

Forests Ontario to plant 70,000+ trees countywide in 2020



March 3, 2020 By Nate Smelle

Since the program began in 2008, Forests Ontario has planted more than 29 million trees throughout the province. With 600,000 of those trees now growing in Hastings County, local landowners are planning to add at least another 70,000 trees to the total in 2020. Forests Ontario is the leading non-profit organization for the delivery of high-quality, large-scale tree planting in the province. Having worked with more than 5,000 landowners to plant trees under the 50 Million Tree Program, they have helped to establish some 16,500 hectares of new forest. Each year, these trees also sequester over 22,000 tonnes of carbon. The program also supports more than 300 full-time, seasonal forest sector jobs.

Despite the 50 Million Tree Program's success, registered professional forester and Forests Ontario's CEO Rob Keen said it nearly fell victim to the Ford government's cuts last spring. Fortunately, he said the program was brought back from the edge of elimination when the federal government stepped in with an infusion of \$15 million in funding over four years. Relieved that the 50 Million Tree Program could continue, Keen said he was also thrilled to see the public speak out against the Ford government's decision to ax the program.

"What was really amazing was the support that the public gave, and the backlash for canceling the program," said Keen.

"I was doing radio interviews, TV interviews; and there was an incredible amount of people, reporters interested in what had happened. There was a guy in Southwestern Ontario who started a petition for Ford to rescind his decision to cancel the 50 million tree program, and within a very short period of time that petition gathered more than 100,000 signatures from right across Canada? with most coming from Ontario of course. I was amazed that there was so much overwhelming support for tree planting."

As the public's awareness grows of the important role tree planting plays in tackling the climate crisis, Keen said so does their understanding of the societal benefits trees provide. While the program primarily focuses on the afforestation of private land in Ontario, he explained that the benefits it creates improve everyone's quality of life. By supporting the 50 Million Tree Program, Keen said people are able to help reduce the cost of tree planting for landowners, and deliver such benefits to society.

"These folks that [plant trees on their land] are adding all sorts of value to your local area," said Keen.

"It is about more than fighting climate change? they create wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and the timber industry in Bancroft is certainly kept alive and well."

According to Keen, this spring in Hastings-Lennox and Addington, Forests Ontario will plant white pine, white spruce, red oak, as well as several other species selected as suitable to planting site conditions and landowners' objectives. Although most of the planting occurs over six weeks between mid-April and the end of May, he said anyone interested in having trees planted on their land could possibly get on this year's list of tree planting sites.

Keen added that any landowner with enough space available to plant a minimum of 500 trees? which is usually less than an acre? could qualify for the program. To find out more about how to learn more about tree planting and funding assistance through the 50 Million Tree Program, he advised people; and/or tax savings through the MFTIP, to call Forests Ontario at 1-877-646-1193, or visit

www.forestsontario.ca