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Re: Application for a Minor Exception to Haldimand County's Forest Conservation Bylaw

As the Watershed Forester at the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), I am writing to provide comment on the Application for a Minor Exception to Haldimand County's Forest Conservation Bylaw to remove 9.3 hectares (23 acres) of forest on the property located at 665 Highway 6 (Roll # 15 20 051 5300 0000).

The GRCA has an interest in maintaining and increasing forest cover to create and maintain a healthy Grand River watershed. Forests have many integral roles in a healthy landscape including: providing clean air and water, sequestering carbon, protecting soils and minimizing flooding, providing recreational opportunities and forest products, and as habitat for a wide diversity of plants and animals.

Environment Canada's "How Much Habitat is Enough?" describes maintaining a minimum of 30% forest cover as a high-risk approach to maintaining species richness and healthy aquatic systems within a watershed. Forest cover in the Grand River Watershed is currently 16%. To protect and improve the benefits our forests provide, it is important that we conserve what forest cover we have and where possible provide support to increase forest and tree cover.

The planted forest in this application functions, along with forests on adjacent properties, as part of a larger 25 hectare (62 acres) contiguous forest. Removal of the subject 9.3 hectares of forest would result in both direct loss of forest cover and impact the overall benefits provided by this larger forest patch. Although the planted forest on this property currently has a fairly simple species composition and structure, plantations like this are designed to improve conditions for the establishment of a more diverse forest over time. Good forest management can promote and speed this conversion through a series of plantation thinning harvests. This approach not only improves forest habitat and resilience, it also promotes ongoing carbon sequestration. Material harvested through plantation thinnings are typically sold but could also be used by the landowner.

Ontario municipalities' authority to regulate the cutting of trees and removal of forests on private land is an integral tool in maintaining landscape forest cover levels and the benefits that forests provide. Although I will not comment directly on whether this particular application meets the Minor Exception provisions of the County's Forest Conservation By-law or its Guidelines for Minor Exceptions, I will comment that approving this application as a Minor Exception would set an example that other landowners may refer to in justifying similar applications for forest clearing within Haldimand County.

Thank You

Ron Wu-Winter RPF
GRCA Watershed Forester