

## Forest loss at what cost?

It has become an ongoing battle in these parts of Eastern Ontario.

As heavy machinery moves in to decimate forested property, the local conservation authority is waving its red flag, hoping to entice landowners to first consider the real cost of their woodlot.

With clear-cutting becoming more and more widespread to make way for agricultural crops and residential development, South Nation Conservation launched its Woodlot Advisory Service three years ago, aiming to promote efficient and sustainable management of forests and the establishment of additional forest cover in Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry, Prescott-Russell, Leeds-Grenville, and portions of the City of Ottawa.

As part of the program, a service technician will help property owners to discover the value of their forest, and the benefits it can provide. Technicians will visit woodlots for preliminary evaluation of the site, suggest management options and introduce property owners to available programs that will allow them to meet various objectives set out for them. Forest experts will also provide contacts for local woodlot operator associations, and forestry consultants that can assist in achieving the targets proposed, including possible revenue generation. According to South Nation, those who participate in the program could save up to 75 per cent in property taxes. The program is open to owners on a first come, first served basis, and is free to join. To be eligible for advisory help, woodlot properties must be a minimum of five acres. It would seem this program was implemented at just the right time. Concern has been growing locally as tree lines have been torn up to give way for further agricultural development.

Along County Road 16, north of Brinston, trees have been uprooted en masse, while the same practice has been taking place on County Road 18 near Williamsburg.

On the surface, this act appears harmless, with local producers simply working toward monopolization of their crops. Yet, such egregious deforestation could pose issues in the many years still to come.

What's more, it is next to impossible to prevent such destruction due to the current legislation in place.

In and around Ottawa, residential developers have been pushing suburbia further and further toward rural environs. This act leaves little in the way of wildlife protection, and it is no wonder coyotes and other wildlife (all with the potential for danger) have been popping up near homes and schools. It isn't blood lust, as they are simply crossing terrain familiar to them.

Locally, the continued clearing of land has the potential to do nothing more than make local fields more enviable to wind or solar energy developers. Hundreds of homeowners have banded together to keep these renewable resource promoters from erecting wind turbines or solar farms, yet the same chorus of discontent has not been heard as trees continue to be ripped from the soil.

According to the Eastern Ontario Model Forest, there are roughly 7,500 hectares of private forests owned by more than 100 partners, while another 34,500 hectares of community forest exists. Yet, the local forest cover remains low, and fragmented.

Perhaps the time is now for more responsible cutting, and more practiced relationships between conservation authorities and the keepers of local land. This region is rich with agricultural history, but stewardship must be the story that prevails.