

Canadian firm to grow 8 million tree seedlings a year in Brighton recreation area

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North America's largest producer of container-grown tree seedlings plans to grow about 8 million seedlings a year in the Brighton State Recreation Area. A large commercial tree nursery with 22 greenhouses comprising about 7,000-square-feet, several outdoor raised beds and a building for production and office space will be constructed this year at 5995 Chilson Road at the corner of Bishop Lake Road in Hamburg Township in the recreation area. Victoria, British Columbia-based PRT Growing Services Ltd signed a 20-year lease with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division for about 14 acres at the site. The lease includes an option to renew for up to another 20 years. "We have a fairly well developed base of customers from the (Great Lakes) region, but we had no local production there ... for growing and providing seedlings for reforestation," PRT Growing Services CEO Rob Miller said. The company's customer base includes states, parks agencies and counties, as well as the lumber industry and other private sector businesses. Miller said the Michigan DNR is "a key customer for us so we felt building the nursery would be the best way to tend to their needs." Miller declined to comment on how much the company plans to invest.

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Ann Arbor SPARK estimated the company's investment will be in the range of \$4 million to \$5 million. The company will pay the state \$1.4 million in rent over 20 years, according to Nicole Toman, a regulatory unit manager for the state's Parks and Recreation Division. He said the new facility will create about 50 seasonal



jobs and a couple year-round jobs. He expects growers to begin sowing red pine, jack pine and other tree varieties next spring. "In Brighton, we expect this nursery can expand further in the future," he said. "When we build a facility like this, they are very long term assets. Mike Donnelly, park supervisor of the Brighton State Recreation Area, said the state's Forest Resources Division grew a small number of trees on the property for decades. A tree improvement center is located there. "They were growing different types of trees, a lot of red pine and a lot of tamaracks, but the state has moved away from wanting to

do that and instead contracted it out," Donnelly said. He said the Forest Resources Division will grow "some other species" of trees in different parts of the recreation area. Miller said he has noticed "a trend across North America" of states and other government entities contracting with reforestation companies rather than growing their own trees. "I think it's because there is a viable commercial sector, and more and more they are turning to commercial seedling companies," Miller said. "Containerized seedlings have advantages over bare root seedlings, which means they are grown in a field. One problem is those seedlings suffer a great amount of damage when they are dug up and moved and seedlings in containers are not subject to the same kind of damage." PRT Growing Services's facility in the recreation area will be the company's first in a Great Lakes region state, its fourth U.S. nursery and 16th overall in Canada and the U.S.

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