

REPORT #: COR 2016 11
DATE: 15 Mar 2016
TO: Mayor and Members of Council
SUBJECT: **Simcoe County Forests - Hunting as a Permitted Use**
PREPARED BY: Brent Lee, Manager of Enforcement

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Report COR 2016 11 regarding Simcoe County Forests - Hunting as a Permitted Activity be received; and

That Council approve Option # 1 to maintain the current hunting regulations in Simcoe County Forest Tracts.

2. PREAMBLE:

A request was received by the CAO from a resident in Ward 5 requesting Council allow Sunday gun hunting during existing regulated hunting seasons in Bradford West Gwillimbury. Enforcement staff undertook a review of provincial regulations and the Town's Discharge of Firearms By-law to determine what actions or changes were required to consider this request.

On November 3, 2015, Report COR 2015 05 was brought before the Committee of the Whole seeking direction whether to permit Sunday gun hunting in Bradford. The Committee of the Whole voted to approve an application to the Ministry of Natural Resources, requesting permission to allow Sunday gun hunting in Bradford.

On November 17, 2015 Council heard two deputations from residents concerned with the approval for Sunday gun hunting. These concerns related specifically to the use of Simcoe County Forests for the purposes of hunting. Council deferred the decision to permit Sunday gun hunting, pending a report concerning the permitted uses of Simcoe County Forests.

This report outlines the information pertaining to Simcoe County Forests.

3. BASIC DATA PERTAINING TO THE MATTER:

Background

The Simcoe County Forest (SCF) is the largest and one of the most productive municipal forests in Ontario, totalling over 32,000 acres. These forests provide a multitude of environmental, social and economic benefits to the County including the protection of wildlife habitat and water resources, public education and recreation, scientific research and the production of wood products.

Recreational use of the SCF is a primary role and function identified by the County. As such, there are numerous passive activities that are permitted within the forest tracts. The County has established a Recreational Policy (see attached) and Recreational By-law to ensure the responsible and sustainable use of the forest for all. Contained within the Recreational Policy, the County elaborates on the use of hunting by identifying hunting as a traditional sport and a management tool utilized to regulate and control wildlife populations. The County also notes that all hunters are required to be trained, pass an examination and possess an Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) license to hunt within any SCF. In combination with the stringent regulations of the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, hunting is the most regulated activity within County forests.

As a result of increasing urban encroachment around certain forest tracts with the associated increase in activities in these areas, the County has designated hunting within certain SCFs as a prohibited use. The objective of this restriction is to limit the potential for conflict in urbanized areas by eliminating hunting from a small percentage of the SCFs. This hunting prohibition is on less than 3% of the total area designated as SCFs. These regulations are offset by the increasing expansion of SCFs in less populated areas, where hunting is permitted.

The County established a County Forest Recreational By-law No. 5569 which specifically identifies SCF tracts where hunting is not permitted. The hunting-prohibited tracts are:

- Dyer Tract, City of Barrie
- Blauxham Tract, City of Barrie
- Midhurst Tract, Township of Springwater
- Museum Tract, Township of Springwater
- Tottenham Tract, Township of New Tecumseth
- Rippon Tract, Township of Essa
- Thompson Tract, Town of Penetanguishene
- Thompson Tract, Township of Tiny
- Charlebois Tract, Township of Tiny
- Martin's Valley Tract, Town of Midland

Out of the 134 forest tracts owned and maintained by the County, hunting is not permitted in 10 of them. The common characteristic among the tracts that have hunting prohibited is that they are directly adjacent to urbanized areas and/or subdivisions. The County initially identified and designated tracts as non-permitted hunting properties due to the very close proximity to these urban areas. This was done when the Recreation Policy was established in

2006. Since the inception of the Recreation Policy, one additional tract was added to the list of non-hunting properties - this tract is identified as the Tottenham Tract in the Township of New Tecumseth.

Most recently, the County acquired two additional properties; the Thompson and Charlebois tracts. These tracts are directly adjacent to two existing SCF tracts, forming a continuous SCF block. The existing Thompson Tract was already designated as a non-hunting property. With the new property acquisition, this property now forms a contiguous forest block straddling the borders of Penetanguishene, Midland and Tiny Township. Another consideration in the designation of this new tract is the fact that Midland has a no-discharge by-law. As a result, the County recommended that these recently acquired tracts also be designated as non-hunting. This report was presented to the County CoW in October 2015, and was formally adopted into the County Forest Recreational By-law.

Forest Tracts in Bradford

There are three (3) Simcoe County Forest tracts located in Bradford:

- 1) Welsh Tract - 3960 Line 12
- 2) Hodson Tract - 3537 Line 11
- 3) Sinclair Tract - 4022 Sideroad 10

These tracts are all located in the northern portion of Bradford, in a rural setting between Line 11 and Line 13 (see attached map). All three tracts in Bradford have the same permitted and prohibited activities. Hunting is listed as a permitted activity in all the tracts located within Bradford.

Permitted activities: hunting, cross country skiing, cycling, dog walking, hiking, horseback riding and snowshoeing.

Prohibited activities: camping, fire, paintball, target practice and vehicles over 400kg.

The Sinclair tract is a 170 acre property located on Line 12, approximately 250 metres west of Sideroad 10 with a small finger that continues to Sideroad 10. This property is surrounded by farmland to the south. There are two properties along the west boundary line; both are tree-lots; one having a residential dwelling approximately 170 metres from the Sinclair Tract west boundary line. There are approximately 20 parcels of land along the north and east portions of the SCF which have residential dwellings (see attached map).

The Hodson Tract is an approximate 118 acre property that extends from Line 11 to Line 12, along the east side of Highway 400. This property borders Highway 400 along its entire west border. To the south, this tract is directly across the street from Joe Magani Park and the Town owned property at 3541 Line 11 which houses the rural Public Works yard, the Building Division, the Community Planning Division and the Office of Economic Development. The east and north borders are largely agricultural lots. There are four dwellings along the east property line of this property (see attached map).

The Welsh Tract is a 100 acre property located on the north side of Line 12, west of Sideroad

5. This property is surrounded by agricultural lands to the west, north and east. On the south side, there are four residential dwellings located across the street.

In consideration of the information contained within this report, staff propose the following options:

Option # 1

This option proposes no request for changes to the Simcoe County Forest tracts. Hunting is currently permitted six days a week in all SCF located within Bradford and under this option hunting would continue to be a permitted use. If choosing this option, the following recommendation is proposed:

That Report COR 2016 11 regarding Simcoe County Forests - Hunting as a Permitted Activity be received; and

That Council approve Option # 1 to maintain the current hunting regulations in Simcoe County Forest Tracts.

Option #2

This option proposes that Council make a request to Simcoe County Council to designate one or more SCF tracts as non-hunting properties. Should Council decide to request hunting be a non-permitted use, a resolution is required from BWG Council to County Council requesting the specific tract(s) and reason(s) for the request. County Council can then consider the request, and, if approved, update their recreational by-law accordingly. Council can choose to request one, two, three, or any combination thereof as tracts where hunting would be prohibited. If choosing this option, the following recommendation is proposed:

That Report COR 2016 11 regarding Simcoe County Forests - Hunting as a Permitted Activity be received; and

That Council make a request to Simcoe County Council to prohibit hunting in the Simcoe County Forest tract(s) identified as:_____; and

That Council request Simcoe County Council pass the necessary by-law to give effect to the desired request.

Staff Recommendation

In reviewing the SCF tracts located in Bradford, none have the same or similar urbanized areas when compared to the list of non-hunting SCFs found elsewhere in Simcoe County. While it is acknowledged residential dwellings exist in close proximity to some of the SCFs in Bradford, these areas are by no means urbanized to the extent of other non-hunting tracts which have subdivision-type streets and/or commercial properties in very close proximity to the SCF. As such, staff do not recommend the prohibition on hunting in any of the SCFs located in Bradford.

In an attempt to address some of the safety concerns brought forward by residents and users of the SCFs, staff recommend the Discharge of Firearms By-law be updated. The current by-law was passed in 1994, and contains limited substantive regulations which govern the discharge of firearms. Currently, you can discharge on private property with permission, permitted crown lands (County Forests which allow hunting), and at approved target shooting facilities. The only other regulation that exists, is that you cannot discharge within 100 metres of a building.

A revised version of the discharge of firearms by-law will address issues such as: identifying designated settlement areas where discharging is prohibited, increase the distance to buildings where discharge is permitted, provide more strict penalties for discharging on private land, and govern the types of weapons which are discharged. This by-law will be in addition to, but will not take precedence over, existing provincial and federal regulations that govern firearms.

It is anticipated that staff can bring a draft version of the new by-law forward to Council in the first half of 2016. This revised by-law should provide the Police and Conservation Officers the necessary tools to address concerns regarding the proximity of discharge of firearms in relation to adjacent properties to SCFs. As part of this effort, the Town can undertake a multifaceted education campaign to inform hunters of the new regulations contained within the revised by-law, if approved by Council.

4. EFFECT ON TOWN FINANCES:

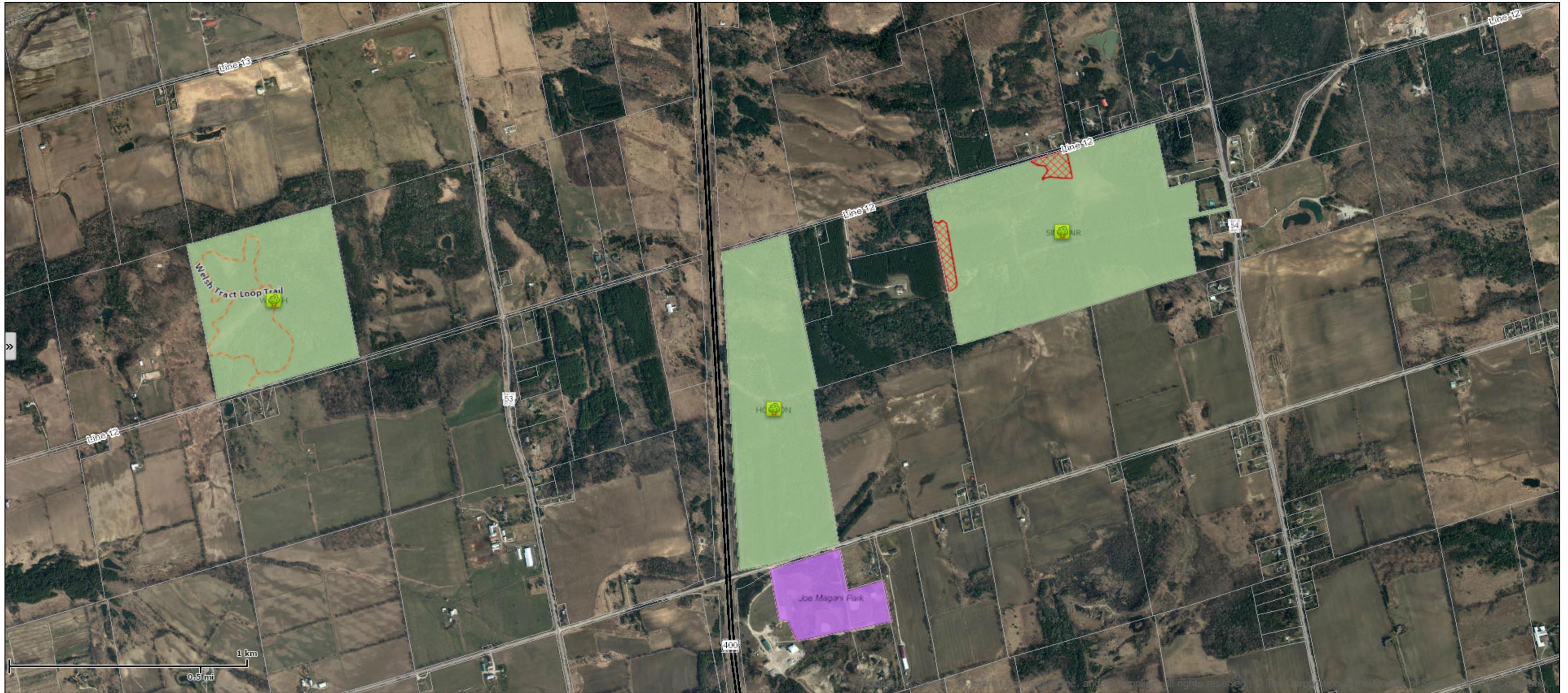
There will be no significant costs incurred by the Town. It is anticipated that advertising of any approved changes can be covered by existing operating budgets.

5. ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 - Map of SCFs in Bradford
- Attachment 2 - Welsh Tract
- Attachment 3 - Hodson Tract
- Attachment 4 - Sinclair Tract
- Attachment 5 - Simcoe County Forests Recreation Policy

6. APPROVALS:

Rebecca Murphy, Director of Corporate Services/Town Solicitor/Clerk	Approved - 22 Feb 2016
Ian Goodfellow, Director of Finance/Treasurer	Approved - 22 Feb 2016
Geoff McKnight, Chief Administrative Officer	Approved - 22 Feb 2016







SINCLAIR

HC 20N

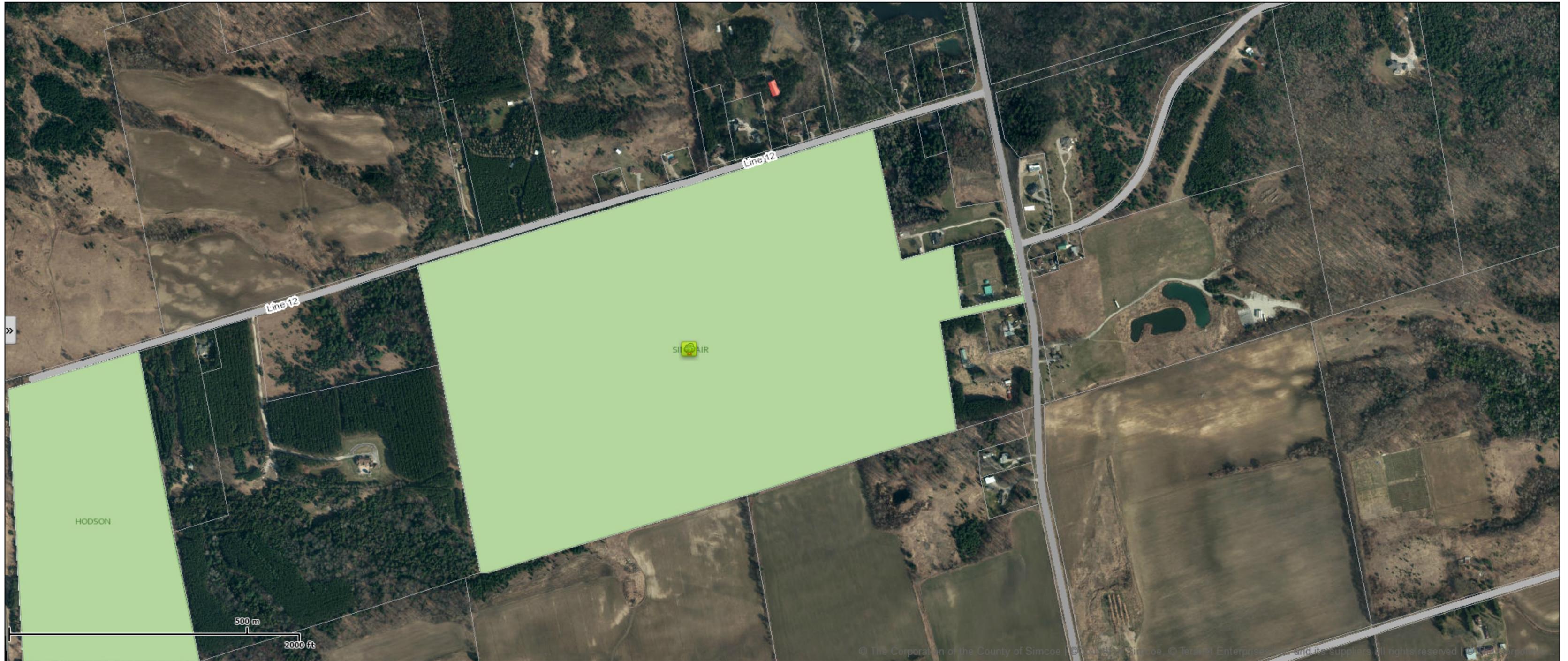
Line 11

Joe Magani © The Corporation of the County of Simcoe © County of Simcoe © Teranet Enterprises Inc. and its suppliers all rights reserved | © The Corporation

500 m

2000 ft







POLICIES



DIVISION:	Corporate Services		
POLICY SECTION:	County Forests	EFFECTIVE DATE:	October 2007
SUBJECT:	Recreation Policy		
POLICY NUMBER:	POL-CSF-001	SUPERCEDES:	June 2006

1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Hendrie Tract, 1,000 acres of wasteland in the former township of Vespra, became the first County Forest in Ontario in 1922. The first trees were planted on May 8 of that year on land that had been stripped of its native white pine, then burned and left to erode. Since that time, the Simcoe County Forest (SCF) has become the largest municipally owned forest in Ontario with nearly 30,000 acres under active management as of 2006.

County Forests were purchased by the Corporation of the County of Simcoe and managed under long-term agreements with the Ministry of Natural Resources until 1996. Since that time, the County has been fully responsible for management.

Intensive forest management has resulted in high value timber products, providing sufficient revenue to repay the management debt to the province and purchase approximately 2000 acres of additional forest since 1996. The SCF is debt free and does not rely on tax support. Revenue from timber sales has resulted in a substantial forest reserve account which is utilized for management expenses, to purchase additional forest lands and to assist in other County projects.

The SCF has become recognized as an exceptional example of the benefits of sustainable, multi-use forest management. Land reclamation and timber management has also provided substantial environmental, social, and economic benefits to the residents of Simcoe County.

The development of this policy involved extensive public consultation beginning in the fall of 2005 with the publication of an initial Draft County Forest Recreation Policy. A series of five open houses, meetings, and advertising resulted in a substantial number of written submissions which have been considered. Further, a Public Advisory Group was established to aid in the refining of the Policy (Appendix D).

2. PURPOSE

Hunting is the primary traditional sport practiced extensively since the beginning of the County Forests. All other activities have developed since approximately 1960 and a high volume of recreational use has developed particularly within the past 10 years. With the high population growth projections for Simcoe County, activity levels in the SCF will continue to increase. The County has permitted most types of recreational uses provided they are not damaging to the forest, however there has been no effort to monitor recreational use and no policy framework from which to regulate activities. In order to ensure the continued enjoyment of the forest by all responsible users, reduce conflict and minimize environmental impacts, a Recreational Use Policy is required.

During the consultation process it became apparent that policies cannot be developed for the County Forest in isolation. Trails play an important role in promoting a healthy lifestyle and more prosperous communities. The development and promotion of trails of all kinds has received provincial attention with the development of the Ontario Trails Strategy in 2005, and several organizations from within the County played a direct role in its development. Interest in the policy development for the SCF has been widespread, including both local and provincial organizations. Further, the coordination of SCF policy development with local municipalities and other jurisdictions will be beneficial to both landowners and users.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all members of the public entering or utilizing the lands owned by the County of Simcoe and known as the Simcoe County Forests.

4. OBJECTIVES

The Simcoe County Forest originated and evolved since 1922 with the following objectives:

- Restore waste lands and marginal farm lands to productive use
- Prevent soil erosion and restore and conserve water resources
- Manage forests in a scientific manner to produce high-value forest products
- Preserve, conserve and improve wildlife habitat
- Provide educational opportunities and encourage scientific research
- Provide opportunities for public recreation
- Encourage private landowners in their reforestation efforts
- Support the County's Natural Heritage and Greenlands policies

Assumptions:

Further to the County Forest Objectives which have been established for many years, the following assumptions have been utilized:

- The County Forest is considered to be a 'working forest' and is not parkland, preserve or for single-use; however some areas may not be suitable for all activities.
- The County Forest is owned by the Corporation of the County of Simcoe, and is not crown land.
- Recreational pursuits in the forest are a privilege, not a right.
- Forest health, management and associated operations take precedence over recreational activities.

Criteria for Analysis of Recreational Activities:

All activities within the SCF have some impact upon the forest and other users. While assessing the level of impact is subjective, the following criteria were applied to each:

- Activity must have minimal environmental impact
- Activity must not have significant impact upon other forest users;
- Activity must be compatible with forestry operations;
- Activity must not pose significant liability concerns to the County;
- Activity should not require significant County staff intervention for administration or policing.

5. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The continued enjoyment of the various users will depend upon respecting the forest environment and the rights of others. A 'Code of Conduct' has been adopted which applies to all those who wish to use and enjoy the Simcoe County Forest (Appendix B).

5.1. Low Impact Activities:

Most passive users of the SCF leave only footprints while taking away a host of benefits including healthy outdoor activity and improved peace of mind. Some outings and activities take place entirely within a forest tract while others may just pass through. Linear systems such as the Ganaraska and Trans Canada Trails provide linkages while trail loops on individual properties provide opportunities for more casual users. Both are important in providing opportunities for residents to get out and enjoy all that Simcoe County has to offer. Improving access to trails through improved coordination, mapping, signage, and promotion will best be accomplished by partnering with and supporting existing trails organizations. As such, walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, geocaching, nature appreciation, nature study, dogsledding, and horseback riding are permitted in the Simcoe County Forests as per the Code of Conduct. The County of Simcoe will also work to strengthen partnerships with existing trails organizations to promote trail use throughout the County.

5.2. Dog Walking:

Many residents utilize the SCF as an area to exercise not only themselves but their pets. While this practice is generally accepted, large or aggressive dogs can be frightening and potentially dangerous for other users. Serious consequences can result particularly if uncontrolled dogs meet with equestrians. In order to address this issue, dogs must be under control or on-leash at all times while within the Simcoe County Forests.

5.3 Mountain biking

Mountain biking is one of the fastest growing recreational pursuits within the County Forests, particularly in Oro-Medonte Township. This is due in part to the challenging terrain found on the Oro Moraine sought by most cyclists.

Damage to forest soils and vegetation is minimal with most mountain biking activity. The desire by some riders, however, for more extreme challenges has resulted in unauthorized trail construction, including in some cases ramps and platforms. In heavily used locations, the construction of new 'single track' trails can reach levels which may become damaging to the site and dangerous to other users. Entering into Use Agreements with area clubs or organizations will improve communication with County staff and limit unacceptable practices. As such, mountain biking is permitted and that Use Agreements are encouraged with organized groups. Construction of new mountain biking trails or obstacles is prohibited except where authorized through a Use Agreement.

5.4 Snowmobiling:

As is the case throughout much of Ontario, over the past 30 years snowmobiling has matured into a very well-organized sport benefiting both the riders and the economy. The snowmobile clubs are well-organized and assist the County with trail maintenance throughout the year. There are negligible complaints regarding their activities. The 13 local clubs within Simcoe County are organized into 2 Districts which are responsible for the agreements with the County.

Numerous club members maintain a mapped and signed trail system. A trail permit is required and the trails are self-policed by club members with assistance from the O.P.P.. County forestry staff can easily contact key club personnel to address situations of concern such as rerouting trails that may interfere with a winter harvesting operation. As activities occur during winter months, few other

County Forest users are present or impacted by snowmobile use. As such, snowmobiling is permitted to continue on designated OFSC trails where Use Agreements are in effect with the County.

5.5 Other Off-Road Motorized Vehicles (ORMV's):

For the purpose of this report, an ORMV is defined as any motorized vehicle except snowmobiles designed for off-road use which is a maximum gross vehicle weight of 400kg. This largely includes all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles.

The number of ORMV's utilizing County Forests has increased dramatically over the past few years for a number of reasons:

- Increasing population levels
- Increasing popularity of ATV's and off-road motorcycles due to improved technology
- The finite or declining open space available for off-road vehicle use

Most ORMV operators are respectful of the forest and other users. A number of ORMV enthusiasts have been coexisting with other forest users for many years with little problem, on vehicles which are designed for trail riding, operate relatively quietly, and are properly insured. However, where motocross bikes designed for racing utilize the forest, complaints of excessive speed, noise and dust are commonplace. Most often these users are also not properly insured.

Concerns regarding ORMV's are expressed as either environmental degradation or conflicts with other users. An exhaustive study completed for the Gananaska Forest found that while some compaction and erosion does occur on trails, the overall impact to a forest environment is minimal. Because they operate in spring, summer and fall, however, impacts on soil conditions can occur particularly in wet areas and stream crossings. Some operators actively seek out wet locations and cause severe rutting as a result. Damage to trails is also a concern to the local snowmobile clubs who are increasingly forced to repair damage caused during summer months.

Conflict with other groups is mainly attributed in order of magnitude to noise, dust, danger, and fumes. Adjacent landowners are also objecting due to the amount of trespassing which occurs to access County Forest. Because SCF properties are numerous but scattered, ORMV users are currently using a combination of trails on private and public land, roads, ditches, and unopened road allowances to get from one Tract to the next.

While unrestricted and unregulated use of ORMV's is problematic for jurisdictions throughout rural Ontario, significant benefits from increased tourism and outdoor recreation are possible with the proper controls. With sales increasing every year and without designated areas to operate these vehicles, trespassing, conflicts and damage to property will continue to escalate. Designated trails will provide an opportunity for users to become organized, insured, and implement a trail maintenance program. It is also hoped that by working with and promoting clubs, a volunteer warden program can assist County staff and police in directing traffic away from restricted areas and onto designated trails. Reduced environmental impact and user conflict should result.

Eliminating vehicle traffic and restricting ORMV use to designated trails will have an unintended impact upon area hunters. A recommended compromise includes provisions to permit ATV use to enable infirm hunters to access the Simcoe County Forests, and to facilitate the retrieval of large game. As such, ORMV's are permitted to use designated trails within County Forests at such time as use agreements are in place which specify adequate insurance, a permit system, trail maintenance program, noise limits and an enforcement mechanism.

In addition to designated trails, ORMV's are permitted to utilize County Forests for the following purposes:

- To enable OFATV or OFTR members where authorized to facilitate volunteer patrols or stewardship activities
- To enable improved access for hunting as specified in Section 5.6.

5.6 Hunting / Fishing

Hunting is a traditional sport in Simcoe County and is a management tool utilized by wildlife biologists to regulate and control wildlife populations. Fishermen frequent some of the coldwater streams available in the forest with little or no consequence. Hunters are required to be trained and pass examinations. These requirements and the stringent regulations of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act make hunting the most regulated recreational use within the County Forests. Regardless of this, some residents fear hunters and are opposed to hunting in principle. Others would appreciate some measure of notification and the opportunity to frequent some Simcoe County Forest tracts without fear during hunting season.

With the increasing population around certain forest tracts and the associated activity in such areas, conflicts can be drastically reduced by eliminating hunting from a very small percentage of the SCF which are now very close to or within urban areas. This will limit hunting opportunity on less than 3% of the Simcoe County Forests, while additions to the Simcoe County Forests in other less populated areas will continue to more than offset any losses to area hunters due to urban encroachment. While tree stands are recognized as a necessity for many hunting situations, the use of nails, hardware and other permanent structures are undesirable within an area actively managed for the production of timber. As such, hunting and fishing remain as a permitted use on most County Forest Tracts and only portable and temporary tree stands and ladders are permitted.

Hunters are permitted to utilize ATV's on existing trails throughout the County Forests as follows:

- To enable disabled or infirm hunters to access the SCF during all hunting seasons
- To facilitate large game retrieval (deer and bear)
- To facilitate complete access to the SCF during the Controlled Deer Hunt only

All hunters must be members in good standing with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

Furthermore, hunting shall NOT be permitted in Simcoe County Forest tracts as specified within the County Forest Recreation By-law.

5.7 Trapping

At such time as the County assumed management responsibility from the Province, there were 7 trappers licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources trapping within the County Forests. They were assigned areas with the understanding that, when they were finished trapping, the areas would not be reassigned and no further permits would be issued. As such, no new permits for trapping be issued for County Forest properties.

5.8 Harvesting of Non-Wood Forest Products

Gathering of mushrooms, fiddleheads and other naturally occurring edible and medicinal products has been growing substantially in popularity. While generally considered to be a healthy and harmless activity, there is growing concern among experts that over harvesting may be impacting the sustainability of some species in some locations. Working with naturalists and interested groups to educate users regarding appropriate harvesting practices will be investigated. As such, the harvesting of non-wood forest products is permitted for personal use only; However the County reserves the right to restrict harvesting if warranted.

5.9 Prohibited Activities

The Simcoe County Forest has traditionally been open to vehicular traffic largely due to expediency. With the large number of tracts and associated entrances (approximately 440 primary entrances) restricting vehicles is difficult. While access had been enjoyed by many for legitimate purposes, it has unfortunately created difficulty in curtailing unwanted activities such as dumping, bush parties, and fires. Also, some of the most excessive rutting of forest access roads is caused by 4 x 4 vehicles utilizing the SCF during spring months. Only through restricting vehicular access can we hope to curtail most unwanted activities.

Therefore, the following uses or activities are prohibited within the Simcoe County Forest:

- Operation of motorized vehicles in excess of 400 kg gross vehicle weight
- Littering, dumping or disposal of any foreign material
- Open fires
- Camping
- Consumption of alcohol
- Target practice; paintball
- Cutting, pruning, digging or gathering of trees, shrubs, groundcover or firewood
- Construction of unauthorized structures; permanent tree stands
- Placement of unauthorized signs

5.10 Special Use

A number of agreements are traditionally approved each year for individual events such as mountain bike races, horseback riding and adventure racing. Longer-term use agreements have also been signed with mountain biking clubs, resorts and other organizations. In each case, the event or activity must not result in any environmental impact to the Simcoe County Forest, or interfere with forestry operations. These agreements do not grant exclusive use of the tract in question and should not interfere with other users. A use agreement is required to protect the County which includes proof of insurance. As such, Use Agreements for single events and longer-term use be considered on an individual basis with consideration given to the following:

- Environmental impacts associated with the event or use
- Impact on other forest users
- Compatibility or conflict with forestry operations

Organized events are not permitted without a valid Use Agreement in effect. This includes any activity which is advertised or if participants are charged an entry fee, but does not include organized hikes or nature walks.

APPENDIX A - Implementation Strategy

Simcoe County Forests occupy an area of approximately 30,000 acres divided amongst 150 properties with in excess of 500 vehicle access points. Achieving compliance will require a long-term and multi-faceted approach including education, partnerships, and enforcement. Working cooperatively with the public and various user groups to build awareness, assist with monitoring, and reduce conflicts will be critical.

Timelines:

A period of grace will help to ensure that users are provided an opportunity to adjust and enter agreements if required. Assuming that the policy framework is adopted in mid 2006 it is recommended that the implementation of most changes not occur until the 2007 season.

Information / Education:

Informing and educating the public about changes to the permitted uses of the SCF will take time, a varied approach, and consistent effort. A standard 'code of conduct' for trail users (Appendix B) will be adopted and widely disseminated. The following methods will be utilized to inform and educate users of the SCF:

- The County website
- Direct contact with all members of the public who provided comments
- A news release
- A public open house
- Publication of a new SCF pamphlet
- Completion of the SCF map book
- Effective and consistent signage
- Displays at events throughout the County (fall fairs)

Stewardship:

Many individual members of the public and organized groups have indicated a willingness to work cooperatively with County staff to assist with a range of activities. While some effort will be required to establish and maintain effective partnerships, it would assist staff tremendously in keeping abreast of issues and concerns. Reporting prohibited activities, garbage clean-up days, trail maintenance, and user education can all be accomplished more effectively with assistance from the public.

Conflict Resolution:

Uses, activities, and potential for conflicts will continue to evolve over time. Maintaining an advisory group to provide recommendations to resolve issues as required will be an important ongoing requirement.

Enforcement:

Although every effort will be made to achieve compliance by working cooperatively, enforcement will be required to alter behavior in some cases. Options include the utilization of bylaw enforcement officers, working in cooperation with area OPP, and the hiring of off-duty officers to conduct additional patrols in problem areas. Requests can also be made for the OPP S.A.V.E. program which is a mobile unit which patrols areas on ATV's, snowmobiles, and boats. Again, successful enforcement will require a variety of techniques and a long-term commitment.

Recreation Policy Bylaw:

An effective bylaw is required to provide adequate options to enforce the Policy. Short-form wording will be a helpful addition to enable ticketable offences.

Increased Staffing:

A dedicated forest technician/enforcement officer will be enforcing the Tree Cutting Bylaw on private lands while assisting with compliance of the Recreation Policy. One additional staff may also be required to build partnerships, initiate and monitor Use Agreements and increase contact with the public and user groups to increase vigilance and stewardship.

OPP:

It is recognized that the existing resources and staffing levels of the area OPP are limited, and that the S.A.V.E. unit is responsible for a very large area. With increased vigilance and reporting, however, the resources which are available can be used most effectively.

Off Duty Officers:

Off-duty officers have been utilized in the past to focus efforts on a particular problem area for a short duration. Results have generally been favorable where employed, however the high cost prohibits ongoing or extensive use of this option.

APPENDIX B – Code of Conduct for County Forest Users

These guidelines have been adapted from the Ontario Trails Council's user guidelines for shared-use trails with assistance from Huronia Trails and Greenways.

General Rules of Etiquette

- ***Expect and respect other trail users.***
- Keep to the right to allow other users to pass on your left. When stopping for a break, move to the side to allow others room to pass
- Stay on the trail; don't create new trails.
- Respect neighboring landowners by staying off private property, and avoid excessive noise.
- Leave the trail as you found it; whatever you pack in, pack out. Leave the wildflowers and wildlife for others to enjoy.
- Maintain control of your pets. Carry a leash for your dog and be prepared to use it. "Stoop & flick" when waste is on the trail path.
- Use trails only according to the permitted uses indicated on the signage. Some trails are user specific i.e. hiking or snowmobile only trails.
- Some trails may close seasonally or during forestry operations. Obey trail closure signs.
- Most trails experience problems in the spring. Check the trail conditions. If you are leaving tracks over 1/2" deep don't use the trail. If there are no signs posted, but weather conditions have been bad, do not use the trail.

Walkers & Hikers

Remember that on shared use trails there are a variety of other users enjoying the trail with you. If you have children in your group make sure they are aware of any horses, dogs, bicycles or snowmobiles passing.

When passing horses say "hello" to help the horse know you are not something scary. If approaching from the front, stop and let the horse and rider pass unless the rider indicates otherwise. When approaching from the rear, ask if it is OK to pass then proceed on the left. (Keep dogs leashed and close to you.)

If you have a walking stick, do not raise it in the air, as the horse may think you are going to hit it.

Keep control of your pets, particularly when sharing the trail with cyclists, children, horses or snowmobiles.

Limit your group size to 20 hikers to keep from overwhelming other users. If you have a large group, let the other users know its size when passing them, e.g. "Passing on the left, 15 hikers and 2 dogs, may we go by?"

Don't walk in groomed cross-country ski tracks.

Equestrians

Ride at a leisurely pace. Keep to a walk unless safety is certain and ground conditions are good so that no trail damage will occur. Never gallop.

When your vision of the trail ahead is restricted, slow down and keep control of your mount. Always assume that there may be another trail user ahead.

Ensure your horse is well mannered. Kicking, biting and excessive spooking are not safe on shared use trails. Train your horse to accept various experiences and other users. Ride with an experienced horse if your mount is nervous.

Keep to the right to allow other users to pass on your left. Help other users by telling them the safest and easiest way by.

Pass other users on the left in single file, after receiving their permission. Allow them to get control of any pets, and be especially alert for children.

Kick the manure off the trail. Users on foot or bicycle really appreciate this.

Limit your group to six or fewer. Large groups of horses intimidate people. If you have a large trail ride in progress, pass other trail users in groups of six with spaces between. Inform the user you are passing of your group size, e.g. "4 horses and 3 dogs, passing to your left, may we come by?"

Use the bridges for waterways. If your horse refuses, dismount and lead it across the bridge.

In winter months, stay off of groomed ski trails. Only use groomed snowmobile trails where permitted.

Children love to pet horses. Tell them how to approach your horse safely.

Never leave horses unattended.

Cyclists

Keep your pace leisurely and slow down to pass other trail users.

Slow down if your vision of the trail ahead is restricted. Always assume there may be another user ahead, and be prepared to stop.

Yield the trail to hikers and horseback riders. Use your bell or speak when you are about 30 feet away to alert them. Be careful when passing children or dogs, especially from behind. Allow the owner to control dog before passing.

Some horses may be frightened by moving objects rapidly approaching them, so slow down and ask how to pass safely. The rider may indicate to continue at your present speed. If the horse reacts, stop and wait for the rider to regain control.

Limit the size of your group to six cyclists. If you have a larger group, ride in groups of six with spaces between. When riding in a large group and passing other users let them know your party size, e.g. "We are a party of 18 cyclists in three groups of 6, may we pass on the left?"

Always use the bridges supplied for crossing waterways.

Some trails are for hikers only; respect those trails by only riding on trails for cycling.

Use extra caution at access points and when crossing roads.

X-Country Skiing

Use common sense and personal awareness, particularly in intense cold or when sharing the trail with snowmobiles.

Keep to the right to allow other users to pass to your left. Be alert for other trail users and ski in control, particularly when your vision of the terrain ahead is restricted. Always assume that there could be someone up ahead, and be prepared to stop.

Do not ski late in the day. Plan to be off the trail by dusk.

Carry sufficient wax, food, drink, and clothing for unexpected eventualities

Keep track of your progress and where you are. For remote areas, leave your itinerary and expected return time with someone. Obey all posted signs and warnings. Keep off closed trails.

Do not stop where you obstruct the trail or are not visible from above or at a bend.

Before merging onto a trail, look both ways (particularly uphill), and yield to others. When going downhill or passing others, ski in control to avoid the persons below and beside you.

The motion of X-C skiing may startle a horse. Do not scare horses by approaching silently, rapidly or waving your poles. When approaching from the front, stop and let them pass unless the rider indicates otherwise. If approaching from behind, alert the horse and rider from about 30 feet away with a friendly "hello". Ask the rider the best way to pass.

Snowmobile and ORMV Operators

Be safety conscious. Be aware. Ride with care.

Stay on the designated trails. Off trail riding can injure vulnerable plants, crops and wildlife.

Enjoy wildlife viewing opportunities, but avoid stressing any species.

Avoid sudden stops and starts and quick directional changes with acceleration.

Slow down when your vision of the trail ahead is restricted, at night or over unfamiliar terrain.

Always assume there could be other trail users ahead, and be prepared for a controlled stop.

Keep your speed and engine rpm low and steady when approaching and passing other trail users, homes, etc.

Slow down and be courteous when approaching or passing other trail users. Communicate with the riders of horses and those walking pets.

Your machine may scare a horse. When approaching from the front, stop and let them pass unless the rider indicates otherwise. Approach slowly from behind, and allow the rider to signal when it is OK to pass. If the horse reacts, stop and wait for the rider to regain control.

Park and dismount from your machine and walk to sensitive, scenic, historic and cultural areas.

Remove your helmet when talking to other trail users.

Don't ride on groomed XC-ski tracks.

When parking along a trail, park machines in single file over to the right as far as possible to avoid obstructing the trail. Ensure you are visible and turn off your machine.

Obey all regulations and by-laws regulating the operation of your snowmobile or ATV.

APPENDIX C – Criteria for Motorized Trail Consideration

Applications for trail routes shall be reviewed by County staff and the Simcoe County Forest Public Advisory Group or a subcommittee thereof. If the trail is deemed satisfactory and all conditions are met, a Use Agreement will be required as per the Use Agreement Policy. The Corporation of the County of Simcoe reserves the right to terminate Use Agreements in the event that the terms of the agreement are violated or the arrangement proves undesirable. Proposals for motorized use of specific trails within the Simcoe County Forests must meet the following criteria:

1. Ecological Sustainability

The ecological impact of the trail must be minimal and not harm the environmental sustainability of the area. The applicable Conservation Authority, Severn Sound Environmental Association, Ministry of Natural Resources and/or County of Simcoe Planning Division may be consulted for opinion on ecological suitability.

2. Physical Sustainability

The trail must be of suitable width and navigability for off-road vehicle use, and be able to withstand the human and natural forces acting upon them without unreasonably degrading the road allowance. Year-round trail stewardship is sought through cooperation between user groups.

3. Social Sustainability

The rights of adjacent landowners and other affected parties must be taken into consideration, including concerns over dust, noise, and trespass to property. Conflicts with residential areas must be avoided whenever possible. Spatial separation and site specific characteristics, or the lack thereof, shall be given due consideration when selecting a trail location.

4. Compliance with Legislation

The proposed trail uses must conform to all applicable legislation, including the provincial Highway Traffic Act, Ontario Regulation 316/03, Off-Road Vehicles Act, Motorized Snow Vehicles Act, Trespass to Property Act, and municipal by-laws.

5. Trespass to Property

The proposed trail layout must not lead users to private property or utility corridors, unless specific written permission exists for use of the private or utility-owned lands. Deviation from an established trail is illegal under the *Trespass to Property Act*.

6. Tread Lightly Principles

Proposed trail uses must be consistent with the principles and guidelines of the non-profit *Tread Lightly* organization which promotes land stewardship, safety in recreational sport, and environmental messaging.

7. Provincial Incorporation

Motorized recreation clubs applying for permission to use the Simcoe County Forests must belong to a provincially incorporated association (e.g. Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicle Clubs, Ontario Federation of Trail Riders), and must have a permit system, trail warden system, trail maintenance program, and third party liability insurance.

9. Speed Limits

Speed shall be limited to a maximum of 50 km/h in rural areas, and 20 km/h in urban or parkland areas.

10. Noise Limits and Spark Arrestors

In order to ensure consistency with Ontario Regulation 316/03, no vehicle exhaust system shall be modified in such a manner that would result in increased noise emissions. The maximum allowable noise limit from any off-road vehicle is 94 dB and spark arrestors are required.

APPENDIX D – Simcoe County Forest Public Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Mandate:

The mandate of the Simcoe County Forest Public Advisory Group (SCF PAG) is to:

- Provide community input and advice to County staff regarding the Draft Recreation Policy;
- Assist County staff in communicating policy revisions and;
- Provide input into the development and initiation of an implementation strategy.

Simcoe County Forests – Vision

To promote excellence in the practice of forestry by maximizing timber values while contributing to environmental sustainability, protecting environmentally sensitive areas and providing for responsible use by the public.

Assumptions:

- The County Forest is considered to be a ‘working forest’ and is not parkland, preserve or for single-use; however some areas may not be suitable for all activities.
- The County Forest is owned by the Corporation of the County of Simcoe, and is not crown land.
- Recreational pursuits in the forest are a privilege, not a right.
- Forest management and associated operations take precedence over recreational activities.

Criteria for Analysis of Recreational Activities:

- Activity must have minimal environmental impact
- Activity must not have significant impact upon other forest users;
- Activity must be compatible with forestry operations;
- Activity must not pose significant liability concerns to the County;
- Activity should not require significant County staff intervention for administration or policing.

Membership:

Members will be selected according to the following criteria:

- Be committed to advancing the mandate of the SCF PAG;
- Have relevant knowledge, experience and skills;
- Have interest and respect for a broad range of issues regarding recreational use of the SCF;
- Respect the procedures agreed to by the members and;
- Willingness to serve in a voluntary capacity.

A maximum of 12 members shall be comprised of the following general interests:

- walking, hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing;
- mountain biking;
- equestrian;
- nature appreciation;
- environmental protection;
- snowmobiling;
- off-road motorcycling;
- ATV operation;
- picking / gathering;
- hunting.

Structure:

The Public Advisory Group is an 'ad hoc' committee which will sunset following completion of the mandate. The County Forester and/or Forest Technician will attend all meetings and assist as required.

Activities:

It is anticipated that the Public Advisory Group will meet face-to-face on a minimum of three occasions, will review documents and take part in telephone or email communications.