

To:	Chair and Members of Forest Management Plan Technical Advisory Committee
Committee Date:	December 16, 2020
Subject / Report No:	PDR-FM-06-21
Title:	Updates to the Forest Management Plan
Prepared by:	Sarah Johnson
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	No resolution from December 16 2020 Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee; See addendum report March 10, 2021

Recommendation

1. **That Report PDR-FM-06-21 regarding updates to the Forest Management Plan be received and that staff be directed to complete the final draft of the Forest Management Plan and bring it forward to the Advisory Committee for review and support.**

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. The draft Plan has gone through public consultation. A revised draft of the Plan will be prepared following discussions with the Forest Management Plan Advisory Committee, and later County Council.

Background and Discussion

With its diverse mix of landforms and features, Grey County is an attractive place to live or visit. An excellent range of recreational activities are available including golfing, fishing, sailing, boating, and cross-country and downhill skiing. Grey County forest

properties are an integral part of this attraction, providing the public with a wide variety of recreational opportunities such as hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, nature appreciation, wildlife viewing, picnicking, hunting, fishing, and much more.

Grey County is currently about 40-45 percent forested and therefore supports a strong local forest economy. However, the last decade has seen the loss of hardwood sawmills. Currently, only one commercial hardwood mill remains in the County.

Grey County's properties provide wildlife with natural sources of food, water, shelter, lifecycle habitat and travel corridors. The large forested tracts of land also provide forest-dependent wildlife with forest interior habitat. 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.

The Forest Management Plan (FMP) applies to the management of Grey County's approximately 8,125 acres of forest. 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.

The Forest Management Plan covers the 22-year period from January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2042 and includes a detailed management program for the first five-year operating period. In practice, where it is necessary to accommodate actual conditions such as actual tree growth, adjust to invasive pests, or provide viable tender packages for loggers and mills, stand harvest dates may be moved from year to year, however this plan provides a valuable, science-based and useful outlook for the next 22 years.

The FMP defines the desired outcomes for all Grey County forest lands and will guide the forest management activities over the next twenty-year period. The desired outcomes and strategies presented in this FMP will apply to all properties where management has been deemed appropriate. All planned activities will be conducted in a manner which will minimize adverse environmental impacts while striving to achieve the ideal basal area distribution.

The following are the key principles and strategic outcomes identified in the draft Forest Management Plan. These principles and outcomes will guide how the forests will be managed over the next 20 plus years.

1. Biodiversity Protection and Enhancement
 - o Species at Risk surveys will be completed prior to any planned harvest to ensure that impacts are mitigated and to explore opportunities for enhancement. Long term invasive species

management will also be done to reduce or eradicate any invasive species causing a risk to the health of the forest. Opportunities for enhancing the natural features and functions of the County Forests will be explored.

2. Economic Sustainability

- 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. Harvesting trees sustainably allows for a continual supply of material and a continual support of revenue while ensuring that the ecosystem of the forests is improved, protected, or enhanced. Any harvesting or production of other goods from the County Forests will be offered through a fair and open competitive process to ensure that anyone who is interested will have an equal opportunity to bid (e.g. tender or request for proposal processes).

3. Social Benefits and Equal Access

- Healthy forests are the foundation for a healthy ecosystem, which in turn provides us with a healthy environment. Trees have proven to lower stress levels in people when they are in their presence and the term "forest bathing" has been coined for therapy that involves spending time in a forest relaxing. The continued management, promotion and enhancement of trails and associated facilities within County forests will provide increased opportunities for people to get out into the forests and enjoy outdoor recreational pursuits contributing to a healthier lifestyle.

4. Climate Change Mitigation/Adaptation

- Forests and trees have proven to be effective in removing air pollution and carbon dioxide from the environment and in return providing oxygen for us to breath and helping to mitigate against climate change. When forests are managed properly to promote health and vigour they are better able to withstand the stresses caused by the forecasted warmer, drier, more unstable climate we face in the near future.

The actual forest management operations projected for each property over the next 20 years is described in Appendix 1 of this Plan. An Annual Plan will be prepared at the start of each year, and an Annual Report will be prepared at the end of each year to track the progress of operations. The revenues generated from forest management activities will be used primarily to offset the expenses of Grey County's forestry and

trails program. In the event that revenues exceed expenses, they will be placed into reserves to balance years in which expenses exceed revenues.

Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, the contracted manager of the County Forests, have worked closely with Grey County staff on an update to the FMP in consultation with the 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.

The feedback from the public consultation regarding the proposed draft (January 2020) raised questions about possible amendments. These potential amendments will be discussed below.

Forest Names

This is an administrative item and for information purposes, a number of the Forest Properties held names that were not always unique or they had a name that provided to be too broad of a location (i.e. there were a few that contained road names, which could provide issues in an emergency to locate the property). As such, Planning staff, in consultation with Grey Roots, communications staff and the Corporate naming policy will be proposing to rename approximately 11 properties, with some minor adjustments to the names of other properties, these new names will be reflected in the final FMP. A separate report discussing this matter will be brought forward to Committee of the Whole in early 2021.

Maple Syrup/Honey

Through the consultation it was determined that a few of our properties were being used or were desired to be used for the purposes of making maple syrup/sap collection or situating beehives. Initially these requests were examined through the lens of the Grey County Recreational Trails Master Plan (RTMP); however staff feel that the tool to best consider these uses is the Forest Management Plan and looking at it through the lens of the principles and strategic outcomes highlighted above.

Staff are seeking input from the Committee to determine if these types of uses should be considered. Based on the principles and strategic outcomes, it is possible to consider these types of uses as long as the operations are conducted in a sustainable way, and that these opportunities be offered through a fair and open process. If private business are to be allowed to benefit economically from a public asset, how should the County be compensated? Does this activity introduce risk and new liability? Is there any benefit or harm to the forests as a result? Do management practices that optimize sap production align with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards? Can the

County or GSCA Contract staff effectively monitor these activities to ensure no damage? Running lines and setting up a maple sap collection operation may require significant time and expense for the operator so if these opportunities are explored the County would likely need to offer these opportunities under agreement for a period of time (e.g. 5 plus years).

If the FMPAC sees merit in considering these uses based on the principles and strategic outcomes, staff could consider a request for proposal type process to ensure a fair, equal and open process. Staff would work with our legal and purchasing departments on an appropriate mechanism to ensure that all interested parties have a fair opportunity to access the County Forests in this regard.

Foraging

Along the same vein as the above noted uses, foraging has also come up as a potential permitted use in County Forest Properties. It is possible that this use is already occurring without the County's knowledge. Looking at this through the lens of principles and strategic outcomes, is this something that the County should consider? Would it promote off trail use and damage to understory growth or potential species at risk? Are there concerns with over harvesting of certain species? Could this type of use be profit gaining, and then qualify as a similar use as the two above noted uses?

In our neighbouring counties, foraging is not permitted in Dufferin County. It is permitted within Simcoe County forests, but for personal use only. Bruce County's Recreational By-law doesn't allow for the cutting, pruning, damaging, removal or destruction of any living tree, shrub, or ground cover without first obtaining the written permission of a Designated Manager. Wellington County does not have a policy regarding foraging.

First Nations and Metis Acknowledgement

Staff were contacted by the Metis Nation of Ontario (MNO) regarding the FMP and the request for them to hunt in County forest properties. With respect to hunting in County Forests, all hunters must abide by provincial rules and regulations where hunting is permitted. MNO also requested consideration of wording to be included in the Plan acknowledging the Metis. Staff would like the Committee's input regarding this consideration. The MNO will be providing some text including MNO history, etc. that could be added as an appendix to the FMP. Should staff obtain similar history recognition from other First Nations or Metis peoples to include as appendices? Staff would recommend a broad acknowledgement encompassing all First Nations and Metis peoples within the area, rather than focusing on any particular subset.

Mountain Lake

Recently, Grey County and the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) have reached an agreement settling Grey County's involvement in SON's long-standing legal action in relation to parts of the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula. The agreement settles a claim launched by SON approximately 25 years ago and is a positive step towards fostering further cooperation and reconciliation between Grey County and SON.

The claim went to trial in 2019. After several years of discussions, Grey County and SON have reached a settlement that includes the transfer of approximately 275 acres of County forest in Georgian Bluffs known as the Mountain Lake forest property.

As a result of this land transfer the removal of the Mountain Lake property from the Forest Management Plan will be done, prior to its final draft and presentation to Committee of the Whole/Council.

Questions for Consideration

1. Is there merit in allowing businesses in forest properties, through an agreement, like bee keeping or maple syrup?
2. Does the County want to permit foraging in forest properties?
3. Should the Forest Management Plan include a land acknowledgment for the Metis and First Nations?

Next Steps

Following today's meeting, staff will prepare a final draft with all of the discussed matters in this report. The final draft will be completed, along with a report that has a recommendation to Council for approval, this will most likely occur in the early new year. Attached to this report is a link to the current draft FMP.

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. Any enhancements to the County Forest Trails will be addressed through the Recreational Trails Master Plan and be part of future budget considerations. 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 Appendices](#)

[Current Forest Management Plan](#)

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