

April 23, 2019

Ms. Kimberley Kitteringham  
City Clerk  
City of Markham  
101 Town Centre Boulevard  
Markham, ON L3R 9W3

Dear Ms. Kitteringham:

**Re: It's in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional  
Forest 2019 - 2038**

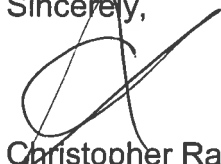
Regional Council, at its meeting held on April 18, 2019, adopted the following recommendations of Committee of the Whole regarding "It's in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 - 2038":

1. Council approve "It's in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038".
2. Council approve the fees for permitted activities in the York Regional Forest, as set out in Attachment 3 and authorize Schedule A of the fees and charges bylaw (Bylaw 2010-15) to be amended to implement these fees.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities and local Conservation Authorities for information.

The original staff report is enclosed for your information.

Please contact Laura McDowell, Director, Environmental Promotion and Protection at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75077 or Ian Buchanan, Manager, Natural Heritage and Forestry at ext. 75204 if you have any questions with respect to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christopher Raynor  
Regional Clerk

Attachment

# **The Regional Municipality of York**

Committee of the Whole  
Environmental Services  
April 4, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Environmental Services

## **It's in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 - 2038**

### **1. Recommendations**

1. Council approve “It’s in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038”.
2. Council approve the fees for permitted activities in the York Regional Forest, as set out in Attachment 3 and authorize Schedule A of the fees and charges bylaw (Bylaw 2010-15) to be amended to implement these fees.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities and local Conservation Authorities for information.

### **2. Summary**

This report seeks Council approval of It’s in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038, and the associated fees for permitted activities. A summary of the management plan is presented in Attachment 1 and the full management plan can be viewed at [York.ca](http://York.ca).

Key Points:

- Management of the York Regional Forest has demonstrated leadership in forest management, environmental restoration and public use for over 90 years
- It’s in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038 sets forth the following vision for the Forest:  
  
“As the heart of the Region’s natural landscape, a healthy and ecologically diverse York Regional Forest sustains its communities and inspires its people”
- An approved management plan supports objectives in the Regional Official Plan and is a requirement to maintain Forest Stewardship Council certification

### 3. Background

2018 marked the end of the existing 20 year management plan for the York Regional Forest. In anticipation of the plan ending, staff undertook a comprehensive process, including stakeholder engagement, to develop a renewed management plan for the York Regional Forest.

#### **For over 90 years our work on the York Regional Forest has demonstrated excellence in sustainable forest management and restoration**

Following arrival of Europeans in the 1600's, significant areas of York Region were cleared for settlement, lumbering and agriculture. By the late 1800's the impacts of deforestation were evident, especially on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Rivers and streams alternated between drying and flooding, water tables became unstable, and extensive areas of blow sands covered roads and crops. No longer able to support agriculture these lands were abandoned. These impacts prompted the province to take action, and through the *Reforestation Act, 1921* (the Act), tens of millions of trees were planted across southern Ontario to stabilize soils and restore forest cover.

Under the Act's Agreement Forest Program, the Province partnered with municipalities to establish 56 agreement forests across southern Ontario. Through this program the Province provided and planted trees and managed forests on degraded lands held by municipalities. The York County Agreement Forest, now the York Regional Forest, was established in 1924 with the planting of trees in the Hollidge Tract, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. By 1994 the York Regional Forest had grown to 18 tracts of land spanning 2,031 hectares.

Following a review of the Agreement Forest Program in 1994, the Province concluded that management of the agreement forests should be transferred to forest owners. As a condition of transfer, the Region prepared the 1998 - 2018 forest management plan. In 2000 management of the York Regional Forest was officially transferred to the Region.

#### **Since 1998 York Region has managed the Forest continuing the legacy of leadership in sustainable forest management**

At its meeting on December 10, 1998 Council adopted the York Regional Forest Management Plan 1998 – 2018. The plan placed a strong emphasis on the ecological sustainability of the York Regional Forest while recognizing the many social and economic values it provides. During the past twenty years there have been many significant achievements associated with the York Regional Forest, including becoming the first public forest in Canada to achieve Forest Stewardship Council certification.

Today the York Regional Forest is comprised of 23 tracts of land totalling 2,400 hectares with over 148 kilometres of trails, including 4.3 kilometres of accessible trails. The York Regional Forest is an integral part of the Regional Greenlands system and a network of publicly available greenspace that includes National and Provincial parks and local municipal open space areas. Today the York Regional Forest is a destination for residents to participate in nature oriented recreational activities including walking/dog walking, nature appreciation,

cycling, horseback riding, and skiing/snowshoeing and hosts over 600,000 visits annually throughout all seasons.

## 4. Analysis

### A comprehensive engagement plan was implemented to solicit input from residents, key stakeholders and forest users

In anticipation of the ending of the 1998 – 2018 forest management plan, a comprehensive forest management planning process was implemented. Figure 1 summarizes the process followed to develop the plan including engagement with residents, Indigenous peoples, stakeholders and forest users. Development of the plan was completed over two years to provide multiple opportunities for public input.

The public was engaged throughout the process through user surveys, workshops and information sessions. In addition, a technical working group provided detailed input into the management plan. Stakeholders, including the York Regional Forest Advisory Team, represented a wide cross-section of forest interests (Attachment 2).

**Figure 1**  
**Forest management planning and engagement process**





## **Public feedback was instrumental in guiding development of the renewed forest management plan**

During the engagement process residents identified that existing management direction was working well and should continue. Residents also identified key drivers and risks that should be considered in the renewed management plan including; the need to balance environmental protection and increasing public use, the importance of environmental education and connecting people with the forest, and managing impacts associated with climate change (e.g. extreme weather and invasive species). York Regional Forest users felt the existing rules related to public use were appropriate but suggested the need for more education to help provide clarity around expectations and perhaps more signage.

Input received throughout the process was incorporated into development of the plan including its vision, goals and actions. Feedback received during the final review of the draft management plan supported the plan's vision and future direction for the York Regional Forest.

## **Management of the York Regional Forest will continue to support protection of ecological features and functions while providing a multitude of benefits to residents**

Building on the direction set in the previous management plan and with input from stakeholders, the following updated vision was developed for the York Regional Forest:

- As the heart of the Region's natural landscape, a healthy and ecologically diverse York Regional Forest sustains its communities and inspires its people

Achieving this vision will be guided by three broad goals, each representing elements of the vision. These goals will guide management decisions and activities over the next 20 years and include:

1. Strengthen Ecological Integrity - Continue to strengthen the health, diversity, resiliency and sustainability of the York Regional Forest
2. Foster an Understanding of the Broader Benefits - Demonstrate that the Forest provides a wealth of environmental and social benefits, making it key to the Region's vision of healthy, thriving communities
3. Inspire People - Encourage public use that inspires respect for the Forest and a connection with nature

Specific objectives and actions have been developed for each goal (see Attachment 1) and are key to setting work priorities. A comprehensive monitoring program will provide a framework for assessing progress towards the vision.

## **Providing an exceptional visitor experience through compatible public use and educational programming will remain a cornerstone of the York Regional Forest**

The previous forest management plan identified acceptable and prohibited activities in the York Regional Forest, which are collectively referred to as the “rules of the forest”. Users felt existing rules were reasonable, but more public education was required. The renewed plan continues to identify these acceptable and prohibited uses, and has added two new activities including allowing scientific research, and prohibiting paint ball guns and fireworks (see Attachment 1).

Two new uses, geocaching and operations of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) have been addressed in the plan. Geocaching has been added to the list of acceptable uses with the restriction that all caches be located within 2 metres of a trail. Operation of unmanned aerial vehicles has been added to the prohibited list due to noise, safety and privacy concerns, which is consistent with National and Provincial parks.

The Region delivers environmental education programs within the York Regional Forest, including guided walks, forest festivals, and group specific programs. Programming is focused on introducing users to the forest, and educating residents on the rich history, management and appropriate use, which in turn helps foster a sense of environmental stewardship.

## **Off-leash dog walking was identified as a growing use requiring further engagement and study**

Dog walking is one of the most popular activities in the York Regional Forest. The most recent forest use survey indicated 52 per cent of respondents walked dogs in the forest. During development of the plan, users expressed support for dog walking, but there were varied opinions on whether dogs needed to be leashed. The current rule states that the York Regional Forest is not an off leash dog park, and that dogs must be under control at all times and leashed around other forest users. Some users, including dog walkers, identified negative experiences with off leash dogs, while others identified walking their dog off leash as the main reason to visit the York Regional Forest. Other users indicating they stopped using specific tracts or the entire forest due to off leash dogs. In 2014 a specific fenced off leash dog area was constructed at the Bendor and Graves Tract, Town of East Gwillimbury. While extensively used, the off leash area does not provide the walking in nature opportunity many dog walkers desire.

During development of the plan it was clear that dog walking is very important to many York Regional Forest users and finding a solution would require more dialogue and study. As one of the ten actions proposed in the renewed forest management plan, the Region will be undertaking a comprehensive review of dog walking opportunities, including local municipal by-laws, with the goal of providing clear direction and address feedback from forest users.

## **Organized events and commercial activities will continue to be managed through forest use permits**

Each year the Region receives a number of requests (five to ten) from external organizations to host charitable events or undertake commercial activities (e.g. film production) in the York Regional Forest. These activities have the potential to impact other forest users, negatively affect forest ecology and can increase the Region's risk exposure. To manage impacts, event organizers are required to obtain a forest use permit. Permits allow staff to review proposed events and activities to ensure compatibility, modify events and activities to address concerns, and obtain appropriate insurance.

The renewed management plan continues to use forest use permits to manage organized events and commercial activities, including fees and charges to offset costs incurred by the Region (Attachment 3). The proposed fees and charges are in alignment with similar permits issued by the Region and reflect rates charged by other organizations for commercial activities.

## **The vision and goals for the York Regional Forest will be achieved through a series of actions and continuing existing best practices**

The renewed management plan will be delivered through successive five year forest operating plans detailing the type and location of management activities, such as harvesting, tree planting and infrastructure improvements. Existing best practices will continue to be used to manage the York Regional Forest. Forest certification by the Forest Stewardship Council ensures our management meets or exceeds global sustainability standards demonstrating transparency to a more engaged public. The plan identifies ten specific actions to be implemented over the first ten years of the plan (Attachment 1). These actions address public feedback and new challenges pertaining to climate change, invasive species, increasing forest use, education and monitoring.

Monitoring will be an integral component of implementing the plan and help track progress towards achieving the vision and goals.

## **Management of the York Regional Forest supports the sustainable natural environmental goal of the Regional Official Plan**

It's in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038 supports the York Regional Official Plan 2010 triple bottom line objectives and policies. The plan supports the Regional Official Plan 2010 objective to protect and enhance the Regional Greenlands System and its Natural Features components and specifically policy 2.2.51, that York Regional Forests shall be sustainably managed in a manner that enhances their ecological, educational and recreational functions to ensure their health in perpetuity.

Implementation of the plan aligns with 2019 – 2023 Strategic Plan strategic priority areas; support community health, safety and well-being, and build sustainable communities and

protect the environment, including the objective of enhancing and preserving green space. The Plan also supports five of the eight goal areas and multiple actions in Vision 2051.

## **5. Financial**

The renewed management plan will build on existing programs and partnerships and will be funded through existing Natural Heritage and Forestry operating and capital budgets. The approved 2019 Natural Heritage and Forestry division budget includes \$1 million operating and \$0.4 million capital for management of the York Regional Forest. The 10 year capital plan for Natural Heritage and Forestry includes \$4.8 million for the York Regional Forest. As actions are implemented any additional funding requirements will be brought forward for Council's consideration as part of future budget processes. External funding sources including provincial and federal funding programs and partnership opportunities will be explored to support implementation.

## **6. Local Impact**

The York Regional Forest is a key component of the public open space system and complements services provided by Federal and Provincial parks, local municipal green spaces, and lands owned by Conservation Authorities. Implementation of the renewed management plan supports local municipal initiatives to provide residents with outdoor nature oriented recreational activities. Local municipal staff were engaged through the key stakeholder workshops and provided input throughout development of the plan.

## **7. Conclusion**

It's in Our Nature: Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038 sets a vision and goals for the management of the York Regional Forest. The plan ensures the forest's long term sustainability and balances the need to protect ecological features and functions while providing benefits to the residents of the Region. Key actions are proposed to address challenges associated with climate change, invasive species and increasing use. Monitoring and reporting will ensure progress is assessed, and practices are continually improved. This management plan ensures the legacy of the York Regional Forest will continue.

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For more information on this report, please contact Laura McDowell, Director, Environmental Promotion and Protection at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75077 or Ian Buchanan, Manager, Natural Heritage and Forestry at ext. 75204. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Erin Mahoney, M. Eng.**  
Commissioner of Environmental Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**  
Chief Administrative Officer

March 22, 2019  
Attachments (3)  
#9110519

It's in our



Management Plan for the York Regional Forest

2019-2038 SUMMARY



It's in our



## Management Plan for the York Regional Forest



*Ontario Archives. White Pine Stump.  
Ontario. Circa 1900's*



*Source unknown. Bare sand and white  
pine stumps. Ontario. Circa 1900's.*

The York Regional Forest has its origins in the provincial *Reforestation Act* of 1921, which responded to the devastating impacts of deforestation across southern Ontario and especially on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Through the Act's Agreement Forest Program, the province provided and planted trees and managed forests on degraded lands held by many southern Ontario counties. The York County Agreement Forest, now the York Regional Forest, began in 1924 with the planting of trees on land owned by the county in what is now the Hollidge tract in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

In 1998, York Region developed a 20 year forest management plan to guide the York Regional Forest. Two years later, the agreement with the province was terminated and the Region officially assumed full management responsibility.

The previous management plan focused on:

- ecological integrity
- recreational and educational use
- silvicultural management

A major goal of managing the Forest has been to bring it closer to its condition before European settlement.



## Early history

After the last glacier retreated from what is now southern Ontario roughly 12,500 years ago, nomadic Indigenous peoples roamed a landscape of tundra and lived off the land by hunting, fishing and gathering.. Despite more permanent settlements and growth in indigenous agriculture over the following centuries, at least 80 per cent of what is now York Region was covered with mature and diverse forests at the time of first European contact in the 1600's.

Increasing European settlement and lumbering in the 1800's cleared almost all of these woodlands. By late in that century, the devastating impacts were clear. Rivers and streams alternated between drying out and flash flooding, water tables became unstable, and "blow sands" covered roads and fields. Impacts were felt most strongly on the Oak Ridges Moraine, a massive ridge deposited by glaciation and characterized by light, sandy soil. Farms were lost, and commerce and travel hampered. These conditions, worsened by further abandonment of farms after the First World War, prompted provincial action through the *Reforestation Act* of 1921. This led to the creation of 59 Agreement Forests across southern Ontario. Initial management focused on planting rows of conifers, such as red and white pine, to stabilize the soil.

These plantations were thinned from time to time, allowing more light to reach what is called the "understory," where a mix of other trees, shrubs and plants could grow. This process began to move the Forest from areas of single-species reforestation to mixed woodlands more typical of south-central Ontario. The Region's first plan (1998-2018) successfully continued and enhanced this work, and this new management plan reaffirms and strengthens the direction it set.

## Why a Forest Management Plan is important

A well-designed management plan is critical to achieving specific goals for a forest, such as sustainability and biodiversity, by setting out the related principles, practices and actions. When the Region assumed management of the Forest, developing a forest management plan was a provincial requirement.

The management plan also links to third-party certification and key Regional plans:

- Certification by the Forest Stewardship Council in 2000 required the management plan to align with that organization's principles
- The Regional Official Plan (2010) *policy 2.2.51* states that the Regional Forest is to be sustainably managed

In 2017, including the Regional Forest as part of the Region's green infrastructure asset management plan highlighted its ongoing contributions to the Region as well as its investment needs. Recognizing the value of the Forest as infrastructure requires a plan to meet asset management goals, and the new Forest Management Plan is designed with that in mind.

## Achievements of the previous plan

The Regional Forest grew and flourished under the 1998-2018 Forest Management Plan. It now consists of 23 tracts totaling roughly 2,400 hectares, with the Region's Greening Strategy adding 344 hectares since 2001. Reflecting an early focus on deforested areas where farming had failed, most of the tracts are located on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Under the plan, reforested areas have continued the transition to more mixed, native woodlands. The Forest today is roughly split between reforestation and natural tree communities. Fourteen tracts contain Legacy Conservation Forests, which are areas within the Regional Forest that warrant special attention because of their unique and important natural features and functions. In addition, the Region has added new habitats – prairie, meadow and oak savanna – and encouraged more native species in forested areas. These measures have strengthened biodiversity of plant and wildlife species.

The Regional Forest is also a place where people can re-connect with nature and learn more about the benefits of trees. It welcomes more than 600,000 visits a year from residents of the Region and beyond, and hosts dozens of environmental education events each year.

York Regional Forest is recognized for excellence in forest management, invasive species management, accessibility and public programs.



## Milestones achieved over the last two decades under the previous Forest Management Plan:

- 2000:** Became the first public forest in Canada to be Forest Stewardship Council certified
- 2010:** Regional Forest Advisory Team received the Oak Ridges Moraine Hero's award
- 2012:** Created a Legacy Conservation Forest Strategy to designate areas of the Forest with unique ecological features and functions
- 2013:** Developed and implemented Accessibility Design Guidelines for York Regional Forest trails
- 2017:** Received the Forest Stewardship Council Leadership award for the Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre in the Hollidge tract
- 2018:** The Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre became the first building in Canada to be Living Building Challenge certified

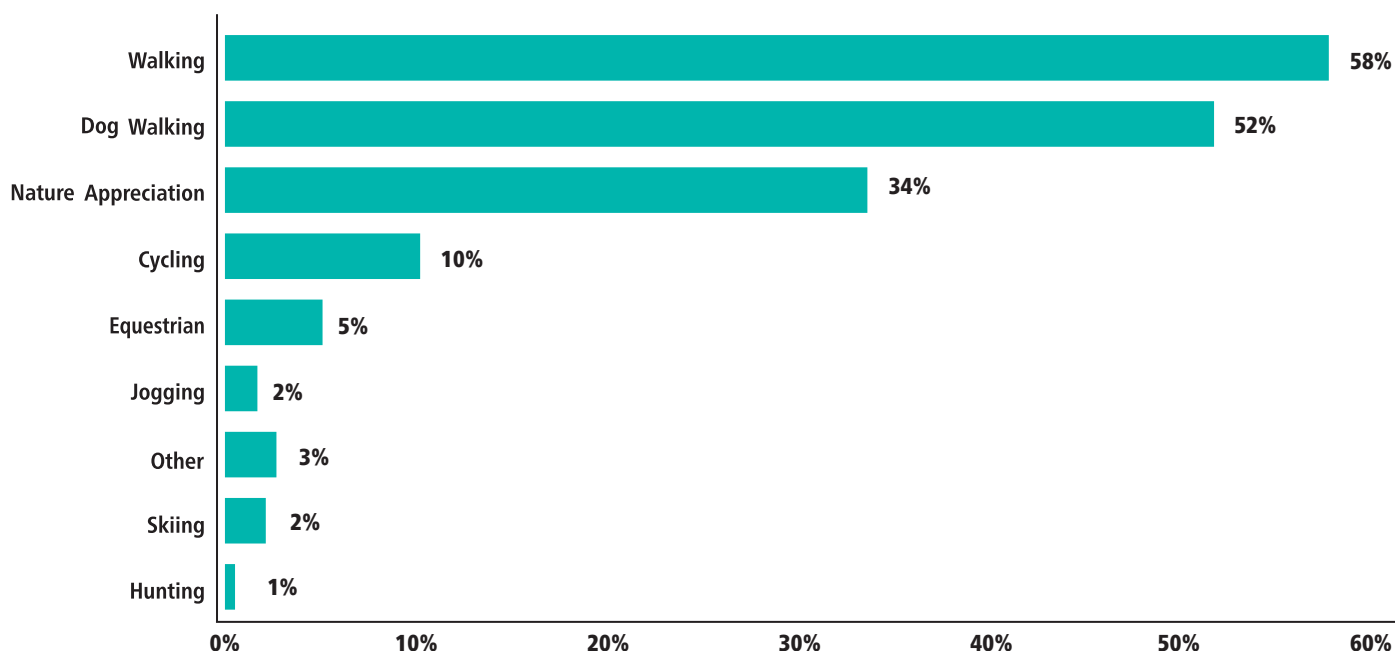
## The Regional Forest is a destination

Recreation and personal well-being are important social benefits of the Forest. Its trail network of almost 150 kilometres, portions of which are designed to be accessible to people of varying abilities, welcomes a wide range of visitors and activities. The trail connections between Forest tracts and other natural areas enrich the recreational possibilities.

When compared to previous surveys, a user survey completed in 2016-17 showed that types of uses have not changed significantly over the years. Walking, often with a dog, and nature appreciation remain the top reasons to visit the Forest. The survey also showed that the Forest is a year-round destination, with residents enjoying the Forest across the seasons.

## Top Public Uses in 2016-2017 Forest User Survey

**NOTE:** Respondents could select more than one activity - percentages add up to more than 100%



## How this Plan was developed

In developing this Plan, the Region drew on the expertise, advice and views of a wide range of people, including a technical advisory team, a group comprising key stakeholders, and the Regional Forest Advisory Team. In addition, several public open houses allowed for broad community engagement. Other work

included developing and analyzing the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 surveys, and researching best practices in forest management and use of public lands.



## What the Region heard through engagement with residents:

- Existing management practices are sound
- Balancing environmental protection while providing benefits to residents is key
- The plan must address impacts of climate change and invasive species
- There is a need to manage increasing use and review dog-walking activities
- Existing public use rules work well and the focus should be on education

# The vision and goals

The work put into developing the Plan was critical to crafting the following vision for the Forest:

**As the heart of the Region's natural landscape,  
a healthy and ecologically diverse York Regional Forest  
sustains its communities and inspires its people.**



The Vision for the Forest will be achieved through the following three goals and related objectives and actions under each goal:

## Goal 1: Strengthen Ecological Integrity

Continue to strengthen the health, diversity, resiliency, and sustainability of the York Regional Forest

### Objectives:

- Protect ecological features and improve ecosystem integrity and biodiversity
- Use innovative practices to restore and protect the Forest
- Implement best practices to prevent and mitigate impacts of invasive species
- Manage the Forest to increase ecological resilience and minimize the impacts of climate change

This goal reflects the ongoing restoration of the Forest from barren land to conifer plantations and then, over the past several decades, to a much more diverse system of native plant communities and wildlife habitats. This has moved it toward greater ecological integrity.

**For the York Regional Forest, ecological integrity means a condition that is characteristic of its natural region, including the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, and abiotic factors like soil, rock and climate.**

The Region advances the Forest's ecological integrity by several means, including silvicultural management. Silvicultural management is a way of actively influencing the speed and pattern of growth in the forest. This involves, for example, thinning trees to provide more light, water and other resources to native species underneath and, where natural regeneration is not taking place, underplanting with native species. These practices replicate natural disturbance in woodlands. In non-woodland areas, the Region uses other ecological restoration tools, for example controlled burns in prairie habitat to encourage fire-dependent plant species and remove competing vegetation.

The Region adapts and refines its management practices as it works to mitigate threats from climate change and invasive species. Impacts of climate change, such as destructive wind bursts, ice storms and periods of drought, are already being felt in the Forest. Climate change will continue to bring more volatile and extreme weather along with warmer temperatures. A key action under the new plan is to assess the Forest's vulnerability to climate change and develop an adaptation plan.

Non-native invasive plants, insects and pathogens are also threats to the Forest. Invasive plants, such as dog-strangling vine, garlic mustard and buckthorn, can quickly take over a forest site, crowding out native species. Non-native insect threats include the emerald ash borer, gypsy moth, Asian long-horned beetle, and hemlock woolly adelgid. As well, invasive fungal diseases are putting the health of a number of species at risk.

### Key actions for Goal 1

#### *Short-term (2019-2023)*

1. Assess the vulnerability to climate change and develop an adaption and mitigation plan
2. Update invasive species inventories, review mitigation practices, and develop an invasive species action plan

#### *Medium-term (2024-2028)*

1. Review Legacy Conservation Forest Strategy
2. Review science-based silvicultural practices to inform management and operating procedures
3. Develop an information system to capture ecological features, species at risk, invasive species and infrastructure assets



## Goal 2: Foster an Understanding of the Broader Benefits

**Demonstrate that the Forest provides a wealth of environmental and social benefits, making it key to the Region's vision of healthy, thriving communities.**

### Objectives:

- Review and assess the environmental and social benefits of the Forest
- Ensure the Forest continues to demonstrate leadership through science, innovation and sharing best practices

This goal recognizes the increasing environmental and social benefits of the Forest that extend beyond its boundaries.

The Forest provides important ecosystem services to communities by:

- Absorbing carbon dioxide, which is a major greenhouse gas, storing the carbon in the tissues of trees and other vegetation in a process known as sequestration, and releasing the oxygen into the environment. The Region's Green Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (2017) estimated that every year, the Forest sequesters 5,717 tonnes of carbon
- Reducing air pollution caused by particles and gases like ozone, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide, all of which are linked to respiratory problems. Each year, the Forest captures 166,800 kilograms of polluting substances
- Naturally managing the flow of water by absorbing rainwater and snow melt, which helps to manage the risk of flooding, filters out many contaminants and reduces the need for costly built infrastructure. The Forest absorbs 642,600 cubic metres of rainwater and snow melt each year

Woodlands also provide social benefits like reducing stress and encouraging a more active lifestyle. While these benefits are more difficult to quantify, studies have shown that the availability of green space is associated with reduced mortality, obesity, depression, anxiety and cardiovascular disease, and even with healthier newborns. Natural spaces give people a place to restore their mental health, reduce their level of stress, and spend quality time with others.

Research into the Japanese practice of "forest bathing," in which people spend time walking in deep in the woods, away from technology and other distractions, has shown that calming impacts are greater than from walking in urban areas.

### Key actions for Goal 2

#### *Short-term (2019-2023)*

1. Develop a comprehensive monitoring framework that includes ecological and social values

#### *Medium-term (2024-2028)*

1. Review and refine forest stewardship and education programs to capture the broad benefits of the Regional Forest



## Studies have shown that forests improve:

- Air quality
- Water quality and quantity
- Migratory bird habitat
- Carbon sequestration
- Mental health and well-being
- Community cohesion
- Outdoor recreation and physical activity
- Stormwater interception
- Local biological diversity
- Natural shade and UV Ray protection

## Studies have shown that forests reduce:

- Risk of developing chronic diseases
- Flood risk
- Urban heat island effect
- Energy consumption
- Climate change
- Airborne pollutants

The Region's current educational programs help users better understand and respect the Forest:

- **Guided Walks**  
Attendance at these monthly themed walks in various tracts has increased in recent years, especially among families with children. On average, nearly half those attending an event are doing so for the first time.
- **Forest Festivals**  
Seasonal festivals connect people with nature through a variety of activities. Visitors learn about the Forest, how it was established, how the Region manages it for future generations, and sustainable forestry practices.
- **Nature's Classroom**  
These educational sessions for groups of 10 to 25 people are designed to teach participants about the forest ecosystem and its importance to the community. Each session includes a guided forest hike and programs focus on diverse themes including trees, wildlife, the Forest at night, fitness activities and snowshoeing.

The Region offers a variety of other educational and outreach programs in the Forest and at the Bill Fisch Forest Stewardship and Education Centre, an award-winning building in the Hollidge Tract designed to complement and integrate with the forest surrounding it.



In 2017, the Region completed the Green Infrastructure Asset Management Plan. The plan is one of the first plans in Canada to recognize green assets and its supporting built infrastructure. The plan highlighted the ongoing contributions and investment needs of the York Regional Forest.

This will ensure that environmental and health benefits of the York Regional Forest are optimized for residents over the long term, and that assets are managed sustainably over their life cycle.





## Goal 3: Inspire People

Encourage public use that inspires respect for the Forest and a connection with nature.

### Objectives:

- Provide an exceptional visitor experience
- Ensure that public use and facilities are managed to protect the Forest and keep visitors safe

The Region gets feedback and educates Forest users about etiquette, rules and Forest safety through signage, events, its website and the Regional Forest Advisory Team. As well, the Green Infrastructure Asset Management Plan makes recommendations on providing a safe and functional environment.

### The management plan reflects a review of acceptable and prohibited activities.

Acceptable Activities:	Prohibited Activities:
Walking, running, hiking	Lighting fires
Dog walking	Private access/entranceways
Cycling and mountain biking	Paint balling, air gun, or pellet gun use
Horseback riding	Littering or Dumping
Cross-country skiing	Camping
Snowshoeing	Encroachment
Snowmobiling (only on OFSC trails)	Damaging or removing trees, plants, fungi or other materials
Nature appreciation and wildlife viewing	Operation of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones)
Hunting (limited to specific tracts in the Town of Georgina)	Cooking or heating devices (use of BBQ or other portable cooking devices is prohibited)
Fishing	Fireworks
Permitted activities by clubs, associations and for profit organizations (requires a Forest Use Permit)	Property and trail altering or trail creation
Scientific research (requires a Forest Use Permit)	Use of unauthorized vehicles, including ATV's and dirt bikes
Geocaching	Alcohol consumption
	Smoking

The new management plan builds on this by setting out guiding principles to assess proposed new activities in the Regional Forest. These guiding principles can be summarized as follows:

- The environmental impact of the activity must be manageable
- The activity must not detract from other users' enjoyment of the Forest
- The activity must not put Forest users or the Region at an unacceptable level of risk
- The activity must consider costs to the Region

Compliance is achieved through education and enforcement. Education opportunities include Forest Festivals, Nature's Classroom, other programs and events promoting education and stewardship, and the work the Regional forest Advisory Team (RFAT). Enforcement tools include legislation and support from a York Regional Police liaison officer.

Certain organized uses by clubs, associations, service groups and for-profit organizations such as film production may be permitted, but only under a Forest Use Permit. Scientific research also requires a Forest Use Permit.

### Key actions for Goal 3

#### Short-term (2019-2023)

1. Review dog walking practices and options to better balance visitor experience with ecological integrity
2. Develop a visitor experience plan to enhance residents' connections with nature

#### Medium-term (2024-2028)

1. Develop a trails strategy to guide management of trail infrastructure, support wayfinding and contribute to an exceptional visitor experience



# York Region will continue to be recognized as a leader in working with nature, communities and people for the benefit of the Forest.

## Putting the Plan into Action

The Plan will be implemented through five-year operating plans. These operating plans will deliver the 10 key actions to advance the Plan's vision, goals and objectives, as well as ongoing management practices such as harvesting and capital improvements. Successful existing practices and initiatives will continue.

The Region will regularly monitor the Forest and survey users to assess the impacts of the actions, and will use results of monitoring to adjust plans as necessary.

## Into the next century of restoration

The renewed forest management plan will usher in a second century of restoration in the York Regional Forest, which will mark its one-hundredth year in 2024. This new plan will guide the care and management of the Forest to 2038, and continue work to nurture more native plant and animal species. At the same time, it will recognize and build on the value of the Forest to the communities around it and people who visit it. A key goal will be balancing increasing and varied public use with ecological protection.

While focusing on the 20 years to 2038, actions will be informed by a much longer-term vision for the forest, one that acknowledges a time frame measured in the centuries over which forests evolve and makes the Forest an enduring legacy to future generations.

# It's in our NATURE

Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019-2038

## Summary of Participation in Forest Management Plan Development

### York Regional Forest Advisory Team

Canadian Recreational Horse  
and Rider Association

Durham Mountain Biking  
Association/York Mountain  
Biking Association

Forest Education,  
Nature's Classroom

Georgina Sportsmen Alliance/  
Ontario Federation of Anglers  
and Hunters

Huronian Loggers Association

Local Resident/Forest Neighbour

Oak Ridges Trail Association

Ontario Trail Riders Association

Richmond Hill Naturalists

South Lake Simcoe Naturalists

York Regional Police

### Indigenous peoples

Chippewas of Georgina Island

Metis Nation of Ontario -  
Toronto and York Metis Council

### Technical Advisory Team

County of Simcoe

Lake Simcoe and Region  
Conservation Authority

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Toronto and Region  
Conservation Authority

York Region  
Environmental Services

York Region  
Legal Services

### Key Stakeholders Group

Regional Forest Advisory Team

Technical Advisory Team

Forest Gene Conservation  
Association

Forests Ontario

York Region District School Board

Mycological Society of Toronto

Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust

Ontario Woodlot Association

Parks Canada

City of Markham

City of Vaughan

Town of Aurora

Town of Georgina

Town of East Gwillimbury

Township of King

Town of Newmarket

Town of Richmond Hill

Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

**York Region:**

Community and Health Services,  
Accessibility

Corporate Services,  
Long Range Planning

Community and Health Services,  
Health Living

Community and Health Services,  
Seniors Strategy

Environmental Services,  
Environmental Promotion  
and Education

Finance, Risk

Office of the CAO,  
Emergency Management

Transportation Services,  
Active Transportation

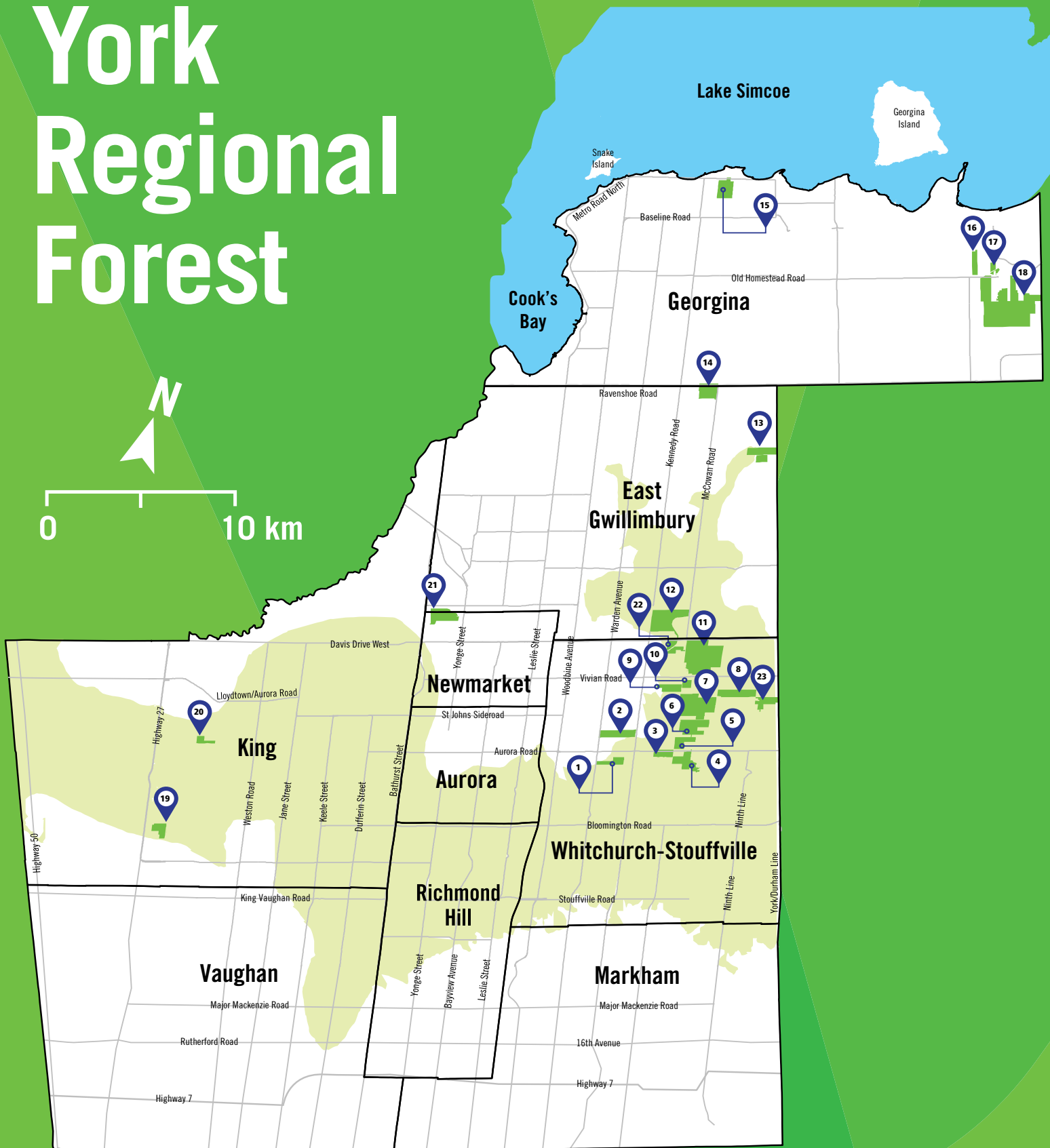
### Residents

Forest User Survey





Public Open Houses

Online Feedback

# York Regional Forest



# Legend

-  York Regional Forest Tracts
-  Oak Ridges Moraine
-  Municipal Boundary
-  Road

## York Regional Forest

23 tracts, totalling 2,379 hectares

1	Robinson Tract	(43 ha)	13	Zephyr Tract	(87 ha)
2	Porritt Tract	(80 ha)	14	Brown Hill Tract	(83 ha)
3	Dainty Tract	(41 ha)	15	Metro Road Tract	(84 ha)
4	Clarke Tract	(85 ha)	16	Cronsberry Tract	(39 ha)
5	Patterson Tract	(50 ha)	17	Godfrey Tract	(20 ha)
6	Hall Tract	(109 ha)	18	Pefferlaw Tract	(579 ha)
7	Eldred King Woodlands	(221 ha)	19	Nobleton Tract	(44 ha)
8	Hollidge Tract	(83 ha)	20	Happy Valley Tract	(26 ha)
9	Scout Tract	(48 ha)	21	Peggy's Wood	(19 ha)
10	Mitchell Tract	(21 ha)	22	Davis Drive Tract	(49 ha)
11	North Tract	(332 ha)	23	Drysdale Woods	(55 ha)
12	Bendor and Graves Tract	(181 ha)			



# DISCOVER

YOUR YORK REGIONAL FOREST



MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE YORK REGIONAL FOREST  
2019-2038 | SUMMARY

[york.ca/forestry](http://york.ca/forestry)



# It's in our NATURE

Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019-2038

## Summary of Participation in Forest Management Plan Development

### York Regional Forest Advisory Team

Canadian Recreational Horse and Rider Association  
 Durham Mountain Biking Association/York Mountain Biking Association  
 Forest Education, Nature's Classroom  
 Georgina Sportsmen Alliance/Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters  
 Huronia Loggers Association  
 Local Resident/Forest Neighbour  
 Oak Ridges Trail Association  
 Ontario Trail Riders Association  
 Richmond Hill Naturalists  
 South Lake Simcoe Naturalists  
 York Regional Police

### Indigenous peoples

Chippewas of Georgina Island  
 Metis Nation of Ontario - Toronto and York Metis Council

### Technical Advisory Team

County of Simcoe  
 Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authority  
 Nature Conservancy of Canada  
 Toronto and Region Conservation Authority  
 York Region Environmental Services  
 York Region Legal Services

### Key Stakeholders Group

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 York Region District School Board  
 Mycological Society of Toronto  
 Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust  
 Ontario Woodlot Association  
 Parks Canada  
 City of Markham  
 City of Vaughan  
 Town of Aurora  
 Town of Georgina

### Town of East Gwillimbury

Township of King

Town of Newmarket

Town of Richmond Hill

Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

### York Region:

Community and Health Services, Accessibility  
 Corporate Services, Long Range Planning  
 Community and Health Services, Health Living  
 Community and Health Services, Seniors Strategy  
 Environmental Services, Environmental Promotion and Education  
 Finance, Risk  
 Office of the CAO, Emergency Management  
 Transportation Services, Active Transportation

**York Regional Forest – Fees and Charges**

**1) Not-for-Profit (charitable) organizations:**

Forest Use Permit application fee:           no charge

**2) For-profit (commercial) organizations:**

Forest Use Permit application fee:           \$460

- Non-intensive coordinated events/activities:
  - no additional fee
- Intensive coordinated events/activities (e.g. film production):
  - additional \$1,100 per day fee

**\*Note:**

- Rationale for permits, fees and charges is to help regulate activities, minimize risks and offset costs
- All activities are subject to the rules and guidelines regarding permitted uses, as set out in the Plan
- If Regional staff need to be present during the event, the Forest Use Permit holder may pay additional fees
- Staff may waive the requirement for a permit based on an assessment of the proposed activity.