

# Counties gets lesson on importance of forest coverage

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SD&G needs trees. And fast.

At least that was the message of Steven Hunter, a Forestry Specialist with South Nation Conservation (SNC), who dropped in on counties council late last month to talk about forest coverage in his watershed.

After a brief primer on the importance of trees – they improve the quality of air, water, and soil while providing homes for plants and wildlife – Mr. Hunter shared some sobering statistics with councilors.

Environment Canada suggests a minimum of 30 per cent forest coverage if an area wants to remain ecologically sound. Mr. Hunter says that his watershed has an estimated 21.6 per cent coverage rate, dropping from 9,500 hectares since 1991. He says that the watershed would need about 6,600 hectares to reach that 30 per cent threshold. That translates, roughly, to more than 13 million trees.

Mr. Hunter says that agriculture is the chief reason behind such “deforestation,” accounting for slightly more than 50 per cent of the nation’s lost forest land. Urban development, transportation, and

recreation is the second biggest culprit, accounting for slightly under 20 per cent of deforestation. Other reasons include hydroelectricity, the construction of forest roads, and industry and resource extraction.

In any case, Mr. Hunter says that stakeholders do have an action plan in place. The province, he says, is committed to planting 50 million trees by 2020 and SNC is increasing its tree planting mandates. In 2009, it planted 150,000 trees. That was upped to 160,000 in 2010. Next year, its target is 200,000.

But SNC is doing a lot more than just planting trees. Indeed, Mr. Hunter said that the authority is also encouraging people to donate land to SNC for long-term forest care or participate in the upcoming Private Woodlot Advisory Program, and educating the public at a variety of events (including the Glengarry Wood Fair and Auction in Dunvegan.)

Mr. Hunter admitted that SNC could do better when it comes to reversing the trend in forest coverage. An example he cited was helping municipalities update their official plans to allow for better forestland protection.

Following the presentation, North Dundas Mayor Alvin Runnals

asked if landowners face any restrictions when it comes to cutting down trees. Mr. Hunter told him that there is no such restrictive legislation in place.

The South Nation Conservation watershed covers 3,900 square kilometres in SDG, covering all of South Dundas, the vast majority of North Dundas, most of North Stormont, and small portions of South Stormont and North Glengarry.

Normand Genier, Mr. Hunter’s counterpart at the Raisin Region Conservation Authority (RRCA) – whose watershed encompasses the lion’s share of Glengarry – says that local forestry coverage stands at about 33 per cent.

Even so, he says that there is still a lot of deforestation going on and that residents shouldn’t feel too confident.

“It could easily go beneath that 30 per cent very quickly,” Mr. Genier said.

He added that there are some subwatersheds within the RRCA that are remarkably low in forest coverage. Westley’s and Patingale subwatersheds stand at 11 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

Both are located in the southern part of the old Lancaster Township.