



POSITION PAPER FOREST HEALTH PROGRAM

Why a Forest Health Program is Necessary

Healthy forests are a fundamental building block of a healthy watershed. They are essential for natural processes and to sustain forestry as a traditional economic activity.

Recognizing the significance of healthy forests, The District Municipality of Muskoka established a Tree Cutting by-law in 2001 under Ontario's Forestry Act.

Ontario's new Municipal Act incorporates provisions for tree cutting by-laws. The District is therefore updating its by-law. The Forest Health Program will comprise the updated by-law and an education program to complement the by-law.

Muskoka has been blessed for many years with healthy forests and a vibrant forestry industry. Many large and small logging companies have responsibly harvested forest resources. As Muskoka experiences growth, sustainability of healthy forests requires an effective Forest Health Program.

Education and Regulation

The District's Education program will focus on operators and landowners and will be undertaken in conjunction with the Parry Sound-Muskoka Stewardship Network and Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc., both active members of the Muskoka Watershed Council. The program will include workshops, landowner assistance and printed material.

The Regulatory component will consist of the updated Tree Cutting by-law and an enforcement program. Muskoka has been working with local loggers, foresters and other interested individuals to review, amend and update the existing Tree Cutting by-law to establish acceptable minimum standards of operation and bring the by-law into compliance with the provisions of the Municipal Act.

The general provisions of the by-law include:

1. Prescribed minimum diameter limits for cutting.
2. Prescribed minimum remaining basal area after cutting. (Basal area is the sum of the cross section of tree stems taken at breast height).
3. Reduction of the minimum area to which the by-law will apply from 50 acres to 10 acres. It is expected that lower tier municipalities will regulate cutting on fewer than 10 acres.
4. Establishment of a 'Permit System' that would require filing a logging plan. This system would be similar to building permits.
5. Exemption from the provisions of the by-law where the property is under the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP).
6. Continuation of the environmental provisions of the existing by-law. (Operations shall be conducted in such a manner as to ensure no unnecessary injury to the forest ecosystem.)

Muskoka Watershed Council Position

The mission of the Muskoka Watershed Council is to 'Champion Watershed Health'. We strongly support implementation of the District's Forest Health Program comprising the education component and the updated enforceable Tree Cutting By-law.

In addition, we would support and urge provisions that:

- Prevent logging operations in wetland areas.
- Encourage property owners to prepare silvicultural prescriptions for all logging operations.
- Establish environmental standards for operations with respect to such factors as erosion, operations near significant wildlife habitat, water crossings, excessive rutting, and logging in close proximity to lakes and rivers.