

Bush league



BY IAN CUMMING

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A tree cutting bylaw is brewing here in South Glengarry. Don't know why really, because that pro-cutting fight was lost in legislation a long time ago.

This being an election fall, proclamations are being made either side by candidates, but one wishes they would save their breath,

Because the way the system works – in your area as well – the decision was/is being made for them. The local politicians have decided long ago to have nothing to do with it, despite their breast beating and huffing about agriculture.

Governance by bureaucratic decree isn't a figment of one's fevered imagination. It's there in printed words on the tree cutting bylaw "options" recently presented to council by Joanne Haley, the matriarch of local bureaucrats down in these parts.

Be it building a house and waiting months for permits, or getting a machine shed a few inches off its designated property taken down, Joanne's the expert.

All you had to do was connect the points made in her written submission regarding tree cutting, and the reality was there.

First of all the Ontario government provided municipalities the powers to impose a tree cutting bylaw a decade ago. Major point that: your trees are not yours.

That law, like the church supper one did, has sat on the books. Now this long-dormant Heritage Strategy "is" being developed by the local Conservation Authority and that strategy "will" be encompassed in the new five-year plan at the United Counties next year.

Notice the timing. Elections will be done and in four years hence no one will remember. Plus no one will be cutting trees.

Haley didn't even remotely spin. "Is" and "will" are exactly what is happening and will happen.

Then there is that caveat that only an "upper tier municipality" like United Counties can issue a decree on cutting over one hectare, hence any bush clearing will be prohibited by law, under the Heritage Strategy.

What the lower tier council at South Glengarry, thinks, debates and decides, carries as much legislative weight as chewing the rag on the issue down at Alex's over morning coffee.

"Agriculture is important to the community," a couple of elected council members running again are proclaiming. Hence giving the impression, that, if elected, they would stop this proposed ban.

How, exactly?

Oxford County has way more agriculture dollars flowing through it than Glengarry. Councilors near Oxford Center applied their tree cutting bylaw with a vengeance on a local farmer who merely cleared back some fence line.

"I had to settle and pay the fine, it would have cost me too much to fight it in court," the farmer told me this summer.