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Quinte Conservation tree plantations now FSC-certified

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Quinte Conservation's forest plantations are now certified as meeting an international sustainability standard.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification is proof the lands and trees are managed to high standards, said Tim Trustham, the conservation area's lands operations coordinator.

"It raised our game," he said. It said it makes Quinte Conservation's forest operations more transparent.

"We're here to answer to the public and certification is a way for us to prove that we are following the best standard, the best rules, hiring the best consulting employees to ensure it's done as best as we can."

To be certified, a product must meet numerous principles ranging from the rights of indigenous people, communities and workers to environmental stewardship.

Quinte's certification was obtained through the forest certification program of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest. Despite the name, the non-profit group's program stretches from the Quebec border to Thunder Bay.

The FSC has 1,168 members in 90 countries.

"It is about accountability," Jim Hendry, the Model Forest's certification program coordinator, said in a telephone interview.

“Sustainable forest management is about good management practices and healthy and involved communities,” he wrote in a news release. He added it provides such values as timber production, recreational opportunities, such as hiking and hunting, and nature appreciation.

Certification involves a third-party review of a forest owner’s policies and procedures and requires annual audits, said Hendry.

It doesn’t mean more money for owners. Trustham said it’s actually an additional cost, “but it’s an important one.”

“What does do is open up a greater field of markets to sell your products,” Hendry added. Many major companies buy only certified products, he said.

“It sends two messages: the forest products that you enjoy or that you recreate in are sustainably managed now and into the future (and) ... it’s healthy for the community.”

Modern approach

Ontario’s Crown forests are certified – but conservation areas are not Crown land. They’re private property purchased from private owners.

Quinte Conservation underwent a recent reorganization. That “required us to modernize” the authority’s approach to forestry, Trustham said.

“As humans we always have an impact on our environment. Let’s try to mitigate it as much as possible.”

The authority owns about 12,145 hectares of vacant property. Uses include nature reserves, commercially-harvested land, conservation areas, leased properties (H.R. Frink Outdoor Education Centre in Plainfield and the Vanderwater Conservation Area Scout camp in Tweed).

About 1,619 hectares (4,000 acres) are commercial forest plantations.

“These were farm fields,” Trustham said.

“They were poor agricultural land, so we planted them – in cooperation with the province – in rows on purpose, so they could be thinned later.”

About 70 per cent of those trees are red pine used, for example, to make pressure-treated lumber. There are also plantations of white pine and white spruce.

“We’re creating employment (and) a purchasable product,” said Trustham.

While it can take 250 years for a harvested property to return to a natural hardwood forest, a managed plantation can cut that period to about 80 years, Trustham said – though it may take a further century for an old-growth forest to become established.

“We have to notify the neighbours of our intent to do forest operations,” he added.

The plantations are mainly near Highway 7 between Madoc and Tweed. When those trees are cut, Trustham said, contractors spend money in those areas for food, fuel, parts, etc. The trees are taken to Ottawa Valley sawmills.

Detailed process

Trustham said Quinte Conservation's forest-management plan was completed in 1998, hence the need for an update.

To certify the properties, crews measured each forest, inventoried trees' size and ages, and modernized the lists of endangered and invasive species.

When trees are cut, the harvest will be prescribed by a registered expert and each tree assessed individually.

Hendry said those lands are now one of 13 community forests to receive FSC certification through the Model Forest.

He said his group is working on entering the carbon-offset market. He noted the first requirement to entering that market is a certification such as the one provided by the FSC. So far, Bruce County is the only one of the 13 community forests to develop a plan to enter the market.

"The offset market is essentially a corporate sponsorship," Trustham said. Corporations seeking to offset their carbon output can sponsor forests by paying annual dividends to forest owners, he explained.

He added Quinte is among the community forest owners discussing that market but no formal decision has been made.

Trustham said Quinte Conservation's modernization continues.

"We do need to develop a comprehensive forest-management plan," he said, adding it is not expected to be ready within this calendar year.

Source: <https://www.intelligencer.ca/news/local-news/quinte-conservation-tree-plantations-now-fsc-certified>