

The Editori

Editorial

Lost in the woods

It can be a lonely – and chilly – life for Vankleek Hill area resident Andre Perreault weekdays at his post along Highway 34.

Bundled up and armed with a placard reading “Save the Forest”, Perreault waves at passing motorists, with hopes of keeping attention on clear cutting and eventually making a difference.

He gets friendly responses from some cars and, he’s pleased to say, “I don’t get the finger from every pickup truck anymore.”

So far, however, his vigil hasn’t persuaded lawmakers at any level to crack down on mass deforestation in Champlain Township, the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, or beyond.

Yet, he doesn’t give up. Perreault is worried that if he walks away, the issue will fade away.

As is the case across Eastern Ontario, clear cutting in the area Perreault plants his placard is mostly about expanding cash cropping. He isn’t the only resident to express concern about the impact of removing wide swaths of trees on water quality, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat.

Not a farmer himself, he’s trying to convince the agricultural community not to put all of its eggs in one basket, that properly managed trees can be a valuable crop.

“Look what happened in Alberta. There was no Plan B. The bottom fell out of oil and there’s nothing else. What do we want to do here? Turn it into 100 per cent cash crops and if that goes, we’re through? The value of our forests is increasing.”

“We’re in a fragile state,” Perreault told Mayor Gary Barton and members of Champlain Council during a recent meeting. While they lent a sympathetic ear, councillors declined to take any bylaw action. Instead, Barton said council is looking at its options, including uploading the issue to the provincial government.

“The province really has to grasp hold of this,” Barton stated. Council decided to pursue the matter with area MPP Grant Crack, seeking a satisfactory solution.

But Crack has indicated publicly he won’t advocate for provincial anti-clear cutting regulations. Instead, he has reiterated that, in his mind, landowners have the right to harvest wood on their properties, whether for financial gain or to expand farmland.

Legislators are definitely in a difficult position because they must strike a balance between agricultural development during boom times and saving the forests.

But at some point, they’ll have to stop tossing this hot poker around, emerge from the woods, and carve out a solution that’ll serve all interests.