

Forests threatened by proposed dump site?

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RUSSELL | According to Dr. Owen Clarkin, postdoctoral scientist with the National Research Council, and a former resident of Russell, two significant forest groups have been discovered in the area of North Russell around the site that is proposed as a landfill by Taggart Miller.

An extremely rare old-growth forest has been identified about 500m west of the site. It is the only old-growth forest remnant of that size that Dr. Clarkin knows of east of Gillies Bush in Almonte. It has never been logged and contains groves of large hemlock, an indicator species of the primeval Eastern

Ontario forests, as well as ancient yellow birch, beech, elm, silver maple, red maple, and sugar maple.

It is connected to a swampy forest, which contains significant biodiversity, including so many frogs singing in the spring they can be heard a km away. The Russell area is fortunate to have many wetlands with diverse frog populations. Frogs of all species are becoming threatened. Because they live in water and on land for different parts of their lives they are immensely susceptible to toxins in the environment and to habitat loss. This also increases susceptibility to a disease which threatens frog populations worldwide.

About the same distance north of the proposed waste disposal site there are two

connected forests, one of which contains a significant population of butternut trees, which are endangered, as well as rare species such as rock elm and black cherry. The butternut trees there are numerous, vigorous and reproducing well, despite having symptoms of butternut canker. Dr. Clarkin says stands like these represent important genetic reservoirs and could be the place where disease-resistant butternuts may be found.

That forest has an attached wetland, also with rich amphibian, bird and insect biodiversity. The watercourse fed from its spring continues south where it enters a mysterious old forest. This forest is classed as middle succession, and it appears to have been partially logged soon after European

settlement, but then left undisturbed.

It now contains a hemlock grove, classic forest pit and mound topography caused by trees growing over fallen logs, as well as old yellow birch, rock elm, other elms, maples, and oaks. Deep inside stand several ancient, old-growth cedars in an area that was probably too wet to log.

Clarkin says these forests and wetlands, and the many other forested and swampy areas immediately surrounding the site, would be devastated by any groundwater contamination at all. In addition, as soon as grading work started on the site, the headwaters of the small streams that start on the shale hill would change or dry up, which would have an immediate negative impact on the woods and wetlands.