

# If a tree falls in the forest.....

Prescott-Russell is losing forest cover at an alarming rate as clear-cutting to pave the way for agricultural crops and residential development becomes more widespread. A new program has been launched by the South Nation Conservation Authority (SNCA) in an attempt to teach property owners about the benefits of their woodlots and encourage preservation....before it's too late. Lianne Lahaie has the full story.



PHOTO LIANNE LAHAIE

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Trees are becoming scarce in Prescott-Russell.

It is becoming more and more common to see heavy machinery decimating forested property, amassing piles of broken trees and setting them ablaze.

With clear-cutting of trees becoming more widespread to pave the way for agricultural crops and residential development, the South Nation Conservation Authority (SNCA), along with some assistance from the United Counties of Prescott-Russell (UCPR), is urging property owners to consider the value of their woodlots before getting rid of them forever.

The SNC recently announced that the UCPR is promoting sustainable woodlot management by contributing \$25,000 to the authority's popular free advisory service for owners of tree stands throughout the region.

The Woodlot Advisory Service aims to promote efficient and sustainable management of forests and the establishment of additional forest cover in Stormont-Dundas-Glenora, Prescott-Russell, Leeds-Grenville and Ottawa.

According to Louis Prévost, director of planning and forestry at the UCPR, the united counties is more than willing to do its part to help preserve forested lands.

"This program is extremely important," Prévost told *The Review*. "The program has been going for about three years now and started as a result of a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. That funding has run out, but the program has been such a success, we [the united counties] didn't hesitate to support it."

Prévost acknowledged that clear-cutting has become an issue locally and says it's time to educate landowners before woodlots all but disappear.

"We need to encourage people to preserve their woodlots, there is no

question," he remarked. "Woodlots are being decimated to make way for agricultural land and there is no real way to stop it because of the legislation in place. This program is a step in the right direction because it educates property owners and shows them the benefits of preserving their forests."

As part of the program, bilingual Woodlot Advisory Service Technicians will help property owners 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 the objectives they set out for their properties.

Technicians will also provide property owners with contacts of local woodlot owner associations and forestry consultants that can assist in achieving the objectives laid out, including revenue-generation.

The SNC pointed out those who participate in the program could save up to 75 per cent in property taxes.

The program is available on a first-come, first-served basis, and it is absolutely free. To be eligible for SNC advisory help, woodlot stands must be a minimum of five acres and applicants must reside in the United Counties of Prescott-Russell.

For more information, please contact Josee Brizard, SNC, at 877-984-2948, ext.231 or via e-mail at [JBrizard@nation.on.ca](mailto:JBrizard@nation.on.ca)

## UCPR is losing forest cover

Prévost said if something isn't done to protect woodlots, the UCPR could find itself in a scary predicament.

"It's really sad," he said. "At the rate we're going now, we will never be able to recover the trees we're losing. Even if we planted millions of trees, we'll never get back to where we were 10 or 15 years ago. At this point, once

the trees are gone, they're gone."

But Prévost is hopeful that this program will get more people thinking about saving trees as opposed to destroying them.

"A lot of people just don't know how beneficial woodlots can be," he commented. "This program will teach people and hopefully, encourage them to hold on to their forests, rather than handing them over to be clear-cut. I'm optimistic this program will have a positive impact."

According to the Prescott-Russell Stewardship Council, there are 3,405 wooded zones that are an average of 18.8 hectares in size - but Prescott-Russell's forest cover is low at approximately 27 per cent and is "very fragmented."

Information and research compiled by Environment Canada and outlined in a report called "How Much Habitat is Enough?" states that 30 per cent forest cover is "ideal" to maintain a diverse population of flora and fauna and notes that, as the amount of forest habitat in an area declines, so does the number and percentage of expected forest animal species within the range.

The Township of Alfred-Plantagenet attempted to put forward a resolution to the UCPR asking the counties to consider introducing new policies for the use and management of forest lands in the counties.

Municipalities with a population of more than 10,000 can adopt by-laws to regulate the destruction of trees on public or private lots.

The resolution didn't go far. Prévost said municipalities do have the power to adopt legislation restricting clear-cutting activities and some, like the City of Clarence-Rockland, have done so. However, he added, many rural municipalities are having a hard time deciding if adopting such legislation is the way to go.

Please turn to page 3