore partnership opportunities including the possibility of sharing resources and sharing best practices when it comes to managing forests. This could include further partnership opportunities with conservation authorities, municipalities, and neighbouring counties.

Opportunities to purchase properties to expand the County forest landholdings as the funds and the properties become available should be explored.

Expansion of trails on existing logging roads and establishing parking facilities are all opportunities that will be explored further as recommended by the Recreational Trails Master Plan.

Threats

As noted previously, Grey County has approximately 40 to 45% forest cover which can support a strong local forest economy. However, the last decade has seen the loss of

hardwood sawmills. In fact, only one commercial hardwood mill remains in the County. We want to work with our economic development staff to see if there are further opportunities to promote and enhance our local forest industry.

Regardless of the plan that we make there will always be the unknown aspects of dealing with this type of resource including the long-term effect of disease or invasive species. Invasive species are anticipated to increase due to the impacts caused by climate change. Part of the work done by Grey Sauble Conservation Authority was to document any invasive species within each of the forest tracts. We will utilize this information to develop an invasive species management plan using recommended best practices.

County Forests can also be impacted by natural disasters or destruction from trespass or vandalism. Natural disasters are difficult to prevent, however destruction caused from trespass or vandalism can be better managed using fencing, gates and other barriers to prevent illegal access. We also want to work with our local law enforcement to explore further opportunities.

Consultation

Following Council review, staff will release the draft for review by the public, stakeholders, agencies, and municipalities. A public meeting will be scheduled for late March or April. The commenting period for this draft is anticipated to end in June, unless any feedback necessitates the need for a longer comment period. A final draft FMP will come to FMPAC and later Council for consideration. Attached to this report is the draft FMP.

The FMP is not to be confused with the recent Recreational Trails Master Plan (RTMP), which was approved by Council in 2019. The FMP is a very technical document that governs how the County manages our County Forests through selective harvests (e.g. which County Forests will be harvested each year, and to what extent). The RTMP provides guidance on the recreational aspects (e.g. hiking, cycling, snowmobiling, etc.) of the County's Forests, as well as the Canadian Pacific (CP) Rail Trail. The two plans are coordinated but have different focuses and audiences.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

The Forest Management Plan outlines environmental best practices for managing the County Forests. County Planning and Legal Services staff, in addition to Grey Sauble Conservation Authority staff, will ensure that the Plan meets all legislative and Forest Stewardship Council certification requirements.

Financial and Resource Implications

This project is being completed by Planning and GSCA contract staff with a total budget of \$60,000 which has been spread over a 3-year period. Most of the expense for this project was updating the forest inventory data for each County Forest tract which has been completed by GSCA staff and commenced in 2017. Once the FMP has been finalized and approved by Council, there will not be any further costs anticipated beyond the regular budgeted forest maintenance as part of the existing contract with Grey Sauble Conservation Authority. Through the discussions with FMPAC, the need for sustainable harvest practices has been prioritized, while also trying to ensure that stable income is provided to offset forest maintenance costs.

Relevant Consultation

- ☒ Internal – Clerk’s, Legal Services, Transportation Services, Tourism, Economic Development, Finance
- ☒ External – Municipalities, First Nations, Metis, Conservation Authorities and agencies will be consulted as part of this review. Interested public members and groups will also be engaged including those that have participated in the process to date.

Appendices and Attachments

[Draft Forest Management Plan V1.2](#)

[Current Forest Management Plan](#)

[PDR-CW-12-19 Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee Report](#)