

Eastern Ontario Model Forest - Certified forest owners creating and enhancing wildlife habitat across Ontario

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) is a not-for-profit, charitable organization that works to promote sustainable forest management practices throughout Ontario.

Our core programs of Forest Certification, Forest Education and Outreach, Regional Forest Health Network and Community Forest Carbon Offsets are guided by a desire to balance the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability.

In 1999 the EOMF began to explore forest certification as a means of promoting sustainable forest management for private forest owners. In 2003 the EOMF received Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) Group Forest Management certification (FSC® Co18800). Our “Forest Certification Program” now covers over 82,000 hectares of certified forest, represented by 13 community forests, 110 private forest owners, 2 commercial forests, 3 independent forest managers and 5 maple syrup producers. Each forest owner manages their forests based on FSC®’s 10 Principles of sustainable management and detailed in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Region Standards.

Key to the principles of sustainable management is managing for biodiversity and creating or enhancing wildlife habitat, while ensuring other environmental, social, and economic benefits are achieved. During many of our field visits and annual FSC® audits, we have witnessed first hand the commitment and dedication that forest managers have towards the importance of forest biodiversity and wildlife creation and enhancement initiatives.



The range of biodiversity and wildlife enhancement projects taking place on certified forests is both impressive in number and scope. Private forest owners, community forest managers, and loggers alike are leading and implementing these types of projects at both the stand and landscape levels. A short list of these projects includes invasive species control, development of Biodiversity Strategies, rare species recovery, species at risk habitat enhancement and protection, riparian habitat restoration, wetland protection, medicinal and culturally significant plant surveys, intensive wildlife management areas, to name a few.

Loggers in Renfrew County Forest helping to create wildlife habitat by topping dead red pine trees, when safe to do so!

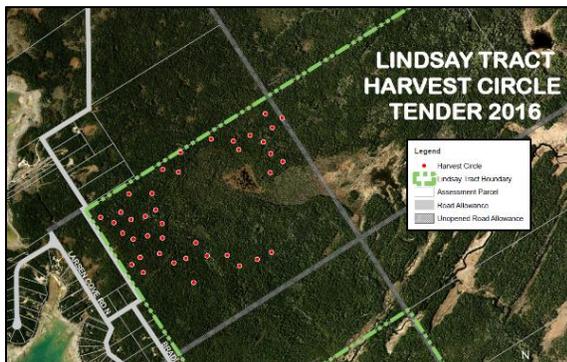
Photo credit: Lacey Rose

The following two examples demonstrate the range and scale of involvement of certified forest managers in promoting healthy diverse forest ecosystems.

Bruce County Forests - Enriching biodiversity in white cedar dominated forests

Bruce County owns approximately 4,700 hectares of forest, located over eight tracts. The largest of these properties is the Lindsay Tract, which is 2,800 ha of primarily cedar dominant stands located in the Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula. Cedar is one of the most sought after species by local timber producers, but managing this particular resource poses many challenges, including excessive blow-down, slash management, herbaceous competition, and the establishment of desirable regeneration.

A recent cedar harvest operation in 2016 demonstrated a unique harvest method to address these challenges, while promoting species and habitat diversity. Kevin Predon, Forest Manager for Bruce County implemented a harvest system of small circular patch clearcuts with connecting corridors. This system had been suggested by Fred Pinto, RPF.



Forty small patch clear-cuts, Lindsay Tract.
Photo credit: Kevin Predon

The harvest area was delineated into 40 individual circular clear-cuts, approximately 30-50 metres in diameter, with connecting corridors. This method allowed the lower density areas to be left undisturbed while targeting those that were more operationally feasible. The cut areas helped to create greater habitat diversity while the uncut areas provided a good supply of desirable seeds, including white pine.

There is also a significant population of Massassauga Rattlesnakes, a species at

risk, living in the Lindsay Tract. To mitigate the risk of harming any snakes, operational timing restrictions were used as outlined in MNR's *Forest Management Guide for Conserving Biodiversity at the Stand and Site Scales*. As a result, harvest was restricted to the winter months.

Early observations have been positive. The slash left on site as helped to protect the shallow soils, while machine travel has broken and lowered the slash, thus hastening decomposition. Regeneration in the form of white pine has already begun to germinate in the exposed soil areas and few trees have fallen over in the uncut areas as a result of the



Massassauga rattlesnake Lindsay Tract cutover. Photo credit: Kevin Predon

smaller openings. Furthermore, while conducting a summer site visit in 2018 a few Massasaugas were encountered, an encouraging sign!

Northumberland County Forest – Advancing Oak Savannah Habitat

The Northumberland County Forest is 2,225 ha of mainly forested land on the Oak Ridges Moraine. The forest is a mix of planted and natural forest and wetlands. One of the most unique communities present is the globally rare ecosystem - Black Oak savannah and woodland. Less than one percent of this habitat is left in North America due to habitat modification, habitat loss, succession and fire suppression. Oak regeneration is being replaced with maple and cherry, and the unique species that depend on the ecosystem are also disappearing.



Oak Savannah habitat prescribed burn,
Northumberland County Forest
Photo credit: Todd Farrell

“Typically, the management of this ecosystem involves prescribed burns”, says Todd Farrell, Forest Manager. This increases light levels, helps to remove non-native and non-woodland plants and helps stimulate oak regeneration. Research in the United States has shown that a combination of thinning of canopy trees and prescribed burns provides the desirable environment for this ecosystem to thrive. Northumberland County Forest has documented these areas as high conservation values and are using thinning and prescribed burns to ensure these globally rare habitats and the species that live in them prosper.

EOMF would like to thank the private forest owners and community forest managers who contributed content to this article, in particular Kevin Predon, Forest Manager for Bruce County and Todd Farrell, Forest Manager for Northumberland County.