

## **Achieving a sustainable balance in community forests**

If you picture the sustainable management of Lanark County's community forests as a three-legged stool (a nice wooden one), it makes it easier to understand how important it is to achieve balance.

That's how Brian Anderson, advisory services coordinator with Mississippi Valley Conservation, sees it. MVC provides professional forest-management services to the county based on many decades of experience and membership in the Ontario Professional Foresters Association.

"Each leg of the stool represents one of our major management principles: social, environmental and economic. If too much emphasis is placed on one aspect it gets too much weight and tips the stool. We need to balance all three of those principles in order to achieve sustainable management."

Lanark County owns more than 4,600 hectares of community forests on 38 properties scattered throughout the county, and it takes the job of their sustainable management seriously. The lands are open to the public for low-impact use and offer a mosaic of woodlands, wetlands, streams, lakes, plants, animals, geology and heritage features.

The public works department is responsible for forest management with input by the Community Forest Working Group, made up of representatives from the county, forestry professionals and key stakeholders in the community. The working group makes recommendations to the county's community development committee, which reports to Lanark County Council.

"One of Lanark County's key objectives is to manage the lands in a sustainable manner so that over the long-term they can continue to provide social, recreational, economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual benefits for all of us," says Jonathan Allen, the county's operations manager in the public works department.

To that end, a 20-year forest management plan has been prepared in consultation with the public to ensure a consistent approach over the long-term and to meet the stringent requirements of Forest Stewardship Council certification, which the county's forests have achieved in partnership with the Eastern Ontario Model Forest.

"FSC certification is a world-recognized standard, and we are very proud that our community forests continue to achieve this," said Lanark Highlands Mayor Peter McLaren, who is a member of the working group and also the Mazinaw-Lanark Local Citizens Committee, which is currently going through the FSC process. "This involves an independent audit of forestry practices to meet a common standard that can be used to label forest products such as lumber or paper harvested from a well-managed forest. Attention to detail with regard to sustainability is a factor that helped us to get the FSC certification."

The environmental leg of the stool is maintained using tools such as the management plan and five-year operating plans, along with the many life science studies and species at risk inventories that have been completed on hundreds of acres of the lands.

"These various documents form the environmental management system for the community forest, which helps us to address our strategic direction, site-specific planning and an ongoing assessment of the health and ecological integrity of the forest ecosystems and their natural heritage values," said Mr. Anderson. "The life science studies completed by the county go above and beyond what is required, and they are used to help us to decide whether trees can be harvested or not, for example."

This ties in with the economic leg of the stool because cost recovery from certain forest activities helps to pay for such management factors as signage, life science studies and trail work that is conducted on the properties. The long-term goal is financial self-sustainability.

"When the county first started purchasing the properties in 1938, part of the overall agreement with the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests was to plant trees on these marginal lands," Mr. Allen explained. "The thought was there would be a future economic return from harvesting these red pine plantations. Moreover, when the county bought these properties it wanted the forests to be a good example of forest management for others."

As for the social leg of the stool, keeping “community” in the forests is important. “Part of the long-term direction described in our vision statement and guiding principles is to see the forest managed to accommodate a wide variety of values and uses,” says Mr. McLaren. “Many of these uses are guided by other plans and policies through the county, such the recreational use policy. We also work closely with the municipal trails corporation.”

“People have access to these properties now and are actively using them,” adds working group member Andrew Kerr-Wilson, who is a local educator. “Time and again Lanark County’s community forests have proven to be wonderful living classrooms for various levels of students and groups, such as naturalist organizations and recreation clubs.”

“The goal is to look for ways to enable different responsible uses of the community forests that do not compromise their overall health and ecological integrity,” says Mr. Anderson. “This acknowledges the three legs of the stool: monitoring the environment while balancing economic uses with tourism, recreation, education, natural and cultural heritage recognition and research. We want to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the values and uses of the forests while providing opportunities for the community to use them.”

For more information about the community forests, check the county’s website at [www.lanarkcounty.com/Page268.aspx](http://www.lanarkcounty.com/Page268.aspx).

– 30 –

For more information, contact:

Jonathan Allen  
Operations Manager  
Lanark County  
1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 3170

***Photos attached:***

Forest Managers Tour 2010 001: The county welcomed certified forest managers to participate in a workshop and tour of community forests in 2010.

County tour 06 002: County councillors and staff participated in a tour of community forests. The county strives to balance the major management principles for these lands.