

# AGRICULTURAL FOREST COVER COMMITTEE

Preliminary recommendations to the South Nation Board of Directors to  
ensure a strong and viable future for forest cover in our area

Preliminary  
Recommendations

# Agricultural Forest Cover Committee: Preliminary Recommendations

## Introduction

The Agricultural Forest Cover Committee (AFCC) was formed at the request of South Nation Conservation's (SNC) 16 member municipalities. These local municipalities were seeking guidance from the agricultural community to develop and implement recommendations to address concerns regarding the change in forest cover in the region.

The AFCC's goal was to formulate recommendations to ensure a strong and vibrant forest cover within the South Nation Conservation jurisdiction that provides value for all residents and future generations. The AFCC also recognized that agriculture is a significant economic and land use activity. In addition to growing crops and raising livestock, agriculture supports important services such as market gardens, food hubs, equipment sales and service, livestock feed businesses, and businesses advisory services. Our local agricultural products are also an important input to food and processing industries.

The AFCC feels there are many actions that can help ensure a strong and viable future for forest cover in our area while recognizing that agriculture is a vital element of our community.

## Committee Representation (by organization)

The AFCC is comprised of a maximum of 22 members including representation from the following:

- 8 appointed members from local county federations of agriculture
- 1 appointed member from the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO)
- 1 appointed member from the National Farmers Union (NFU)
- 1 appointed member from the Union des Cultivateurs Franco-Ontariens (UCFO)
- 6 at large/members of the agriculture community
- 2 municipal councillors
- 3 county planners

## Our Approach

As part of an initial orientation, the committee members participated in round-table discussions that focused on two important questions. These questions were also posed to municipal officials and SNC Standing Committee Members. Many likeminded themes emerged.

## Why are farmers and other landowners cutting forests/trees?

<b>Committee Members</b>	<b>Municipal Officials/SNC Standing Committees</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• landowner/property rights</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• landowner/property rights</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• fear of new laws</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• lack of control and regulation</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• land is needed/scarce</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• land prices increasing for farming and overall lack of available</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• fewer farms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increased farm scale and productivity</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• tile draining = easy access to equipment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• advancements in farming practices and infrastructure (e.g., equipment, tile drainage)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• population/city growth/speculation of development and planning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• development of subdivisions and urban expansion</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• solar and wind</li> <li>• no incentive to keep bush</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• green energy projects</li> <li>• low quality and low value of lumber; clear land has more value</li> </ul>
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What can be done to maintain forest cover?

Committee Members	Municipal Officials/SNC Standing Committees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stakeholder engagement/education and promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public education and stakeholder discussion</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• best management practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• best practices established for clear cutting remediation in the long run</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sharing and utilizing existing programs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taxation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• property owner incentives, discounts, tax rebates</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• economic alternatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more purchases by public bodies of important forested land</li> </ul>

AFCC members suggested specific actions that will have a positive impact on forest cover in SNC's jurisdiction through a series of facilitated sessions. These actions will build on AFCCs goals, reduce or eliminate existing challenges, avoid consequences of inaction, while keeping the desired outcomes in mind. The committee considers this to be a preliminary report; the AFCC would like to continue to develop and refine recommendations by receiving presentations from multiple stakeholders.

The participants clustered the specific actions to identify and prioritize key areas of focus; these areas of focus were put forward to ensure a strong and vibrant forest cover within the SNC's jurisdiction.

The areas of focus listed from highest to lowest priority are:

1. **Best Management Practices**
2. **Education and Promotion**
3. **Stakeholder Engagement**
4. Programs
5. Taxation
6. Economic Alternatives

Due to time constraints, the AFCC chose to focus on the top three priorities and one general recommendation.

### AFCC General Recommendation

The AFCC recommendations require support and effort to move forward. Should the SNC Board of Directors choose to implement these recommendations, the AFCC feels they have a role and responsibility to ensure successful implementation.

Similarly, the AFCC supports the establishment of a Working Group made up of champions from the AFCC to move these recommendations forward; this could include existing municipal Agricultural Advisory Committees.

*RECOMMENDATION: That the AFCC be permitted to establish a Working Group to implement the recommendations chosen by the SNC Board of Directors; and, that the AFCC continue their mandate, as needed.*

## Best Management Practices

Best Management Practices were identified by the forest Cover Committees as the highest priority area of focus; these actions will have the most positive impact on the future of forest cover within the South Nation jurisdiction. The specific actions that the committee recommended are provided below with additional details.

### 1. Define and Establish Marginal Lands Mapping and Update the Canada Land Inventory

The committee recognizes the need to protect good agricultural land for agricultural land uses. Farm businesses form the backbone of rural communities and are poised to drive Ontario's economy. Approximately 60 % of the South Nation jurisdiction is farmed; generally, there is a mix of livestock and cash crop production on flat, tile-drained fields.

Land topography, soils, and drainage can indicate the lands capability for production. These features have been mapped by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada as part of the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) mapping. CLI maps generally rate farmlands from Class 1-7.

The committee supports the protection of classes 1-5 as farmable lands. Similarly, classes 6 and 7 are generally not farmable and may be better suited for environmental protection and forestry.

The CLI mapping should be provided to the public through an online GIS portal and promoted to the agricultural community. This science-based data can:

- Help Municipalities identify areas with the greatest ecological benefit to support policy decisions and natural systems planning;
- Identify marginal lands to help Conservation Authorities and landowners choose areas for tree planting services and forestry outreach; and
- Help the agricultural community to make good land management decisions when expanding farm operations (i.e. where to crop and where to preserve forest cover).

The AFCC recognizes that these maps were created between 1960- 1980. The AFCC feels strongly that the land inventory mapping should be updated to provide accurate information.

- A) **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Counties and City of Ottawa work with the Forest Cover Working Group, local farm organizations, and Conservation Authorities to create an online GIS pilot project to identify the marginal lands not conducive to farming (classes 6 & 7) by the end of 2017. Additional collection of soils data through Agri-Food Canada, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the Counties, crop consultants, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry should be used to update and refine these maps.*
- B) **RECOMMENDATION:** That Municipalities work with agricultural groups, OMAFRA, stewardship stakeholders, and Conservation Authorities to ask the provincial and Federal Governments to support a pilot project within SNC jurisdiction for the collection of up-to-date soils data; this will better reflect the lands soil potential capability and support good decision-making for planning and agricultural land clearing.*

## 2. Create an Best Management Practice for Land Clearing

The committee recognizes agricultural uses and normal farm practices must be promoted and protected while balancing the health, safety, and environmental needs of the community.

The AFCC identified a need to develop a Best Management Practice (BMP) guideline for land clearing where as these activities have the potential to affect and inconvenience adjacent landowners (burning, chipping, visual impact). The committee also acknowledges there are practices that could minimize the environmental impact of land clearing (wildlife seasons, watercourse buffers, windbreaks).

The AFCC understands the need to strike a balance and ensure that tree clearing is the right choice. There are also shortfalls in education and outreach and motivation to encourage agricultural operations to follow BMPs. The AFCC feels this can be improved through training, online education, and public advertising. Land clearing BMPs can also be included in the Environmental Farm Plan.

The AFCC envisions that these BMPs would be used to evaluate use of trees from “cradle to grave”, support forest/woodlot evaluation, inform how to remove lumber (chip, burn, sell/transport), and provide minimum buffer distances, in addition to any other BMP’s.

- A) **RECOMMENDATION:** That the AFCC Working Group work with the agricultural community, the Conservation Authorities, and OMAFRA to develop a Best Management Practice (BMP) for Land Clearing. This guide should consider input from all stakeholders to develop and promote BMPs for all developments, not just agriculture.*

## 3. Encourage Windbreak Development

Windbreaks have year-round benefits and can be planted around field crops, feedlots, livestock buildings, pastures and calving areas. Windbreaks reduce wind speed, may increase crop yields, and reduce soil erosion.

The committee recognizes the need to identify key areas for wind break planting opportunities on County, municipal, and private lands. This program requires active participation from local landowners to plant windbreaks on private land.

A multi-faceted approach to strategic windbreak planting within South Nation's jurisdiction should be supported by enhancing existing stewardship programs such as SNC Clean Water Program, Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program, Alternative Land Use(ALUS), and the SNC-woodlot advisory service. By enhancing the funding for developers, farm organizations, green energy producers, and other industry stakeholders it will be easier and more financially viable to plant windbreaks.

*A) **RECOMMENDATION:** That additional funding be allocated to programs that support windbreak planting. The AFCC Working Group should also reach out to the agricultural community, stewardship stakeholders, CA's and municipalities to develop a long-term plan to increase funding for strategic planting of windbreaks within the jurisdiction.*

## Education and Promotion

Education and promotion was identified by the AFCC to be the second highest priority action to ensure strong and healthy forest cover in the region. The specific actions that the committee recommended are provided below with additional details.

### 1. Promote Agriculture

Agriculture is a major industry in eastern Ontario and has many beneficial impacts. The recent issues around forest cover have hurt relationships between farmers and the community.

The committee recognizes that the public may not be aware of good work done by local farmers. This lack of understanding can lead to divided arguments around important issues like forest cover loss. The committee strongly feels that if agriculture is promoted in a positive way it will ultimately foster a good relationship between farmers and the public and avoid restrictive tree clearing by-laws.

*A) **RECOMMENDATION:** That the AFCC Working Group and local farm organizations actively promote agriculture in our area. Through this promotion we hope to see a positive change in public understanding and more collaborative discussion about forest cover.*

### 2. Agricultural Education

The committee identified a need to improve education around agricultural best practices for farmers and non-farmers. In some cases, partnerships can be enhanced (Environmental Farm Plan, Alternative Land Use Service (ALUS), school programs). These education programs should focus on what farmers do, why, and how it impacts/benefits the land.

The committee also feels that social media, 'Agriculture in the Classrooms', farm tours, and traditional media are an important part of this action. By implementing educational programs, we hope to increase public acceptance of agricultural practices, move toward common goals around forest cover, and establish new school curriculum around agriculture.

- A) *RECOMMENDATION: That the AFCC Working Group work with local schools, OMAFRA, the Conservation Authorities, and local Municipalities to promote agricultural education.*

## Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder Engagement was identified as the third highest priority action to ensure strong and healthy forest cover in the region. The specific actions that the committee recommended are provided below with additional details.

### 1. Form a Multi-Stakeholder Committee

There are many different interests involved in the issue of forest cover. A multi-stakeholder committee could bring together representatives from several interested groups (not just agriculture) to share ideas and to provide recommendations on ways to address forest cover in the area. The committee could work to integrate agriculture, conservation goals, and ecosystem services to increase rural forest cover. This committee would benefit from facilitation.

- A) *RECOMMENDATION: That a Multi-Stakeholder Committee be established comprised of no more than 20 individuals who are representatives from groups/associations/governments and South Nation Conservation that have an interest in the topic of forest cover.*

### 2. Encourage a Coordinated Approach for Stakeholder Engagement

Every local resident is impacted to some degree by forest cover issues and is therefore a potential stakeholder in this discussion. It is important that all groups are involved in this discussion. The AFCC identified key stakeholder organizations such as the Ecological Farmers of Ontario, SDG Ontario Woodlot Association, Ontario Maple Syrup Producer's Association, Eastern Ontario Nutgrowers Association, and the Ontario Beekeepers Association.

Having many groups working together on the Forest Cover Committee will present challenges. Consensus may be difficult to achieve but having many viewpoints will result in broader acceptance of decisions and recommendations brought forth.

- A) *RECOMMENDATION: That as many groups/associations as reasonably possible be contacted to take part in the Multi-Stakeholder Committee.*

## Summary

The AFCC identified three key areas of focus to ensure strong and vibrant forest cover in our area. Through a combination of best management practices, education and outreach, and stakeholder engagement the AFCC feels that we can find common ground and overcome obstacles around forest cover issues in the South Nation jurisdiction.

The AFCC members recognize they have a role to play in ensuring these recommendations are achieved. The members worked with a facilitator to record individual personal commitments. The members identified the need to work with local Municipalities to communicate the recommendations, volunteer on future boards and committees, act as local champions, and be part of discussions with stakeholders on this issue.

This report is the first step towards achieving the vision of strong and vibrant forest cover in our area. The AFCC hopes to be given the opportunity to participate in the implementation of these recommendations.