

# We can't see the forest because trees are being cut down

TREES are disappearing across Prescott-Russell.

It is becoming more and more common to see heavy machinery decimating forested property, amassing piles of broken tree branches, which are then set ablaze.

With the clear-cutting of trees becoming more widespread to pave the way for agricultural crops and residential development, we can't help but wonder if it's time for municipal and provincial governments to enact legislation to protect our forests.

Two years ago, regional mayors at the United Counties of Prescott-Russell (UCPR) voted against putting legislation in place to limit clear-cutting and protect our woodlots. The reason – they didn't want to go to war with farmers who say they need to clear-cut in order to gain access to land for crop planting.

Louis Prévost, director of planning and forestry at the UCPR, has repeatedly stated his concern for the region's woodlots. Prévost said if something isn't done to protect woodlots, the UCPR could find itself in a scary predicament. He has made it clear, on numerous occasions, that at the rate woodlots are being decimated now, the UCPR will never be able to recover the trees being lost.

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.

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

Farmers need land in order to plant crops and developers are often encroaching on rural land for housing growth. But we need woodlots and forests if we don't want to disrupt the delicate balance of nature. The plants, animals and trees that live in the forest have their place, just like the crops grown by farmers. Both support and sustain life.

The South Nation Conservation (SNC), which has planted 2.6 million trees during the past 25 years, does have a program in place to educate woodlot owners about the importance of forests. It gives them tips on how to carry out activities on their land without laying waste to woodlots. But the program isn't mandatory – woodlot owners have to choose to participate.

Levels of government will have to use forward-thinking and be courageous if they value our environment at all. The clear-cutting taking place in our region, and across the province, cannot be allowed to continue. If a balance cannot be struck, then it will be up to governments to put legislation in place to protect one of our most precious resources – our forests.

If something isn't done, the age-old, "If a tree falls in the forest, does anybody hear?" will never be answered because there won't be any more trees to fall.

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