

The Ontario Woodlot Association has developed a Code of Practice that promotes the environmentally and financially sustainable operation of private woodlots within the framework of the woodlot owners' objectives. The Code will guide woodlot owners on how to develop a management plan that allows for forest product extraction while minimizing impacts on the environment and maintaining forest values. The Code also emphasizes that control of activities within the woodlot rests with the owner. However, it is also based on the notion that the woodlot should be considered as an integral part of the larger landscape or ecosystem, to be sustained indefinitely. Therefore owners should consider the needs of other woodlot users and the community at large when making management decisions. Woodlot owners have the final say concerning the future of their property, but they also have a responsibility to sustain the resource for future generations.

Over 90 per cent of the forested land in southern Ontario are privately owned.

These lands support jobs and recreational activities, as well as providing forest products for local, national and international markets. But now, society's demands for protecting the environment mean that woodlot owners are being asked to do even more. Not only should they contribute to society's economic well-being, they should also maintain biological diversity and wildlife habitat. It is a large task, but it is achievable if the woodlot owner is willing to take the initiative. Forest values and forest product extraction can both be maintained in a sustainable manner.

Many current forest practices on private lands, however, are either not sustainable or could be performed in a more sustainable way. Woodlot owners and the forest industry realize that a change is needed to improve current practices. A recent survey of Ontario Woodlot Association members found that 85 per cent believe that there is a need for the forestry/logging industry to demonstrate that sound environmental practices and good forest management will lead to sustainable forestry.

Principles of the Code of Practice

With an understanding of the present state of his or her property, the woodlot owner can form a plan to manage the woodlot sustainably. The following points should be considered in any plan:

Safety

- Forest management activities can be dangerous. Woodlot owners must provide a safe work environment for all forest workers and woodlot users. Reasonable steps must be taken to ensure the safety of all persons authorized to be in the woodlot. Only

operators who have successfully completed safety training should be employed. Hanging trees and partially cut trees pose an ongoing danger and must be removed.

Biological Diversity and Wildlife Habitat

- Woodlot owners should maintain and, where possible, enhance the biological diversity of the woodlot. Any major changes will adversely affect some species, while benefiting others. Management practices, such as cutting and selective planting, can maintain, enhance and rehabilitate the species found in the forest.
- Wildlife is an essential part of the landscape. Woodlot managers and owners should keep the needs of wildlife populations in mind when managing woodlots. For example, snag trees provide habitat and shelter for many bird

and mammal species. Trees should be left to enhance wildlife habitat in the forest, provided that they do not pose a safety hazard.

- The introduction of aggressive exotic species should not be encouraged. Tree species such as Scots pine and European buckthorn compete against native species and create single species stands that are detrimental to wildlife and commercial tree species. The introduction of exotic insects, such as the gypsy moth, and plant species, such as purple loosestrife, is more difficult to control, but measures should be taken to impede their invasion of the woodlot.

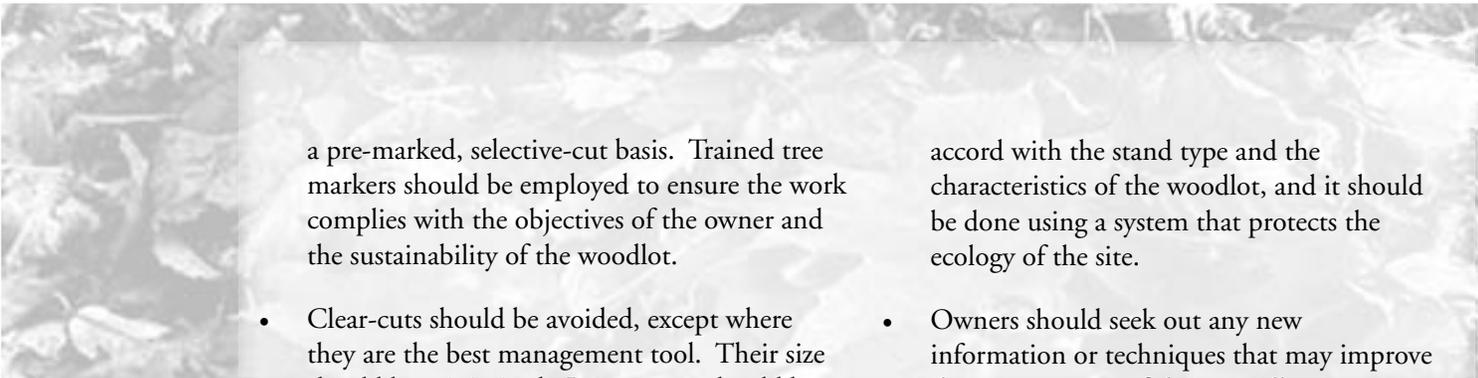
Wetlands and Sensitive Areas

- Woodlot owners should provide buffers around bodies of water and marshlands and attempt to minimize impacts on these areas during management activities. Water bodies and marshland can be damaged by even the slightest interference. Wetlands provide habitat and breeding areas for fish, reptiles and amphibians, birds and many mammals and, as a result, require special attention. For example, a woodlot owner who is considering a drainage project to promote better tree growth should weigh this benefit against the potential damage done to seasonal breeding grounds for frogs, insects and birds.

Responsible Management Activities

- During activities such as thinning or harvesting, the woodlot owner should minimize any impact on the ecosystem. In fact, efforts should be made to leave the site better than it was before. Native plant species should be protected whenever possible. These plants enhance the value of the area and may provide other benefits to the woodlot owner and users (food sources for wildlife, berries, ginseng, etc.).
- All harvesting, unless specific conditions to the contrary apply, should be carried out on





a pre-marked, selective-cut basis. Trained tree markers should be employed to ensure the work complies with the objectives of the owner and the sustainability of the woodlot.

- Clear-cuts should be avoided, except where they are the best management tool. Their size should be minimized. Larger areas should be clear-cut in small patches over many years. This avoids regenerating stands of one age-class.
- Roads and skid trails should be established that do not cause erosion, rutting, compacting or a change to the drainage pattern, one approach is to undertake management activities in the winter when the ground is frozen.
- Work carried out on the woodlot should be completed according to accepted stand management guidelines. The harvest should

accord with the stand type and the characteristics of the woodlot, and it should be done using a system that protects the ecology of the site.

- Owners should seek out any new information or techniques that may improve the management of their woodlot.

Protection

- Woodlot owners should try to minimize the effects of fire and disease. Managing a woodlot for only a few tree species leaves it susceptible to disease and insect attack. The natural spacing provided by having many different tree species in the woodlot lessens this vulnerability.
- Mechanical or biological controls for diseases or insect infestations should be adopted if required. Chemical pesticides should be used only if no alternatives exist. Careful monitoring of the woodlot will usually show if disease or insect populations are on the rise. The best time to act is when the problem is still small and easily controlled.

Regeneration

- Natural regeneration should be encouraged. Trees should be planted only on areas where natural regeneration has not been successful or is not likely to occur in the future (i.e. abandoned fields and pastures). The trees should be ecologically compatible with the site. Among the considerations is the soil type, moisture, and the tending the trees will require after planting.



Recommendations

Inventory and Interpretation of the Woodlot

Knowing and understanding what their personal goals and objectives are for owning a woodlot will make it easier for woodlot owners to make management decisions and to develop a plan to meet these objectives. Once these objectives have been decided, the woodlot owner should take a few steps to ensure that all pertinent information about the woodlot has been obtained. A complete inventory should be undertaken. Questions that should be asked during this inventory include:

The Forest: What is the composition and age of the forest? Is there merchantable timber or firewood in the woodlot? What other types of plants and shrubs are there? Are they rare or endangered?

Soils and Slope: What type of soils exist? Are there areas of steep slope?

Water and Drainage: Are there bodies of water,

streams (seasonal and permanent), swamps or marshes? Are any wetlands classified or significant by government standards?

Wildlife: What type of wildlife uses or resides on the property? Are there any rare or endangered species?

Other Users: Are there other users that have an interest in the woodlot? What is the municipal zoning designation on the woodlot?

Since all woodlots have their own unique characteristics, other questions may come to mind while the inventory is being done. Although the woodlot owner likely already has a good knowledge of the land, a complete inventory will provide more information that will aid in its management.

Management Plan

A management plan should be drawn up based on the owner's goals. The plan should first state the owner's objectives: what products, services or values are to be provided by the forest and in what quantity, and how will the supply of these vary over time?

Consideration should be given to identifying what crop or product best suits the land, the financial and time constraints of the owner, as well as the needs of the local market. Local markets may demand more than timber and firewood. Products such as maple syrup, Christmas trees, mushrooms,

hunting leases/licences, eco-tourism and nut production can also produce income for the woodlot owner. It should be noted that two or more of these endeavours could be managed on the same woodlot.

Several other factors should be incorporated into the management plan so that the woodlot will benefit the environment, wildlife and other users. In order to realize the potential returns from wood-related and other products, as well as wildlife and environmental goals, the landowner must develop a comprehensive plan that will act as a constant guide. This plan should be re-evaluated periodically and changes made if necessary.