

## REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

# 2025 Managed Forest Plan Update

**To:** Warden and Members of County Council

**From:** Director of Public Works

## RECOMMENDATION

---

1. That County Council receive Report PW 2026-04 entitled “2025 Managed Forest Plan Update” for information.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

---

- This report provides an update on 2025 Managed Forest Plan undertakings, including but not limited to:
  - Commercial timber harvesting generating close to \$12,000 in revenue, including harvests on 6.0 hectares (ha) across the Hall, Lakeside, and Creditville Tracts;
  - Afforestation plantings of 8,000 trees across 4.7 ha of fallow land;
  - Reforestation plantings of 1,200 trees across 2.2 ha of existing woodland/wetland;
  - Invasive species management across 46.5 ha, including competition management on two properties; and
  - 800 kg of tall grass prairie seed was sown as part of Phase 1 of the Thornton Naturalization Project.
- Details of the proposed upcoming operational activity forecast associated with the active management of both the Agreement Forests and forested sections of other County-owned rural properties are also highlighted.

## IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

---

Implementation of the recommended activities included within the ten-year Managed Forest Plan (MFP) began in 2018. County-managed forest properties consist of parcels of land acquired as “Agreement Forests” in accordance with the provisions of the *Forestry Act, 1990*, as well as parcels of land acquired for other purposes such as source water protection, wastewater lagoon operations and the monitoring of closed landfills.

In previous years, a primary focus of forest management has been the salvage/harvest of ash and beech trees on affected properties. Presently, the percentage and quality of ash trees is severely declining and, subsequently, so is the demand for logging this species. While no longer a driver of harvest operations, the removal of dead/dying ash and beech is and will continue to be a priority in the short-term as reducing the number of dead-standing trees within a harvest block is important for staff and public safety. The primary driver of recent harvest operations has been red pine decline within typical conifer plantation management. Red pine decline has been a problem on County properties since the mid-2000s caused by limestone content in the soil and, while predictable, the severity of the decline can accelerate quickly depending on the location.

In accordance with the MFP, secondary and tertiary thinning of conifer plantations in Agreement Forests, as well as tree planting, invasive species management and wetland rehabilitation initiatives, are the high-level driving forces behind active management. In future years, activities will be selected based on priorities listed within the MFP, new priorities based on the current state of County woodlands, funding availability, specialized contractor availability and workload.

## **Financial Impact**

Revenue generated from the 2025 harvesting activities totalled approximately \$12,000 (2025 budget revenue was \$15,000) as follows:

- Lakeside Tract generated ~\$8,900 from veneer log sales and \$3,000 from sawlog and firewood sales.
- Hall Tract and Creditville Tract – carried over into 2026.

The total revenue from commercial harvesting in 2025 fell short of the forecast due to a pause in the operations at the Hall Tract and Creditville Tract. The operations were on hold until ground conditions became suitable for machinery access; however, with the prolonged cold weather, harvesting resumed in late February 2026.

The 2025 Woodlands Conservation total net operating expenses were \$270,267. The 2025 operating expenses included the management of County owned forested properties and wetlands (\$185,802) and activities associated with landowner engagement and enforcement of the County's Woodlands Conservation and Weed Control By-Laws (\$84,465).

## **Communications**

The County's forest management work is outlined for the public in the [Managed Forest Plan](#) as posted [on the County's website](#). The current ten-year plan covers 2018 to 2027. In late 2027, staff will bring the new ten-year plan for 2028 to 2037 to Council for endorsement, including a summary of work completed from 2018 to 2027 and how the next plan will build on those results.

A copy of Report PW 2026-04 will be circulated to the Ontario Woodlot Association, Woodland Owners Association, Ducks Unlimited, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, Grand




River Conservation Authority, Long Point Region Conservation Authority, Catfish Creek Conservation Authority and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

## 2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

---

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals:

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
<b>Promoting community vitality</b>	<b>Enhancing environmental sustainability</b>	<b>Fostering progressive government</b>
	<p>Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation</p> <p>Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment</p>	

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

## DISCUSSION

---

### Background

In August 2017, County Council adopted Report [CAO 2017-11](#), “County Managed Forest Properties Review.” The Report recommended the continued public ownership and active management of the forest tracts owned by the County, in accordance with good forestry practices and for staff to consider partnership opportunities to advance the forest properties’ natural environment and public value.

As per Report [PW 2019-26](#), staff retained a forestry consulting service to develop a ten-year MFP. The MFP covers the period from 2018 to 2027 and concentrates resources on commercial harvesting, tree planting and invasive species management. The MFP included a detailed ten-year Operational Work Schedule in which 14 parcels with target species were identified as a priority for commercial harvest.

While the MFP identifies 14 parcels for management, it should be noted that harvesting activities are not strictly limited to these parcels or species. Several other parcels from both Agreement Forests and Source Water Protection forests are assessed for harvesting on a yearly basis based on ideal tree stocking, weather conditions and contractor availability.

Tree planting and invasive species management, while included in the MFP, were not associated with any specific timeline. The MFP recognizes that a tree planting and invasive species management program would be established gradually and increased year-over-year. Only a general framework and parcel management recommendations were given. Review and evaluation of the work related to these tasks during this MFP will be used to inform the work schedule for the subsequent plan beginning in 2028.

## Comments

### Summary of 2025 Managed Forest Plan Undertakings

Several projects and/or programs were undertaken in 2025 in support of the active management of the County's forested properties. These activities are detailed below.

#### i) Tree Harvesting

Three parcels not initially included in the 2025 MFP commercial harvest schedule (Hall Tract – red pine, Lakeside Tract – black walnut and Creditville Tract – red pine) were added to the 2025 undertakings. The lowland hardwoods parcel at the Hall Tract was scheduled for 2025 in the MFP; however, a portion of that parcel was logged in September of 2022 as the ground conditions were exceptionally dry at the time. The invasive european buckthorn is present in patches throughout the property and, with disturbance being the primary vector for invasive species, this parcel is now managed to minimize large-scale disturbance to eradicate the remaining buckthorn prior to any new harvesting.

This red pine parcel at the Hall Tract harvest was not originally planned in the MFP, as the red pine plantation was landlocked between a large wetland and the property boundary. The neighbouring landowner allowed the County to use an old access trail through his property to access this area. Approximately two-thirds of the parcel was harvested before conditions were deemed too wet to continue. The remaining red pine will be harvested in late winter of 2026.

The black walnut plantation at the Lakeside Tract was also not included in the harvest schedule as the number of merchantable log trees was low at the time and it was believed too many trees would have to be cut to justify a commercial harvest. Since the year the MFP was written, black walnut prices have risen considerably and so harvest of the parcel became viable while removing far fewer trees. This drove an increase in revenue while harvesting a smaller area than 2024.

The red pine stand in the northern half of the Creditville Tract was not initially identified or included in the MFP, as the entire tract was slated for harvest the year the MFP was written. A partial harvest was conducted in 2018 on the southern half of the plantation at which time the operation was split into two phases as the northern half had much less consistent drainage and the ground conditions were too wet to allow for proper completion. Harvesting resumed in

February 2025 and approximately 50% of the red pine marked for removal was harvested. However, operations were halted in early March when conditions became too wet to continue. With consistent cold temperatures to start the new year, operations resumed in late February 2026 and are expected to be completed before spring.

In accordance with the MFP, the 2025 harvesting activities were focused primarily on plantation thinning as well as stand improvement operations where hardwood species are more prevalent. Hardwood forests require stand improvement to remove trees with major defects, oversized crowns, undesirable species and unacceptable growing stock to improve the overall quality of the stand.

Conifer plantations, while primarily intended as a nurse crop for shade tolerant deciduous hardwoods, function as a valuable habitat type and source of high-demand timber. Periodic thinning is required to allow the diameter and timber quality of the conifers to increase, as well as increase the amount of natural regeneration and the number of trees in the future forest. Black walnut plantations are managed for high-quality timber with long rotation times between harvests. Trails and access points used by logging equipment allow for greater access for the public to enjoy hiking and hunting where permitted. Wildlife habitat quality increases dramatically in the years following a timber harvest as new growth establishes and fresh woody browse becomes available.

The commercial harvest schedule in the MFP identifies properties and compartments that are a high priority for commercial harvest within the ten-year plan. The timing of individual harvests depends on several factors, including:

- Demand for different species and products;
- Weather conditions that affect site access, particularly in lowland areas;
- Ability to control invasive shrub species; and
- Whether a compartment requires reforestation and how that work can be incorporated into the annual planting program.

These factors may delay or accelerate the proposed harvest schedule. Original projections for when a property can or should be actively managed are best viewed as guidelines that can be adjusted based on annual condition reviews. In addition, a number of locations have been added based on the above priorities, which is why many of the operations are noted in the tables below as not having an original MFP timeframe. With the upcoming MFP update, staff are hoping to re-establish more clarity in plans for the coming years.

A summary of 2025 tree harvesting activities by property is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Tree Harvesting Projects/Programs Undertaken in 2025**

<b>Operation</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>MFP Timeframe</b>	<b>Actual Timeframe Completed</b>
Hall Tract (Agreement Forest)	Final removal of failing red pine plantation	2.79 ha (1.10 ha completed)	No given timeframe	Resumed in February 2026
Lakeside Tract (Agreement Forest)	Single tree selection of black walnut plantation	1.80 ha	No given timeframe	March 2025
Creditville Tract (Agreement Forest)	Second thinning of red pine plantation	5.70 ha (3.1 ha complete)	No given timeframe	Planned for Summer 2026

**ii) Tree Afforestation and Reforestation**

Afforestation is the planting of trees in an area not previously forested, whereas reforestation is the planting of trees in an area of existing forest that has recently been harvested or thinned. Afforestation projects in 2025 included 8,000 trees across 4.7 ha of fallow land at the Thames River Wetlands. Reforestation plantings of 600 trees occurred across 1.1 ha of harvested red pine plantation at the Hall Tract. The second phase of reforestation was undertaken at the Drumbo Tract where dead-standing pine and spruce was cut down and piled with a large shear mounted to an excavator. Reforestation plantings of an additional 600 white cedar occurred across 1.1 ha of riparian habitat at the Drumbo Tract.

Overall, a total of 9,200 seedlings were planted. The initial tall grass prairie seeding for the Thornton Naturalization project was carried out in the fall of 2025. Approximately 800 kg of seed was sown with a specialized seed drill. In addition, several small patches were hand sown with rare and unique prairie wildflower species.

A summary of tree planting and naturalization activities by property is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Tree Afforestation and Reforestation Undertaken in 2025**

<b>Operation</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>MFP Timeframe</b>	<b>Actual Timeframe Completed</b>
Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'D'	Machine plant coniferous and deciduous seedlings: standard density (8,000 seedlings)	4.7 ha	No given timeframe	May 2025
Hall Tract (Agreement Forest)	Hand plant deciduous trees and shrubs in harvest block (600 seedlings)	1.1 ha	No given timeframe	May 2025

Operation	Objective	Hectares	MFP Timeframe	Actual Timeframe Completed
Drumbo Tract: Rehabilitation project	Hand plant bare root trees: white cedar seedlings within patch clear cuts (600 seedlings)	1.1 ha	No given timeframe	May 2025
Thornton Wellfield Parcel 'B' and 'C': Naturalization Project	Establish prairie grasses and forbs in initial phase of the project (direct seeding in field)	30.0 ha	No given timeframe	October 2025

### iii) Invasive Species Management

Management of invasive species in County woodlands is often guided by commercial logging activity. The rationale is that heavy equipment activity and the change of canopy density have the greatest influence on the spread of seed and the growth rate of established plants. Invasive species management is not strictly limited to non-native plants. Within woodlands, european buckthorn (invasive shrub) and american beech root clones (native plant displaying qualities of an invasive species) are of greatest concern. The challenge in woodland edges and open ground is usually related to japanese knotweed and phragmites australis (phragmites), while in a new planting site, reed canary and other grass species pose the greatest concern.

Much of the phragmites present on rural County properties is in the process of being, eradicated. Therefore, the focus has started to move toward other non-native grasses that form monocultures. Reed canary grass presents many of the same concerns as phragmites as they both form dense monocultures that prevent the establishment of native species. Reed canary grass is often eradicated in anticipation of tree planting or seeding of native wildflowers and prairie grasses the following year.

The foliar herbicide applications for 2025 included an overspray of the planting compartment at the Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'E' (6.2 ha), to reduce reed canary grass competition with the recently planted tree seedlings in addition to an overspray in Parcel 'C' (4.7 ha), in anticipation of planting in spring 2026. There was also an herbicide application along the east and west banks of cedar creek targeting phragmites in Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: Parcel 'P' (22 ha). The herbicide applications covered approximately 32.9 ha.

In County-managed woodlands, efforts are underway to eradicate invasive species such as european buckthorn, tatarian honeysuckle, beech root clones, and other less desirable understory plants. Heavy equipment, often a key vector for spreading invasive species, is being carefully managed in these areas. Often, areas near wells or water bodies must rely on mechanical eradication of invasive shrubs as opposed to herbicide application. Approximately 13.6 he across two properties were treated using brushsaws to control competition from undesirable tree and shrub species, helping to reduce their impact on the natural regeneration cycle of lowland mixed woods. This management approach will facilitate the establishment of

native hardwoods and herbaceous species in the understory, with the potential for a commercial harvest in the future should buckthorn be completely eradicated.

A summary of invasive species management activities by property is shown below in Table 3.

**Table 3: Invasive Species Management Activities Undertaken in 2025**

<b>Operation</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>MFP Timeframe</b>	<b>Actual Timeframe Completed</b>
Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'E'	Glyphosate application on cool-season grasses competing with new seedling trees	6.2 ha	No given timeframe	April 2025
Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'C'	Glyphosate application on cool season grasses for site preparation	4.7 ha	No given timeframe	April 2025
Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: P	Glyphosate application on phragmites and reed canary monoculture in patches throughout the wetland complex	22 ha	No given timeframe	September 2025
Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: D	Brushsaw buckthorn adjacent to wells	9.3 ha	No given timeframe	August 2025
Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'D'	Brushsaw buckthorn along Thames River bank and in adjacent swamp	4.3 ha	No given timeframe	August 2025

**iv) Planned 2026 Managed Forest Plan Undertakings**

Overall, as per the 2026 Budget, 25.6 ha of woodland are planned for commercial harvest. Invasive species management will be carried out on three properties totalling 46.9 ha. Approximately 11,000 tree seedlings will be planted across 4 compartments, totalling 7.55 ha. The projects and/or programs planned to be initiated in 2026 are detailed below in Table 4.

Table 4: Planned 2026 Undertakings

Operation	Objective	Hectares	MFP Timeframe	Anticipated Timeframe
<b>Tree Harvesting</b>				
Hall Tract (Agreement Forest)	Complete final removal of red pine plantation (if access route is dry enough)	1.2 ha	No given timeframe	February 2026
Creditville Tract (Agreement Forest)	Complete second thinning of red pine plantation	2.6 ha	No given timeframe	September 2026
Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: 'D'	Second thinning of conifer plantation	16 ha	No given timeframe	September 2026
Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: 'D'	Walnut plantation thinning	5.8 ha	No given timeframe	Winter 2026/2027
<b>Invasive Species Management</b>				
McBeth Tract (Agreement Forest)	Garlon RTU application on european buckthorn	20 ha	No given timeframe	March 2026
Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'D'	Glyphosate application on cool-season grasses competing with new seedling trees and site preparation for Spring planting	10.9 ha	No given timeframe	Spring and Fall 2026
Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: 'P'	Brushsaw buckthorn with stump herbicide application	16 ha	No given timeframe	August 2026
<b>Tree Afforestation and Reforestation</b>				
Thames River Wetlands Parcel 'C'	Machine plant coniferous and deciduous seedlings: standard density (9,500 seedlings)	4.7 ha	No given timeframe	May 2026
Thornton Wellfield Parcel 'B' and 'C': Naturalization Project	Erosion control planting along Strik drain (800 deciduous seedlings with stakes and shelters)	0.85 ha	No given timeframe	May 2026

Operation	Objective	Hectares	MFP Timeframe	Anticipated Timeframe
Thornton Wellfield Parcel 'B' and 'C': Naturalization Project	Hybrid willow plantation (600-800 rooted cuttings)	1.6 ha	No given timeframe	May 2026 or October 2026 depending on the availability of cuttings
Mount Elgin WWTF	UTRCA offset agreement (200 seedling trees with stakes and shelters)	0.4 ha	No given timeframe	May 2026

Thornton Wellfield, Hodge's Pond: 'D' was originally included in the MFP's harvest schedule and was partially harvested as planned in 2019. The primary focus of that harvest was the removal of the failing red pine. The objective of the harvest in 2026 is a second thinning of the white pine and norway spruce plantation as well as a sawlog harvest in the black walnut plantation. As the conifer plantation and the black walnut plantation will be harvested by two different contractors, operations will be split up to avoid any overlap. The conifer plantation will be harvested between August and September 2026. The black walnut plantation will be harvested when ground conditions are sufficiently frozen in late 2026, likely continuing into early 2027. The objective of the conifer plantation harvest is typical of a "second thinning," including the removal of many low-quality or suppressed trees to create space for trees with greater vigour and better timber quality.

Black walnut plantations are managed the opposite way. In this case a small number of large-diameter, high quality trees will be harvested either to release competing trees and encourage quality natural regeneration or to create space for supplemental tree planting. The juglone, a natural organic compound, produced by black walnut inhibits certain species from growing nearby so removing dominant trees in patches or removing individual trees with enormous crowns will create space for seedlings to be planted with stakes and shelters.

#### v) Challenges

As no detailed inventory of County-owned forest tracts has been completed and historical management data is limited, many smaller-scale timber harvesting activities have not been given a specific timeframe for completion. Many woodland tracts are seasonally flooded, restricting the window for harvest opportunity to persistent sub-zero winter temperatures or dry summer weather. Ideal winter conditions are becoming less common with the change in climate, adding additional challenges to harvesting on schedule.

By breaking down large tracts into smaller parcels, actively monitoring each property and maintaining high level communication with logging contractors, mills and local forestry professionals, staff are able to operate under shorter timeframes. This allows for a larger percentage of forest stands to be actively managed under ideal conditions and presents the opportunity to eradicate invasive species and reforest cut-over areas with greater efficacy.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

---

The Managed Forest Plan serves as a framework to guide the activities associated with active management of County owned forested lands. The ultimate goal is not restricted to maximizing the revenue generated over the short term, but rather the long-term health of the County's woodlots and sustainable supply of forestry products.

The operational activities identified will improve the overall health of the forest lands and has the potential to serve as a role model for sustainable environmental management practices through habitat enhancement and good forestry practices.

## **SIGNATURES**

---

### **Report author:**

Original signed by

---

Travis Lockhart  
Woodlands Conservation Municipal Law Enforcement Officer

### **Departmental approval:**

Original signed by

---

Melissa Abercrombie, P.Eng., PMP  
Director of Public Works

### **Approved for submission:**

Original signed by

---

Benjamin R. Addley  
Chief Administrative Officer