



# FOCUS

by: Richard Mahoney  
richard.mahoney@eap.on.ca

## Pro-tree stand just makes sense

If a tree falls in the forest, does anybody hear, or care?

The answer, of course, is, "Sure, everyone loves trees, eh?"

Everyone knows that somebody is bound to hear tree "harvesting" operations because all across the Far East of Ontario, land is being cleared for crops, homes, businesses, parking lots and, yes, solar panels.

These are the signs of progress, evidently.

Yet, everyone knows that everyone cares deeply about forests.

In fact, nine in ten Ontarians believe that the amount of tree loss in Ontario every year is a serious problem, according to a survey conducted a few years back.

That poll also showed that 83 per cent of Ontario residents believe the collective impact of tree loss over the past decade has created a crisis for Ontario's ecosystem, according to the poll.

Most rural residents are aware of the impact development is having on our forests. Ironically, the green movement has also paved the way for the clearing of wooded areas. Large tracts of treed properties have been denuded to create space for vast arrays of ground-mounted panels that convert the rays of the sun into electricity.

For many, the exposed hectares expose the myopic nature of government green energy policies. But you cannot move forward with a world-leading renewable energy thrust without inflicting some collateral damage, right?

Forest loss is considered inevitable wherever "growth" occurs.

As our leaders beat the bushes for new investors, they have few qualms about beating up on the bushes. If trees stand in the way of new businesses and homes, new jobs and new tax revenues, let's fire up the saws!

We can expect to see a lot of ash trees biting the dust over the next few years now that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has confirmed that the emerald ash borer beetle is present in Prescott-Russell.

The agency is prohibiting the movement of all ash materials, such as logs, branches and wood chips, and all species of firewood from the affected site, from this region.

The most common way for the EAB to spread is through people moving infested materials. The beetle also spreads naturally through flight. Research indicates the adult can fly up to 10 kilometres, but generally does not stray from the immediate area when it emerges.

This is one mean little bug.

The EAB has claimed millions of trees in North America and threatens billions more.

First detected in North America in 2002, the beetle could inflict severe widespread damage.

Ash wood is also used to make furniture, hardwood floors, baseball bats, tool handles, electric guitars, hockey sticks and other materials that require high strength and resilience.

If there is an up-side to this EAB confirmation it's that it may serve as a wake-up call for those who believe that forests and economic development are mutually exclusive.

Once again, the idea of introducing a region-wide tree conservation program has cropped up at the Prescott-Russell united counties council table.

The case for such a policy, the subject of sporadic debate over the years, is strong.

You'd think it would be easy to take a stand in favour of trees.

But, we know that profit-driven people rankle at the whiff of any attempt by government to influence the use of private land. And we know that politicians are naturally nervous about adopting restrictions that may impede development.

However, studies have proven that for every dollar spent on maintaining trees, the public receives three dollars worth of benefits.

Trees increase property values, and in turn, more tax revenues for the municipality.

The loss of habitat has taken a huge toll on wildlife, particularly in the densely-populated regions of southern Ontario, where there are now more species at risk than anywhere else in Canada.

Apart from offering homes for forest creatures, forests help reduce flooding, provide more drinking water, improve crop yields, sequester carbon, reduce energy costs, generate fuel, and furnish material for carvers and wood workers.

Plus, trees are good for tourism. City people like to flee the concrete jungle and take a close-up look at real trees in a natural setting.

Almost everyone knows that Ontario needs more trees.

In the last few years, the Ontario government has made tree-planting a component of its climate change policy.

The government has made a commitment to plant 50 million trees by 2020 as its contribution to the United Nations' Billion Tree Campaign.

In the 1970s and '80s, there were up to 20 to 30 million trees planted in southern Ontario each year. Since the early 1990s this has dropped to as low as 2 million. Decreased tree planting, rapid urban growth and various forms of deforestation have left forest cover in some areas of southern Ontario as low as five per cent. Studies show that forest cover of a region should be at least 30 per cent.

The Far East has been more fortunate. At last report, wooded areas account for about 26 per cent of the total land mass in Prescott-Russell.

There is ongoing talk of forming a coalition of conservationists to raise awareness of the evils of deforestation's and to eventually lobby for arbour-friendly legislation.

We know that the key to the success of any such push would be the participation of private landowners - most of the forested land in the region is privately owned.

As everyone knows, we all have a responsibility to protect forests.

There is little we can do about the emerald ash borer, except to try to control its movement.

But there are many other different species of trees still standing. A concerted, long-term, well-funded pro-tree campaign would definitely be a sign of progress.