



Nearly 33,000 acres and growing: how did Simcoe County Forest come to be?

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Graeme Davis, county forester, holds up Jack Pine seedlings, which will be planted with about 150,000 others in the Museum Tract in Midhurst. Simcoe County Forest is the oldest, largest and most productive municipal forest in Ontario, totaling 32,835 acres..

One at a time, over 150,000 native tree species are being planted into 128 acres of sand within the Museum Tract in Midhurst — this is how a forest is born.

The County of Simcoe is undertaking its largest tree planting effort in decades to restore nesting habitat for an endangered species: a bird called the Kirtland's warbler.

This is one example of how our natural resource is actively cared for by Simcoe County Forest under the leadership of county forester Graeme Davis.

“My primary responsibility as county forester is the overall management of the Simcoe County Forest,” Davis said.

There is a rich history behind the 1922 creation of Simcoe County Forest that brings to mind Dr. Seuss’ story of *The Lorax*, in which all the trees are chopped down for profit.

“Standing here 100 years ago, you’d see very few trees here,” Davis said outside the Simcoe County Museum in Midhurst nearby the Museum Tract.

In the early 1800s when the first European settlers arrived, much of the county was covered with valuable forests of both softwood and hardwood species, including huge stands of natural white pine.

For 100 years, timber barons harvested, milled and shipped the wood to England — with little thought for the future.

“In the early part of the 1800s, there was a feeling that this resource would last forever,” Davis said.

By the early 1900s there was little timber left, and the once abundant forested areas had become dry, sandy wastelands not suitable for farming.

"There was more and more of an understanding that we needed healthy forests in order to have healthy farms and healthy watersheds. It's all related," Davis said.

The first trees were planted May 8, 1922, at the Hendrie Tract in Vespra Township.

Today, Simcoe County Forest is the oldest, largest and most productive municipal forest in Ontario, totalling 32,835 acres throughout the county and growing.

“There really isn’t another municipal forest in Ontario that continues to reinvest and grow like we do here,” Davis said.

The county forest department is self-funded through timber sales: over 2,000 acres are thinned annually to maintain the forest’s health and productivity, bringing in on average \$1.6 million annually. There is always a surplus in a reserve used to purchase more land, Davis said.

A forestry interpretation centre has been built behind the Simcoe County Museum and is slated to open in fall 2019.

Source: <https://www.simcoe.com/community-story/9299256-nearly-33-000-acres-and-growing-how-did-simcoe-county-forest-come-to-be-/>