



Recently cleared land outside Vankleek Hill. PHOTO: THERESA KETTERLING

Report shows decline in forest cover across counties

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Since 2008, forest cover in the United Counties has declined by about 4.4 per cent, according to a report presented at a counties' council meeting last week.

The majority of the lost forest cover is because of expanding agricultural lands, said Louis Prevost, director of the Counties' planning and forestry department. Prevost said he was pleasantly surprised to see that overall, the area has 29 per cent forest cover, close to the minimum of 30 per cent recommended by the province. However, that number will likely continue to decline. "I think it's going to decline because you certainly notice whenever you drive anywhere in the counties you see those large tracts of land being cleared," he said. "Mind you, we're in an agricultural area, so it's normal in a certain way."

Prevost said about 65 per cent of the clearing for agriculture happens on prime agricultural land. It's diffi-

cult to say what happens to cleared land that's not suitable for agriculture. "Sometimes lands are being cleared and it sits idle for a few years," he said.

Warden Robert Kirby said the report will probably not result in any drastic action. "I don't see any great change at this time," he said.

While a tree conservation bylaw is technically an option, Kirby said he is concerned a bylaw would not be fair for everyone. "A bylaw would be only affecting those that have bushlots, and those that want to develop," he said. Kirby said he was not surprised to see the decline in forest cover in his own municipality, East Hawkesbury.

Instead of a bylaw, the counties could continue to invest in South Nation Conservation, which provides programs and education for woodlot owners, said Kirby. The government could also continue buying wooded areas – Forest Larose is expanded every year, he said – so everyone shares in the cost of conservation, and some money could possibly

be set aside to compensate farmers in exchange for maintaining some forest cover.

An individual municipality could act on its own, he said. "Each municipality is legally able to drop a bylaw

Complaints in Vankleek Hill

While tree-cutting is usually a municipal issue, the Ministry of Natural Resources is involved when the cutting is happening on an aggregate site – somewhere where sand, gravel, or other aggregates are being extracted. Those pits and quarries are licensed by the Ministry, and newer licenses often limit the owner to a "maximum disturbed area," which would prevent clear-cutting of the entire property. Jennifer Tighe, aggregate technical specialist for the MNR.

Tighe said she recently received a complaint about an aggregate site in Vankleek Hill, but because that site had an older license, there were no restrictions on tree-cutting.