

OUR FOREST



forestsontario.ca

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SUMMER/FALL 2024

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A Message from our CEO

Understanding our past is key to future success

Our children and generations to come deserve a world and a future that is healthy and vibrant. At Forests Ontario, we believe that collaboration and partnership are the means to that end. As we head further into 2024, we look forward to launching our new 2025-2028 Strategic Plan to reflect those beliefs.

On June 4, the entire Forests Ontario staff got together for a retreat in Creemore, Ontario to share their insights, support the development of the new Strategic Plan and connect with each other. The following day was World Environment Day. We celebrated by reconnecting with our natural surroundings on a cultural walk led by our Indigenous Knowledge Advisor, Waasekom.

Waasekom led the Forests Ontario team through the Petun Conservation Area in Collingwood. One of the highest elevations of the Niagara Escarpment, the Petun Conservation Area gets its name from the Indigenous peoples who inhabited the land during the early 1600s. The Petun had nine villages in the Collingwood area, grew corn and were involved in the fur trade. Their population grew to over 10,000 people by the year 1623.

During the walk, we explored how the forest made us feel, what changes we noticed in the landscape, and pointed out trees that Indigenous people had tied or bent in a specific way to mark the path, long before established trail maps. We viewed crevices in the rock where Indigenous families hid their children to keep them out of residential schools, and learned of the discrepancy between the visible wealth of settler communities in contrast to the struggles of Indigenous families.

Being able to appreciate the beauty our country has to offer while also understanding its past isn't always easy, but I feel it is incredibly important. There is no reconciliation without truth. By better understanding history, we can learn and find ways to grow together. The best way for us to restore and grow diverse, thriving forested landscapes for today and future generations is through collaboration and partnership with all forest experts, including Indigenous partners.

As we head into the fall and look back at our successful planting season and education work, we look forward to continuing our work together

alongside our trusted network of partners and supporters, to help us build a better and healthier future for all.



Jess Kaknevičius

CEO, Forests Ontario and Forest Recovery Canada



Forests Ontario staff members gather for a retreat at the Petun Conservation Area in Collingwood.

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OUR FOREST

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On the cover: Biologist and turtle expert Dr. Patrick Moldowan holds up a Snapping Turtle as student Candace Sauerberg looks on during the inaugural Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified (FREED) course hosted at the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station, August 2022. This workshop in West Rose Lake, Algonquin Provincial Park, focused on survey methods for turtles, including how to safely handle these animals. All handling of animals was supervised by professionals and conducted under permits. Photo by Samantha Stephens.

Across the land we now call Canada, we live and work on the traditional, treaty and unceded territories that are part of Turtle Island, which is still home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Forests Ontario's office is located in the City of Barrie, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg people, which include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. We also acknowledge the Wendat Nation (Huron), who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century.

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STAY IN TOUCH

We do more than just plant trees, we conserve, restore and grow Canada's forests to sustain life and communities. Follow us on social media for the latest news and daily updates on all our programs.



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Ontario Power Generation Extends its Support of Forests Ontario

New two-year commitment will help plant more than 570,000 trees

BY SANDRA IACOBELLI

For more than 20 years, Ontario Power Generation (OPG) has collaborated on a variety of environmental programs with non-profit organizations, community groups, and Indigenous partners to help plant more than nine million native trees and shrubs in communities across the province. This year is no exception, with OPG committing to support the planting of more than 570,000 trees with Forests Ontario in 2024 and 2025. OPG's two-year pledge of support represents another example of its growing investment in protecting biodiversity and restoring much-needed wildlife habitats by creating hundreds of acres of new and restored forests as part of its Climate Change Plan. You can learn more at [OPG.com](https://www.opg.com).

Waterloo Collegiate Institute Takes the Crown

High school students win Ontario Envirothon; head to New York to take on the world

BY MATTHEW BROWN

This spring, more than 70 teams from high schools across Ontario competed in environmentally themed regional events that led 17 teams to meet at the University of Waterloo from May 26 to 29. From that series of training workshops, testing, and judged presentations, Grand River Region's Waterloo Collegiate Institute came out on top as the 2024 Ontario Envirothon champions.

All teams showcased their knowledge of Ontario Envirothon's four core topics – forestry, soils, wildlife, and aquatic ecosystems and soils – along with this year's current topic of *Biodiversity in a Changing Climate*. However, only the Waterloo Collegiate Institute team went to the National Conservation Foundation (NCF)-Envirothon from July 28 to August 3 at the Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York, to represent Ontario against hundreds of students from across North America and Asia.

"As lead agency of the Ontario Envirothon, we are proud to help the next generation of environmental leaders learn about the integral benefits of healthy natural landscapes and hone their science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills," Jess Kaknevicus, CEO, Forests Ontario, says. "We are grateful for the tireless efforts of the volunteers,

teachers and sponsors who have made this unique program possible and excited to see how these youth will continue on in their environmental journey in the next stage of their lives."



2024 Ontario Envirothon champions from Grand River Region's Waterloo Collegiate Institute.

Benefit Rock Concert Celebrates Sustainability

Eco Jam raises money to plant trees across Canada

BY KIRSTEN KEKEWICH



Engineering firm Smith + Andersen's hosted its eighth "Eco Jam" in April 2024 at the Phoenix Concert Theatre in Toronto with another sold-out show! This charity rock concert is Smith + Andersen's annual event to celebrate Earth Day and draw attention to the importance of sustainability in the construction industry.

Since Eco Jam started in 2013, the event has contributed to a total of 45,000 trees planted through Forests Ontario/Forest Recovery Canada's tree planting initiatives. This year's concert sold out in just over a week and raised \$60,000, surpassing the \$50,000 raised in 2023. To date, Smith + Andersen has supported the planting of more than 74 acres of new forests across Canada, with plenty more planned for next year.

"It is because of events like this that Forests Ontario/Forest Recovery Canada can continue planting millions of trees every year across Canada. For this 2024 planting season, we are on track to plant more than two million trees throughout Ontario, as well as hundreds of thousands of trees in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia," Jess Kaknevicus, CEO of Forests Ontario, says.

Forests Ontario thanks Smith + Andersen and all of the bands and attendees at this year's event. The environmental leadership of our corporate partners and donors enables us to do the work we do.

Top Left: Jess Kaknevicus addresses the crowd at Eco Jam 2024.

Bottom Left: The Deadlines perform at Eco Jam 2024.



Your New Forest

Forests Ontario's Landowner Guide is the ultimate resource for planting and caring for trees

BY TERI HOANG

Participants in Forests Ontario's large-scale tree planting programs can attest that ensuring the health and resiliency of their forest is a year-round commitment. Over the past several years, Forests Ontario has been collecting questions and topics of interest from landowners and planting partners, including how best to transition from newly planted trees to healthy, resilient forested landscapes. We are pleased to announce our new resource guide will soon be available to help landowners and property managers at each stage of tree development and highlights key areas including the benefits of trees and reasons to plant, an overview of planting methods and maintenance recommendations, tips about invasive species and sustainable forest management, and so much more.

You can learn more about our upcoming Landowner Guide at forestsontario.ca/LandownerGuide.



Tree Planting Success Story

White Pines soar skyward on property near Lakefield

BY PETER KUITENBROUWER



In 2017, Eleanor Reed, a Registered Professional Forester, planted about 6,400 conifer trees on Dave Walsh's property near Lakefield, about 150 kilometres northeast of Toronto, with support from Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program. "Look at 'em now!" Reed wrote this spring, attaching this photo of a happy White Pine, that, just seven years after planting, now soars much higher than Walsh himself.

At present, half of Walsh's property is managed forest while the other half remains as farmland. He believes that it's important to balance farming with conservation efforts. "I have a message for landowners who are contemplating participation in the 50 Million Tree Program," Walsh added in a subsequent note to Our Forest. "When we consider tree planting, there is a widely held sentiment that it is for the benefit of future generations. And while this is true, it is also true that the landscape changes quickly. It doesn't take long for wildlife to return and for trees to shoot out the ground. These are things we can enjoy in our own lifetime."

Do you have a story and photos about trees planted on your property? Want to see them published in Our Forest? Send photos and a description to: marcom@forestsontario.ca

Landowner Dave Walsh shows off how tall the White Pine trees planted under the 50 Million Tree Program on his farm near Lakefield have grown since 2017. Photo by Dave Walsh.

Forests Ontario Goes Wild

Green Expo offers a chance to talk to gardeners about trees

BY MATTHEW BROWN

On May 4, Forests Ontario had a booth at Carolinian Canada Coalition's Go Wild Grow Wild Green Expo in London, Ontario to talk to visitors about the benefits of tree planting.

The event was designed to be the largest, wildest, greenest, most adventurous event series in Ontario's far south. Together with thousands of adventurers, gardeners, nature enthusiasts and families, Go Wild Grow Wild is growing a green future. This collaborative movement serves as a catalyst to celebrate, inspire, and spark action to protect our wildlife and create a healthy habitat.



Forests Ontario's Peter Moddle, National Program Manager, and Ted Alemayehu, GIS/Database Technician, at the Go Wild Grow Wild Green Expo.

Bass Pro Shops and Cabela Support National Tree Planting Projects

Customer donations plant 200,000 trees across Canada

BY MATTHEW BROWN

Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund are supporting the planting of 200,000 trees this year and next through Forests Ontario and its planting partners across Canada – creating and restoring more than 240 acres of forests. The support comes from customers who round up their purchases at the register and online.

The recent donation to Forests Ontario from the Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund follows previous contributions in 2022 and 2020 that together will support the planting of more than 306,500 trees, making the retailer one of the charity's most committed, ongoing partners.

“At Forests Ontario, we build strong relationships with a comprehensive network of experienced partners who understand the transformative power of healthy forests – and that includes Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's,” Jess Kaknevicus, CEO of Forests Ontario, says.



Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Vaughan store staff present a cheque to Forests Ontario in May 2024. Photo by Forests Ontario.

Save the Date for Forests Ontario's Annual Conference

The event will be held on February 19–20, 2025

BY MATTHEW BROWN

Diverse, healthy forests sustain biodiversity, healthy people, and a healthy economy – but as we face the threats of a changing climate and biodiversity loss, it's more important than ever that we get together to talk about how we can conserve, restore, and grow forests for the wellbeing of people and planet.



Join us for our 2025 Annual Conference to celebrate, network, and inspire a connection with our beautiful forests.

Evening Social: Wednesday, February 19, 2025

Conference: Thursday, February 20, 2025

Venue: Hilton Toronto Airport Hotel - Suites

Address: 5875 Airport Road, Mississauga, ON, L4V 1N1

Find out more and get your tickets at forestsontario.ca/events.



Top: A couple picking up free trees from *Take Root* flank Mark McDermid, Seed and Stock Specialist at Forests Ontario, in Guelph, May 2024. Photos by Forests Ontario.

Left: Forests Ontario staff and volunteers show off tree seedlings that were distributed at a spring 2024 *Take Root* pick-up event in Newmarket, Ontario in May 2024.

Upper right: York Region Forester Kayla Hayden, RPF (right) helps a resident load trees into her car at a Forests Ontario *Take Root* pick-up event in Vaughan, Ontario in May 2024.

Growing the Urban Tree Canopy

Take Root expands to York Region

BY BRITTANY HAINES

As it enters its second year, Forests Ontario's Take Root program has expanded from Guelph to now include York Region.

Take Root partners with local municipalities to offer residents low-cost to no-cost trees to plant on their property. The program promotes understanding and provides participants with the opportunity to learn about the importance of a healthy tree canopy and proper planting and care techniques, while making a difference in their neighbourhood.

This spring, the initiative reached new locations in Newmarket and Vaughan through our partnership with the Regional Municipality of York, distributing 1,000 trees

and 500 perennial wildflower kits in York Region. In Guelph, where the program began in 2023, Take Root this year distributed nearly 2,000 trees.

With over 25 different tree species available this year and the inclusion of perennial wildflowers, the program further enhances local biodiversity and supports pollinators in typically underserved areas. Forests Ontario's efforts in York Region mark a significant step in fostering sustainable environments and community involvement in conservation efforts.

Visit treestakeroot.ca to learn more and get your community involved!

Under the Tree Seed Coat

BY MARK MCDERMID



Mark McDermid

Viable tree seed sorted by the region from where it originates is a key pillar in Forests Ontario's tree planting initiatives. In this recurring feature, Mark McDermid, Seed & Stock Specialist at Forests Ontario, answers all your tree seed questions.

How do you decide what to collect for seed each year?

Since we have a 17-year history of planting trees in Ontario under the 50 Million Tree Program, historical planting records give us a great foundation of what we plant with our partners on an annual basis. These details include quantities by species, seed origin, planting location and stock types. I compare that information with what we have available in our long-term storage seed bank. Ideally, we would like to have a five-year supply of seed for our major conifer species. But ultimately, we are reliant on what seed crops are on the landscape to collect and with the warmer fall conditions over the last several years, it has been challenging to acquire due to early seed dispersal.

Who collects the cones and seeds?

Forests Ontario is fortunate to have a dedicated group of seed collectors across the province. Many of these individuals have collected seed for decades and some are second-, third-, or even fourth-generation collectors! Many of them and their families started out collecting seed for the Ontario Tree Seed Plant (Ministry of Natural Resources) when it was operating, and Forests Ontario has continued working with this group since the closure of that facility. We also connect with people that have done the Certified Seed Collector workshop training course offered by the Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA). With the support of FGCA, we are developing some additional training which will include some mentoring opportunities.

Can anyone collect and supply you seed?

The short answer is...potentially! As mentioned above, we work with a variety of people to collect seed. But having the appropriate training and/or experience is paramount to continue the high standards and chain of custody required to maintain our programs. It is critical that collectors can identify species, understand the forecasting and timing of collection and implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) while collecting.

Forests Ontario's system is complex and functions as such with an infrastructure that ensures collection sites, quality checks, handling and shipping practices are executed correctly to maintain high-quality seed. As an organization, we are always looking for ways to improve and potential opportunities, which includes seed acquisition.

Do you have any questions about tree seed? Send your questions to Mark via Marcom@forestsontario.ca.



Hailey and Ayden, the granddaughters of tree seed collector Craig Laing, rest on bags of Eastern White Pine cones after a day of helping granddad gather cones for Forests Ontario near Brussels in Huron County, October 2022. "They were a big help," Laing says. Photo by Craig Laing.

2.7 Million Trees Planted This Year

Another successful season for reforestation in 2024

Thank you to the seed and cone collectors, the nurseries, and our many planting partners whose hard work, expertise, and teamwork resulted in another banner year for planting trees with funding support through Forests Ontario and Forest Recovery Canada. Together, we grow healthy forests that communities will enjoy for generations.







Enticing Bird Breeding and Feeding Grounds

Tallgrass prairie restoration blooms on the Oak Ridges Moraine

BY MATTHEW BROWN

When Richard Scott bought his 52-hectare property in the Oak Ridges Moraine region in Baltimore, Ontario (40 minutes east of Oshawa), he was drawn by its beauty but didn't yet realize just how important the land was to local bird species and to maintaining connections between natural areas.

The property provides habitat for bird species that are experiencing serious declines – including Barn Swallows and Tree Swallows as well as grassland birds including Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, and Grasshopper Sparrows. Beyond the local fauna, the property also boasted significant populations of native tallgrass prairie indicator species, including Wild Lupine, Big and Little Bluestem, Switchgrass, and Hairy Beardtongue.

Geographically, the property is close to the Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) Hazel Bird Nature Reserve – a 118-hectare property secured for the protection and

restoration of rare tallgrass prairie, sand barren, oak woodland and oak savanna habitats – as well as three Provincially Significant Wetlands.

"I bought this property just over 15 years ago. There was nothing on it – though part of the property had been farmed and there was also a sand pit," Richard Scott says. "About 10 years ago, I built the house and then four or five years ago, I called Val [Deziel, Forests Ontario's Director of Restoration Programs, and formerly of NCC] because there was a lot of Lupin out here and people from the NCC would come to collect the Lupin seeds."

There was a lot of Spotted Knapweed (an invasive plant that Val knew well thanks to writing an Honours thesis on the subject) on the property, as well as remnants of tall grass prairie. "Val came out to the property and we had a walk around and that was when we first had the idea to do a prescribed burn, which happened in 2022," Scott says.

A prescribed burn is a deliberately set, carefully planned, and controlled fire that consumes ground-level fuels such as dried leaves, cured grass, forbs (a type of herbaceous flowering plant), needles, and fallen or downed woody debris. Pioneered by First Nations, the process is a widely used and recognized scientific method of controlling out-competing, non-fire tolerant invasive species, allowing for growth and regeneration of the naturally occurring historical grasslands and fire-tolerant tree species.

The goal on Scott's farm: establish a sustainable tallgrass prairie ecosystem, which would provide a habitat for many endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna.

"The day of the prescribed burn was an exciting day – kind of stressful too because of the proximity to the road – but it all worked out. I'd guess that there was a 60 per cent improvement in the density of the tall grasses here just from the one burn" Deziel says.

Flowers such as Wild Lupine and rare tall grasses on the property used to be prevalent all around this region of Ontario, but agricultural farming, invasive species, and just getting crowded out and shaded out by species such as Scots Pine, dwindled their numbers.

Richard Scott on his restored tallgrass prairie.





A panoramic shot of Richard Scott's tallgrass prairie in Baltimore, Ontario. Photos by Matthew Brown, Forests Ontario.

"If we didn't do anything, this area would be overrun by invasive species and undesirable species and all these extremely rare grasses and flowers would be gone – which is what happened to most of the prairies in this region," Val says.

For the threatened bird species in the area, the return of a tallgrass prairie provides an enticing feeding and breeding ground. "The way these grasses form in clumps – with bare ground around the clumps – makes it ideal for ground-nesting birds. They can forage and have their young in there and feel safe," Deziel says.

Right: A closeup view of Little Bluestem, one of the defining grasses of the tallgrass prairie.

Bottom Right: An example of the tallgrasses growing in clumps, making them ideal spots for ground-nesting birds.



Above: Val Deziel (left), Forests Ontario's Director of Restoration Programs, with Richard Scott on his property in Baltimore, Ontario.

But the prescribed burn wasn't the only action taken to begin to restore this beautiful, tallgrass prairie. Over the course of several years, restoration actions included prescribed burning, thinning, native planting and seeding, and invasive species control. "We also removed some White Pine from parts of this property, as they were crowding – and killing – these old oak trees. One of the main focuses in this area is all about oak. We protect oak, we encourage oak, we burn for oak – they do so much for the animals and the local environment," Val says.

As Richard – who still splits his time between his legal practice in Toronto and his property in Baltimore – sees the tallgrass prairie begin to thrive and spread, he is grateful for the expertise of Forests Ontario's restoration team and also proud to have played a part in bringing back this incredible ecosystem.

"On any given day, I can see firsthand how this land sustains and protects not just countless species of wildflowers and tallgrasses, but also the insects, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals that call this area home," Scott says. "It's an honour to be a small part of taking care of this land."



Forest Restoration Across the Country

Forest Recovery Canada teams up with local partners from coast to coast

BY PETER MODDLE

Launched in 2012, Forest Recovery Canada is the national division of Forests Ontario, formed in response to the growing demand and increased opportunity for large-scale restoration projects across the country. This article highlights just a handful of Forest Recovery Canada's recent successes.



Above: Trees replanted on a logged site in Malcolm Knapp Research Forest, BC, April 2024.

Right: Nursery seedling stock that is used for planting, April 2024. Planting included a diverse mix of Western Red and Yellow Cedar, Sitka Spruce, Douglas and Amabilis Fir and Western White Pine. Photos by the University of British Columbia.



British Columbia: Tree planting in nature's classroom

Forest Recovery Canada and the University of British Columbia (UBC) have fostered a longstanding, collaborative relationship centered around tree-planting initiatives. In 2024, the two organizations are proudly partnering once again on a planting project at UBC's renowned Malcolm Knapp Research Forest (MKRF). Situated on the traditional lands of the Katzie First Nation in the Coast Mountains, the 5,157-hectare MKRF serves as a vital outdoor classroom and research ground for local and international academia, government agencies, and other forestry stakeholders.

With over 1,000 research projects initiated across its lands over the decades, this year's planting of 72,000 trees will contribute to the numerous long-term studies at MKRF that are shaping forestry knowledge through rich datasets. Some of these trials span over 60 years, providing invaluable longitudinal insights into managed forest growth, yields, ecology, and impacts of various practices - datasets considered among the most extensive in Western North America. Through this collaboration, Forest Recovery Canada enables the sustainable management of this working forest's outdoor classroom, while supporting UBC's world-class research facilities and hands-on training of future foresters, researchers, and land stewards.





Northern Alberta: Planting aims to help restore forests devastated by 2019 fire

In the wake of escalating wildfire risks, restoring fire-impacted landscapes has become a priority across Canada. The McMillan wildfire of 2019 had a devastating impact on local communities, the natural boreal forest ecosystem, and the environment in the area around Slave Lake, Alberta. Earlier this year, Forest Recovery Canada partnered with Shakti by TELUS to undertake a critical wildfire reforestation initiative and support the recovery of 125 hectares of burned boreal forest by planting 250,000 trees. These lands were severely burned, and regeneration of White Spruce dominant stands has been very low to non-existent in the Mistehae Lake area.

Without this wildfire reforestation initiative, it could take hundreds of years for the forest to naturally replenish itself. This project will expedite the White Spruce regeneration and return the forest to its natural cover type by the end of the century. Having trees on the land immediately provides benefits to many species during the regeneration cycle. The Mistehae Lake area is home to many vulnerable and threatened wildlife species, including the Grizzly Bear, Trumpeter Swan, Woodland Caribou, Common Nighthawk, Canada Warbler, and many other mammals, amphibians, insects, birds and plants. Trumpeter Swans are highly vulnerable to human disturbance and this project will restore a forested buffer, greatly reducing human disturbance and impact to breeding swans. The project will also reduce the wolf predation risk to the local Nipisi caribou herd by providing visual breaks in the forest and hiding cover within the regenerating forest.



Sunrise over the forest on the shore of Mistehae Lake in Alberta in May 2024, shows boreal forest burned by fire in 2019. Photos by Shakti by TELUS.



Above: Volunteers with the Calgary Junior Forest Wardens Society help to organize tree planters working to restore forest landscapes at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area, May 2024. Photos by Project Forest.

Left: Project Forest Executive Director Mike Toffan oversees planting by volunteers at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area near Calgary in May 2024.

Calgary, Alberta: Junior Forest Wardens and volunteers plant trees

Forest Recovery Canada is thrilled to collaborate with Project Forest, a Canadian non-profit focused on rewilding landscapes across the nation. This past spring, our partnership kicked off with a community planting initiative together with the Calgary Junior Forest Wardens Society at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area. With perfect planting conditions under clear skies, over 200 people, ranging from five to 80 years old, came together to plant an impressive 10,000 trees in just four hours.

Southwest of Calgary, the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area is a hotspot for biodiversity. Home to over 400 plant species and an abundance of wildlife, the area boasts large mammals like moose, elk, deer, bears, and cougars, as well as smaller species like beavers, porcupines, and a wide variety of birds. Restoration efforts through tree-planting initiatives are crucial in safeguarding this habitat from environmental risks such as wildfires, habitat fragmentation, and climate change impacts.

By actively restoring native vegetation and aligning with the Conservation Area's mission of protecting habitat and providing space for native wildlife, Forest Recovery Canada also aims to create opportunities for youth to learn about climate action, the importance of nature-based solutions, and responsible environmental stewardship. Engaging the next generation in hands-on initiatives empowers them to appreciate the great outdoors and play a part in shaping a sustainable future for our forests and communities.

New Brunswick: Forest restoration at Mactaquac and Herring Cove provincial parks

Along the Wolastoq/Saint John River and the Bay of Fundy coastline, RePlant Environmental and New Brunswick Provincial Parks, with funding support provided by Forest Recovery Canada, are collaborating on a 50-hectare forest restoration initiative to enhance long-term ecosystem health within the provincial parks. This project involves planting 67,000 trees at the iconic Mactaquac and Herring Cove Provincial Parks, encompassing afforestation and understory plantings to boost resilience and biodiversity.

At Mactaquac Provincial Park, large-scale plantings will play an important role in supporting the ecosystem health of the Wolastoq/Saint John River watershed. Using a diverse planting mix, the project will introduce climate-adapted native species like the fast-growing, drought-resistant White Pine, helping to add a layer of resilience to protect the region from the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events. Located on Campobello Island in the Bay of Fundy, the afforestation efforts at Herring Cove Provincial Park will help connect fragmented woodlands and contribute to the island's natural cover, providing valuable habitat for local flora and fauna in a unique coastal ecosystem.

Supported by Forests Ontario's national division, Forest Recovery Canada, these initiatives align with the goal of providing benefits for all Canadians. By restoring for biodiversity and promoting climate resilience, these projects will help to benefit the environment, local communities, and the tourism industry, ensuring visitors can continue to enjoy the scenic beauty of these cherished parks for years to come.



Top: Tree planters rest after a long day restoring forests in Mactaquac Provincial Park, May 2024.

Above: Tree planting in Mactaquac Provincial Park beside the Wolastoq/Saint John River in New Brunswick, May 2024. Photos by RePlant Environmental.



Nova Scotia: Tree planting helps forests recover from 2022 hurricane

Nova Scotia's forests are a vital part of the province's ecological and economic landscape. Private landowners play a crucial role in stewarding these forests, as the majority of the province's forestlands are privately owned. Since the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona in 2022, which caused widespread damage to Nova Scotia's forests, private landowners and organizations have been taking proactive steps to aid in the recovery and resilience of these ecosystems.

In partnership with Forest Recovery Canada, Community Forests Canada and the North Nova Forest Owners Co-op are leading an ambitious initiative to plant 200,000 trees this fall on co-op members' woodlots across areas impacted by the hurricane. This effort aims to advance forest recovery efforts and enhance the resilience of Nova Scotia's forestlands by planting diverse species such as Red Spruce, Red Oak, Sugar Maple and White Pine. These species are well-adapted to the region's climate and will contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of the Wabanaki-Acadian forest ecosystem.

Initiatives like this not only support the recovery of forestlands but also highlight the role of private landowners in climate adaptation and sustainable forest management. With risk of more extreme weather events like Hurricane Fiona, collaborative efforts between organizations and national planting programs (such as Forest Recovery Canada), government agencies, and private landowners will be essential for safeguarding Nova Scotia's forests.



Above: Looking from the air, one can see the damage from Hurricane Fiona to a private woodlot in Pictou County, NS, which was smashed into the province in 2022. Photo by Forest Recovery Canada.

Exploring Resorts of Ontario

Investing in nature is an investment in our own health

BY KIM SELLERS

I have always cherished the intrinsic beauty of our natural surroundings. From the fresh tree buds of spring and the sounds of wildlife echoing through the lush, green leaves of summer, to the vibrant colours of fall and crisp beauty of winter – they are all reminders of the vital role forests play in our daily lives.

While new, healthy forests offer one of the most important, sustainable, nature-based solutions to help mitigate the catastrophic effects of climate change, did you know that our natural landscapes also provide incredible health and wellness benefits?

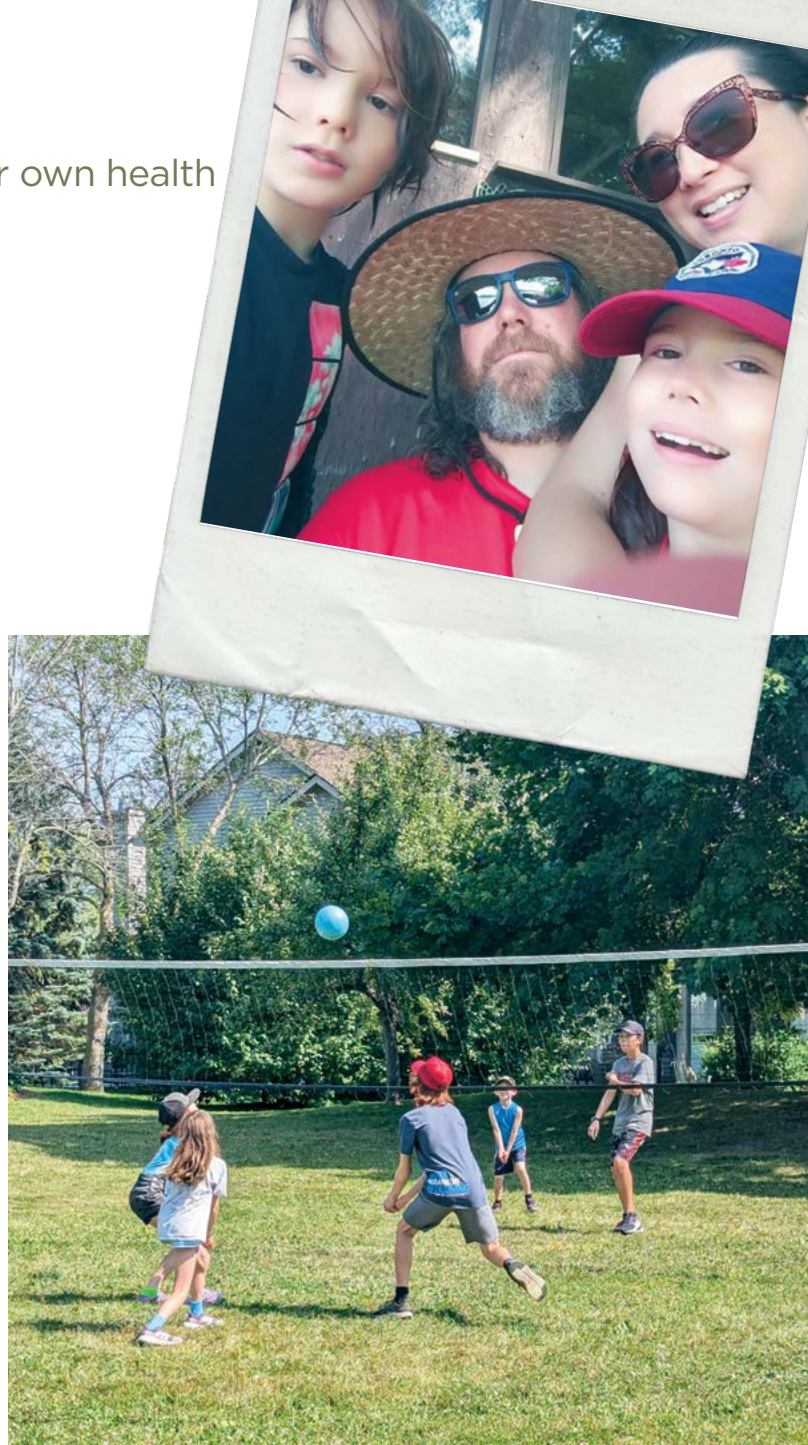
In communities across the province, our forested landscapes help clean our air and water, boost biodiversity and wildlife habitats, create outdoor recreational activities, and even contribute to our own health. From speeding rehabilitation to reducing stress, there is growing evidence that human mental and physical well-being is closely associated with the health of our forest ecosystems.

Connecting with nature has always been a priority for me and my family. Taking advantage of the changing seasons in Ontario means strolling in our local parks and trekking the trails that run through our neighbourhood forest. These familiar spots are important ways for us to get outside year-round, but we also love to venture a bit farther and explore our province. With two children in tow, and plenty of energy to burn, we often pack up the car and see where the next adventure takes us.

Every summer, we visit Georgian Bay Hotel in Collingwood with my sisters, nieces, and nephews. The kids play all kinds of outdoor games, taking full advantage of the resort grounds. We also like to take day trips to the surrounding areas for a bike ride, hike, or swim, and to explore local environmental points of interest, including Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, Blue Mountain Trails, and Sunset Point Beach to visit the local Inukshuk.

Throughout my childhood, my family would spend the week between Christmas and New Year's at Horseshoe Resort just outside of Barrie. Days were filled with snowshoeing (and the occasional snowball fight) in the local forests, along with trips to the neighbouring Horseshoe Resort for skiing, snow tubing, and tobogganing. There were also opportunities to go on horse-drawn sleigh rides and visit local sugar shacks where they made maple syrup.

I feel fortunate to pass along my love of the outdoors to my children and know the work I do every day has an impact year-round in communities across the province and nationwide. At Forests Ontario, we know investing in nature is an investment in our own health. Whether it be strolling through your neighbourhood park or embarking on your next family adventure through a new forest, please take a moment to get outside, connect with nature, and create many new and wonderful memories along the way.



Top: Kim with her family enjoying the outdoors in Peterborough County.

Above: Kim's children, niece and nephews enjoying the outdoors at Georgian Bay Resort in Collingwood, Ontario, July 2024. Photos by Kim Sellers, Forests Ontario.

Kim Sellers is the Director of Business Development with Forests Ontario. This article was originally published in the 2024/25 issue of Resorts of Ontario's magazine Great Escapes (resortsofontario.ca/greatescapes). In 2023, Forests Ontario announced a partnership with Resorts of Ontario aimed at advancing environmental sustainability and forest conservation with resort members and tourism communities across the province, some of which Kim fondly recalls visiting during her childhood. Learn more about this partnership at: forestsontario.ca/en/article/partnership-with-resorts-of-ontario.

Shaping the Next Forest Stewards, One School at a Time

Students in Renfrew County go on a unique forest field trip

BY ANDI DARELL ALHAKIM

When Lacey Rose, County Forester for the County of Renfrew, took a group of high-school students on a day trip to a forest and a lumber mill, she was thrilled with the outcome.

“At the beginning of the day, I asked the students if any of them were considering a career in forestry,” Rose says. “There might have been one reluctant hand raised. At the end of the day, I asked them the same questions. Four or so enthusiastic hands shot up. That’s what this is all about – letting students know there are many meaningful career paths in the forest sector and hoping they can see themselves here someday.”

The outing saw Grade 9 students from Fellowes High School in Pembroke, Ontario, join Rose and other forestry professionals for a Sustainable Forest Management tour – a program held four times a year by Forests Ontario and its partners. This iteration included visits to Petawawa Research Forest and Shaw Lumber about 180 kilometres northwest of Ottawa.

“We had a good group of 50 students and three teachers, so the tour at Petawawa Research Forest involved students rotating at four different stations to learn about different forest management techniques,” Teri Hoang, who

coordinates the tours as Forests Ontario’s Restoration and Stewardship Coordinator, says. Stations addressed themes such as the transition, resistance, and adaptation of trees, while giving students hands-on opportunities to do tree ID and measure tree diameter, height, and basal area. These stations at the Natural Resources Canada-run site showcased different types of treatment or harvest.

“...That’s what this is all about – letting students know **there are many meaningful career paths in the forest sector...**”

Students and teachers from Fellowes High School in Pembroke, Ontario take a Sustainable Forest Management tour of Petawawa Research Forest and Shaw Lumber in April 2024. Photos by Dawn Byers.





Above: High school students tour the Petawawa Research Forest.

Left: Lacey Rose, County Forester for the County of Renfrew, speaks to high school students in the Petawawa Research Forest.

“For example, White Pines generally respond to a type of harvest called shelterwood, but we were also able to test on them varying degrees of shade, cover, and sun,” Dan Beausoleil, Forests Ontario’s Restoration Programs Coordinator, explains. “On one site, they underplanted White Pine and Red Oak but with different seed sources and ages as an assisted migration test to see which performed better. These types of research are becoming more pertinent now as we mitigate the effects of climate change.”

The group then visited Shaw Lumber, a mill specializing in utility poles. It gave students a chance to learn about another side of the forest sector and see how pines are utilized in a sustainably managed production process. “It was interesting to see where students gravitated toward – some were more interested in the outdoors and forest management aspect at Petawawa, while others were keener on the business and industrial production side at Shaw Lumber,” Beausoleil says.

Sustainable Forest Management tours like these are part of Forests Ontario’s broader education and awareness portfolio. According to Hoang and Beausoleil, the aim is to capture minds, pique interest, and gear young people toward understanding that many exciting career options are available in the forestry community.

“Our students still have a long time to decide which path they’d like to pursue. I can’t wait to see in a couple years’ time where they all end up,” Beausoleil shares.

“It’s always fulfilling to get young people, especially from underrepresented backgrounds, to see themselves in the sector and contribute toward environmental stewardship in their own unique ways,” Hoang concludes.

Forests Ontario thanks partners from County of Renfrew Forestry, Petawawa Research Forest, Shaw Lumber, and Renfrew County District School Board, along with volunteers from Lavern Heideman & Sons and Algonquin College, for making the day possible. Funding support for the visit came from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

We Feel the Need... the Need for Seed

Canada must grow its tree seed supply chain, especially for broadleaf species

BY NAIRN HAY

In Canada, the demand for native trees continues to increase for reclamation and restoration projects. With growing demand for seedlings, there is a parallel increase in demand for larger volumes and numbers of species of tree seed. Climate change is driving the need for more seed, from more species, and from more places.

The largest demand for tree seed, by far, is for reforestation by the forest industry (over 500 million seedlings per year). By and large, the forest industry cuts evergreen trees. To replenish these forests, there is a long history of investments by industry and government that has led to substantial facilities for the production, processing and storage of large volumes of conifer seed. Thanks to these investments, the forest sector has, for the most part, a sustainable supply of conifer tree seed.

However, organizations who seek hardwood trees and shrubs for their projects often have difficulty sourcing tree seeds to grow into seedlings. Non-profits, restoration and reclamation companies, and importantly, Indigenous organizations, often struggle to secure tree seed. This makes it hard for them to plant the right tree in the right place.

Communities and organizations plant trees mainly to restore landscapes altered by human activities. Over the past decade, restoration and reclamation projects are increasingly focused on mitigating the impacts of climate change and industrial development.

“Restoration of landscapes in and adjacent to Indigenous communities is an important step towards reconciliation.”

Climate change has altered the scale and vectors of disturbances in our forests: disturbances from fire and disease have become more frequent and are larger. Just think of the 18 million hectares of forest burned by wildfire in Canada in 2023. The 10-year average of area burned by wildfire per year in Canada is nearly 25 times the area harvested for timber each year. The dynamics of where we plant trees and why will alter the species we choose to plant. For example, increased planting of hardwoods as fire breaks to slow fire spread is becoming more common. To meet the challenge of mitigating climate change, we must begin to proactively collect significant amounts of tree seed.

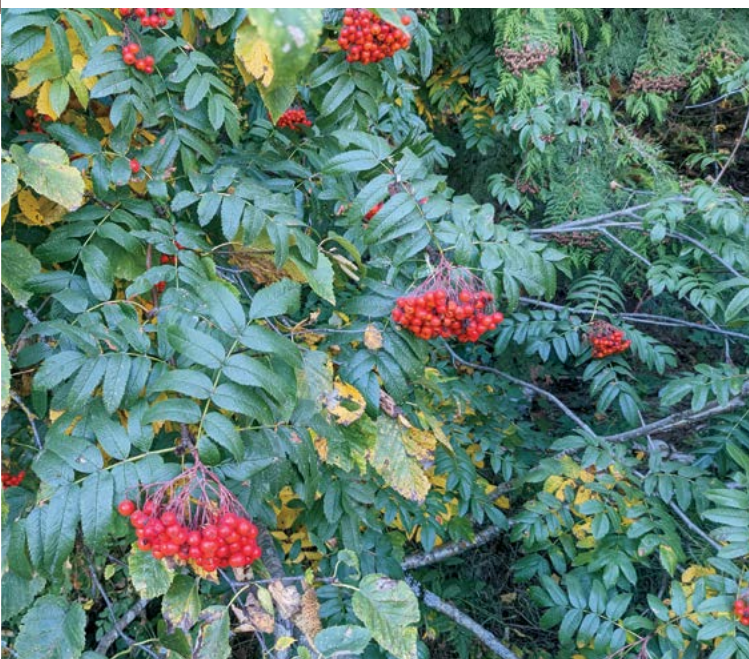


Douglas Maple tree seeds in Lumby, BC, September 2022. Photos by Nairn Hay.

In Indigenous communities, members place high value on restoring plants that have food, medicinal, and cultural value. Saskatoon Berry (used for food) and Black Ash (the bark is used to make baskets) have significant importance to the maintenance of culture: the loss of native plants can be linked to the loss of language and tradition. The National Tree Seed Centre, located in Fredericton, New Brunswick, hosts a national conservation collection of tree seed from species across Canada. In 2022, the centre began the Indigenous Seed Collection Program, to help Indigenous communities build capacity to collect, process, and store tree seed for restoration and reclamation projects. Restoration of landscapes in and adjacent to Indigenous communities is an important step towards reconciliation.

The capacity of the tree seed collection supply chain must be increased significantly for users outside the forest industry. The demand for tree seed used to grow seedlings on behalf of environmental organizations, Indigenous communities, and restoration/reclamation companies are increasing in volume and complexity.

To build capacity in the tree seed collection supply chain will require a sustained financial investment, as provincial governments have done in British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec and the Maritimes. In other jurisdictions, there have been pulses of short-term, targeted funding. The financial support helped build capacity for short periods of time but as funding dwindled, much of the built capacity was lost. Investment must be made in training



Above: Green Bur Oak Acorns in Fredericton, NB, September 2021.

Left: Mountain Ash Berries in Lumby, BC, September 2022. Once the berries are picked, seeds are removed from the flesh using either a blender or a Dybvig Seed Cleaner (a machine used to extract seeds from berries) and the seeds are then dried and placed in cold storage.

and education, facilities, and in the seed collections themselves: seed collections are undervalued. Where there is investment, there are sustainable supplies of tree seed.

Forest Recovery Canada conducted surveys with experts and users of seed from across Canada. The surveys revealed the following gaps in the tree seed supply chain: a lack of human resources (labour force), limited access to training and education, less frequent opportunities to collect seed (climate change has made collection cycles less certain), and a need for facilities to process and store high-quality tree seed collections. Building capacity could

potentially happen through the funding of four primary functions: partnership and networks, training, education and research, and infrastructure – all while increasing the value of tree seed collections themselves. If tree seed value is increased, it will support a sustainable supply chain now and into the future.

Nairn Hay is the former Project Coordinator of the Seed Supply Capacity Building Project, a program with Forests Ontario's national division, Forest Recovery Canada.

Breaking Barriers to Access for Fieldwork

A look into Field Research in Evolution and Ecology Diversified

BY VANESSA NHAN, RPF



Above: Vanessa Nhan leads a forestry workshop during the inaugural Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified (FREED) course at the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station in Algonquin Provincial Park, August 2022. During a hike on Two Rivers Trail, Vanessa teaches students about tree identification and ecology. From left: Vanessa Nhan, Jasmin Jeong, Etienne Oshinowo, and Angie Wang. Photos by Samantha Stephens.

Right: Aranya Iyer points out a bird to Brayden Land and Ava Gayle Rose during an early morning birding workshop at the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station, part of the inaugural FREED course in August 2022.





From the edge of the lookout at Two Rivers Trail in Algonquin Park, a collective moment of peace and silence passed amongst the group as we gazed out over the valley. The only sound was the leaves rustling in a slight breeze. I felt a sense of calm as the wind passed over my face and could see the calm spread through the students around me, as if a wave had passed over us.

For the second year in a row, I was leading a forest ecology and dendrology workshop for FREED (Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified). Engaging with 13 bright, enthusiastic students in this workshop served as a pleasant reminder of my own sense of excitement and wonder being in the forest, and a reminder of why I chose this as a career path.

My path into forestry sprouted from a short stint as a field technician in northern Michigan. As a recent graduate, I found myself living in remote areas, spending 10-hour days in the bush conducting regeneration surveys. While it was challenging, this experience was formative in nurturing my connection to the forest. Because I came to forestry later than some, I am often reminded that not everyone has had the opportunity and privilege to foster that connection to nature from a young age.

The historic marginalization of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized (BIPOC) individuals in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) has disproportionately made it challenging to access opportunities to experience the outdoors, to nurture a connection to nature and the land, and to pursue a career in a field like forestry. Common barriers to these individuals can include financial constraints, familial obligations, culture and religion, discrimination, mental or physical health, or simply lack of knowledge and therefore experience. FREED was created to help BIPOC youth gain that experience and connection with nature in a safe and accessible environment.

FREED is a grassroots organization that aims to increase access to fieldwork and outdoor careers for undergraduates that self-identify as Indigenous, Black, and/or Racialized. During the program, we host curated workshops over several weekends, culminating in our weeklong event in Algonquin Park. As part of our mandate, FREED does not charge any fees, and we offer subsidies and bursaries to alleviate financial constraints of participating in fieldwork away from home and family obligations.

In August 2023, we held our second weeklong event in Algonquin Park for 13 undergraduate students from the University of Toronto, eight

workshop instructors, and two faculty sponsors. We learned to canoe with The Friends of Algonquin Park, fly-fished with Demiesha Dennis of Brown Girl Outdoor World, and learned the history of Algonquin people with Christine Luckasavitch of Waaseyaa Consulting. Graduate students and young professionals led workshops on birds, turtles, aquatic ecology, scientific communication, entomology, invasive species, and scientific illustration. We even had an introduction to camping overnight in Whitefish Lake campground!

During my forestry workshop, we learned how to identify tree species, using scientific and Ojibwe names, and explored the history of forest management in Algonquin Park. We visited a prescribed burn site and discussed the importance of forest fires and the meaning of cultural burning. By the end of the week of FREED, I was happy to see students (and instructors!) shouting, “That’s a White Spruce! There’s a Balsam Fir!”. Seeing folks observing the forest in a new way reminded me of my own excitement when I started learning about trees.

A highlight of the event was the “Letter to the Land” activity where students were prompted to reflect and write a thank you letter to the land. Beautiful expressions of gratitude, belonging, and connectedness were prominent throughout all written letters, reflecting on the reciprocity between humans, the land, and our non-human kin. One student wrote: “You gave us space to grow and to allow ourselves to breathe and just smell the flowers.” Moments like these continue to inspire the work that we do and continue these events annually.

For 2024, we are excited to continue growing FREED. This year, we have partnered with multiple universities in Southern Ontario to host a total of four events. Since the inception of the program in 2022, our network has grown substantially, engaging with 56 students, 39 workshop instructors, and over 80 individuals from 43 different organizations. With our continual growth, we hope that this work can help to foster change in the forestry and environmental sectors to be more inclusive, diverse, and equitable.

Learn More About FREED: You can read a summary on the event in more detail in the 2023 FREED Report and follow FREED on social media: LinkedIn, Instagram (@FREED_fieldwork) and X (@FREED_fieldwork).

Vanessa Nhan lives in Thunder Bay and is a Lead Forest Analyst with Silvacom Ltd.

Prescribed Burn in High Park

Reigniting a practice that is thousands of years old at a Toronto landmark

BY ANDI DARELL ALHAKIM

The controlled flames that swept through High Park this spring were part of a traditional and prescribed burn, also referred to as *Biinaakzigewok Anishnaabeg* or “a responsibility for a cleansing burn by all Native Peoples.” This practice, which holds Indigenous cultural significance, has been carried out for thousands of years predating European settlement. The City of Toronto uses it as an ecological tool for biodiversity management and has conducted prescribed burns annually on key landscapes for over 20 years.

In attendance this year were 30 Indigenous members, 40 City of Toronto staff, and many more partners and volunteers. The day started with a sunrise ceremony by Indigenous Elders to welcome the burn into High Park and light the first fire. Indigenous Fire Keepers transfer the sacred coals to each ignition spot. Specially trained contractor crews control the fire using kerosene drip torches, including hand-held and ATV mounted torches. Forests Ontario recently spoke with two members of the City of Toronto’s Parks, Forestry, and Recreation division to understand why prescribed burns matter.

“This year’s burn date, April 9, was selected for optimal weather conditions such as wind and temperature, all following our comprehensive burn plan,” says Kristen Vincent, Supervisor, Natural Resource Management. “Because of this weather dependency, we only know the exact burn date 24-48 hours in advance, when the team makes the call,” adds Jaclyn Scobie, Program Standards & Development Officer, Urban Forestry.

The burn rejuvenates the landscape by promoting the growth of native species and setting back non-native species, which can be invasive. It also removes the thick layer of leaves and dead litter in the understory. This exposes the soil and allows sunlight to promote seed germination.

Burning also helps conserve a key ecosystem which has become rare in Ontario. “High Park is historically a Black Oak savannah, which is a fire-dependent ecosystem and one that you don’t see often in Southern Ontario. Without fire disturbance, other native trees will fill the landscape and alter this unique ecosystem. In addition, non-native species will also move into the space, pushing out native species,” says Scobie. “Many non-native species also have an extended growing period, meaning that they start germinating earlier in the season and end later than native species, giving them an advantage. Over time, this will fundamentally change the landscape,” explains Vincent.

“We also want to promote tall grasses that are significant in savannah ecosystems. They are reinvigorated by fire, especially given the ash that helps heat up the soil and return nutrients from the fire, rain, and sun,” adds Scobie. “With strong 9-12-foot-deep root systems, they are meant for that kind of environment.”



Prescribed burns are also a way to reverse policies of past generations that caused ecological and cultural scars. Historical records show that following European settlement, governments suppressed fires for over a hundred years on landscapes such as High Park, restricting Indigenous practices such as burns. The decision to turn High Park into a recreational park in the 1950s meant that the city planted more shade trees, mowed tall grass and replaced it with turf grass and added more picnic areas, which all changed the ecosystem.

“Prescribed burns are also a way to reverse policies of past generations that caused ecological and cultural scars.”

Vincent said that the City began to explore the use of prescribed burns in the late 1990s as more promising studies linking it to ecological restoration were published. With the City’s own burn test plots proving fire’s potential in 2000, Toronto eventually incorporated prescribed burns into the toolkit, especially for managing savannahs.

“In many places where savannahs exist and thrive, those are thanks to Indigenous cultural practices of burning for thousands of years,” says Scobie. “We continue to actively partner with urban Indigenous groups involved with High Park management, particularly the Indigenous Land Stewardship Circle.”

Indigenous communities first took part in the City of Toronto's planning of prescribed burns in 2020, culminating in the first Indigenous burn ceremony at High Park in 2022.

The City partners with Lands & Forests Consulting, who specialize in planning and managing prescribed burns across Southern Ontario. "Even though many of the Black Oaks at High Park are of maturity age and thus fire-resistant, we still make sure that oaks in the younger age classes are protected during burns. We do this by creating burn breaks by removing fuel such as dead leaves around them," explains Scobie.

Staff monitor the success of burns qualitatively by viewing the area after several weeks and in the fall. Joining the review team are various experts, including staff from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The latter conducted a biological inventory in 2018 reviewing species at High Park over the decades. They found that prescribed burns have contributed to some species, such as Wild Lupine, Canada Hawkweed and Cylindrical Blazing Star, returning after nearly disappearing in the 20th century.

These restoration successes opened the path for prescribed burns at other City-managed parks, including Lambton Park in the Jane-Dundas area, and South Humber Park in The Queensway-Royal York area.

One of the most daunting aspects of planning a prescribed burn is fostering public awareness. As wildfires become more frequent in recent years due to climate change, some in the community and media erroneously equate prescribed burns with wildfires.

"Perhaps the biggest difference is that prescribed burns involve highly controlled fires, not a raging inferno. The fires we light only crawl along the ground and will not get high, climb trees or hit canopies," says Vincent. "We burn small sections of High Park with burn breaks in place, and a solid plan for every scenario."

According to Scobie, periodic prescribed burns remove dry leaves and dead litter which helps prevent future wildfires from breaking out, as accumulated material in the understory can serve as fuel if not controlled.

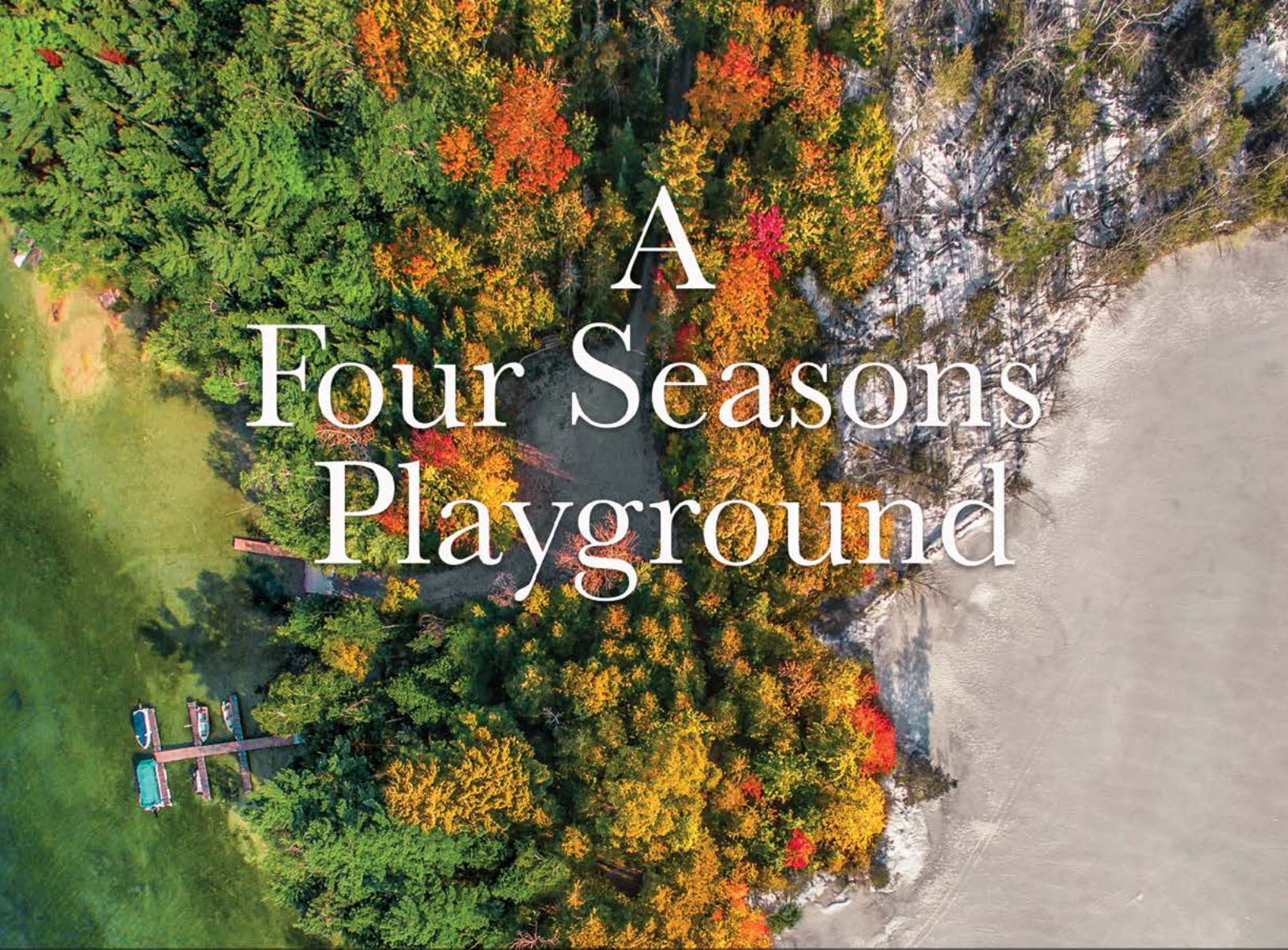
"It is these measures and ecological benefits that we communicate to residents each year," says Vincent, through door-to-door outreach to the surrounding neighbourhoods and social media. "I am glad that more and more people are now starting to be aware, so we can keep maintaining the ecosystem balance at High Park as the famed destination park that it is."

Opposite page: Carolynne Crawley, a member of the Indigenous Land Stewardship Circle, explains the Indigenous origins of cultural burning as a forest management practice during the prescribed burn in High Park, April 2024. Photo by City of Toronto.

Below: Drumming and singing in High Park on day of Indigenous prescribed burn, April 2024. Photo by Matt Forsythe for the City of Toronto.

Background: Smoke shrouds trees in High Park during prescribed burn, April 2024. Photo by City of Toronto.





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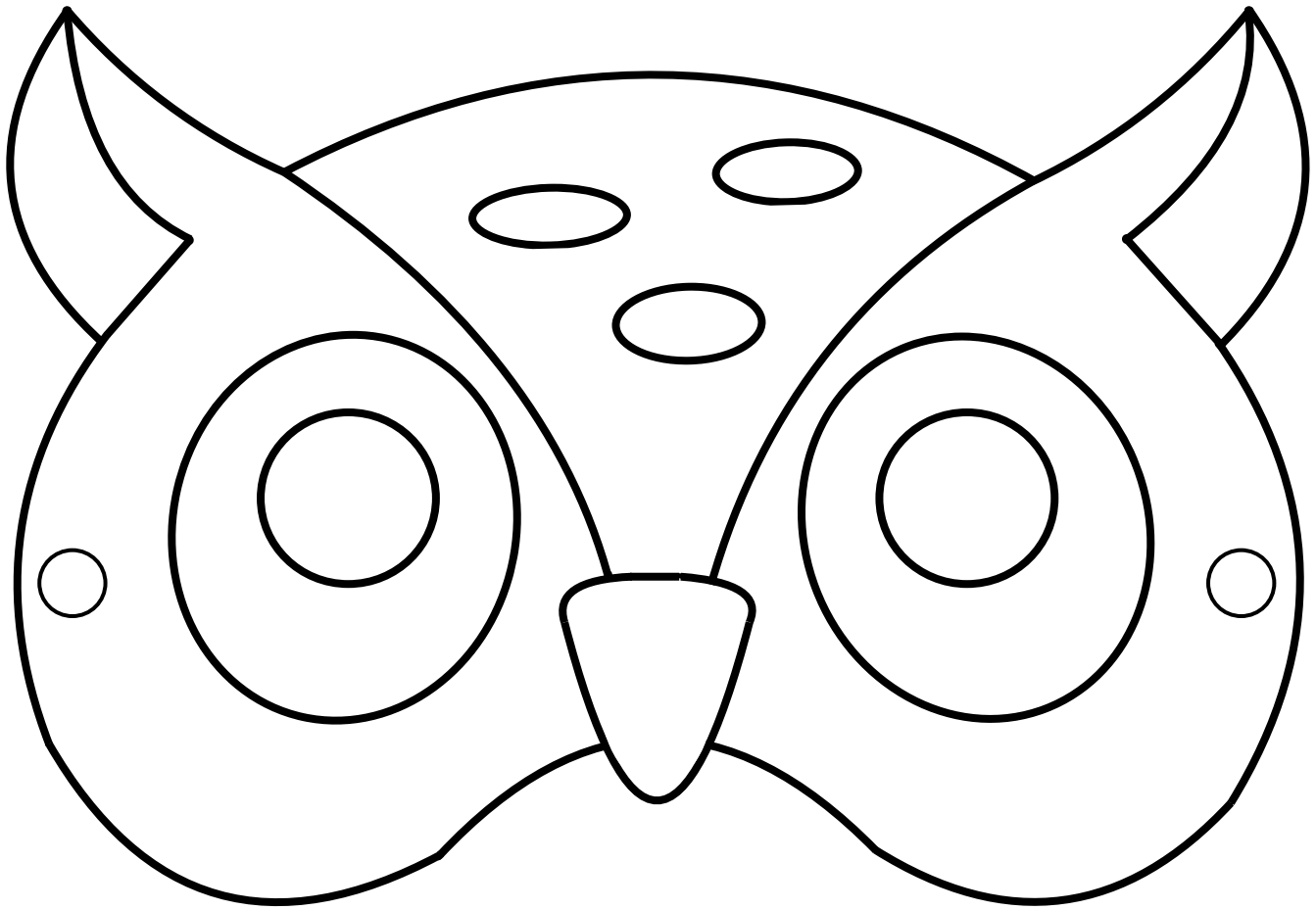
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Colouring pencils, crayons or markers



Scissors



First, colour in the mask. To make a wearable mask, cut out the mask and the eyes of the Owl. Then, you can either glue the side of the mask to a popsicle stick, or cut out a hole on each side of the mask and run a string through it.



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