

Policy Framework for Sustainable Forests



Forest
Policy
Series

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A Statement of the Ontario Government released on April 6, 1994.

1.0 Goal for Ontario's Forests

Our goal is to ensure the long-term health of our forest ecosystems for the benefit of the local and global environments, while enabling present and future generations to meet their material and social needs.

2.0 Ontario's Forests - Broadly Defined

Forests are all around us. They exist in grand expanses in Northern Ontario, and also in urban areas throughout the province. Ontarians must respect all their trees; urban and rural, planted and wild, seedling and old timber, single and in stands. All the trees in Ontario must be considered as part of the forest if policy is to direct our actions and attentions effectively.

It is crucial, however, that we see forests as ecosystems, not just trees. Forest ecosystems, while dominated by plants called trees, also include shrubs, herbs, mammals, birds, microscopic creatures, soil, air, water, and other components of nature. An encompassing definition that embraces all aspects of forest life is central to the ideas, beliefs, and values of a new forest culture which underpins and supports the directions defined in this policy framework.

3.0 Forest Sustainability

Sustaining forests is fundamental to sustaining development based on forests. Forest ecosystems must be kept in good condition and criteria for this condition need to be described and clearly understood by all interests. To achieve sustainability, forest policy must ensure that desired future conditions be defined and direct, that actions taken are compatible with maintaining and restoring this condition.

3.1 Principles for Sustaining Forests

- *Maintaining ecological processes is essential for the functioning of the biosphere, and biological diversity must be conserved in the use of forest ecosystems.*
- *Large, healthy, diverse and productive forests are essential to the environmental, economic, social and cultural well-being of Ontario, both now and in the future.*
- *Forest practices, including all methods of harvesting must emulate, within the bounds of silvicultural requirements, natural disturbances, and landscape patterns.*
- *Forest ecosystem types should not be candidates for harvest where this practice threatens or jeopardizes their long-term health and vigour.*
- *Forest practices must minimize adverse effects on soil, water, remaining vegetation, fish and wildlife habitat, and other values.*

3.2 Strategic Objectives for Forest Sustainability

- *To ensure that current biological diversity of forests is not significantly changed and, where necessary and practical, is restored.*
- *To establish and maintain representative, protected forest lands as part of Ontario's natural heritage.*
- *To manage the forests of Ontario to conserve and enhance the quality of water, air, and soil.*

4.0 Community and Resource Use Sustainability

Throughout the province, many communities are located in forests and depend on them for their existence. These communities are important to the social fabric of the province. Forest policy must strive to ensure that local communities, aboriginal communities, and businesses are fully aware of the nature of the surrounding forest and are partners in making decisions regarding their effective use and management.

4.1 Principles for Using Forests

- *Long-term viability and sustainability of forest-based communities and businesses are vital. This is second only to the sustainability of forest ecosystems.*
- *Ontarians have a right to use and enjoy their public forests. They also share a responsibility for forest stewardship.*
- *All landowners are responsible for managing their forests in an ecologically sound manner, as part of the overall environment.*
- *Ontarians must respect the rights of forest owners.*
- *Users must pay for their use of forests in relation to the benefits they receive.*

4.2 Strategic Objectives for Community and Resource Use Sustainability

4.2.1 Material Values

- *To encourage optimum levels and diversity of employment derived from Ontario's forests while being consistent with all other strategic objectives.*
- *To be able to supply industrial and consumer wood needs while maintaining forest sustainability.*
- *To provide for a sustainable harvest of forest-based food, fur and other renewable goods, while maintaining overall forest sustainability.*
- *To invest sufficiently to maintain forest sustainability.*
- *To ensure that over time, revenues from forest uses meet investment requirements to maintain forest sustainability.*
- *To provide for a range of quality tourism opportunities in response to demand, while maintaining forest sustainability.*

4.2.2 Social Values

- *To protect cultural and spiritual values in Ontario's forests.*
- *To develop and apply the knowledge and understanding required to achieve forest sustainability.*
- *To develop the recreational potential of Ontario's forests, consistent with forest sustainability and demand.*

5.0 Decision-Making

For all public forest lands, Ontario must develop and adopt an adaptive approach to policy development and ecosystem management, an approach with a built-in learning process. The adaptive approach involves establishing clear goals and targets and maintaining a monitoring process that measures how well the goals and targets have been achieved. As experience is gained, approaches and policies must be designed and adapted to become more effective.

5.1 Principles for Decision-Making

- *Best available science, public involvement, local knowledge, and appropriate inventory must work together to produce effective decisions.*
- *Consensus-building methods are to be used for forest decision-making.*
- *Decision makers must be accountable for their actions.*
- *Policy must account for the differences among Ontario's forest regions.*
- *Decisions must be made as close to the situation as possible, respect local needs and desires, and be consistent with the provincial direction.*
- *Forest managers must inform the public of the links among forest ecosystems, objectives, and management tools.*
- *Public participation in local forest decision-making is essential to ensure that all forest values and users are properly taken into account in ecosystems management.*
- *Local decision-making must function within the context of the provincial interest. The provincial interest must also be the product of an effective public involvement process.*

6.0 Essential Steps Towards Ecosystem Management

Forest ecosystems are still not well understood, and much of the knowledge to implement ecosystem management must come from real management experiences. In addition, many forest decisions establish long-term patterns that are difficult to reverse or redirect.

Management practices must be flexible to allow for new information as it becomes available. While many of the specifics remain to be developed, there are some fundamental ideas about ecosystem management that provide a solid premise upon which to build.

- *Ecosystem boundaries are defined for the primary components.*
- *Goals and measurable targets for ecosystem conditions are developed.*
- *Management strategies are designed, implemented and, as necessary, modified to achieve goals and targets.*
- *Ecosystem conditions are monitored and compared with the goals and targets.*

Note: In 1995, numbering was added to the text in 1995 to facilitate cross-referencing with other forest management policy documents.

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