

In Defense of the Forest Industry

In response to the opinion piece entitled "Taking a stand against logging in Algonquin Park," it is prudent to point out that it perpetuates factual errors and misconceptions regarding the forest industry. Firstly, our great country was built on its natural resources, and we should be proud of this heritage and our current position as world leaders in forest management.

This highly regulated industry has ensured that a sustainable forest management approach is in effect across Ontario's Crown forests, including Algonquin Park. In fact, the sustainability of the Algonquin Park Forest is confirmed regularly through the development of Forest Management Plans and reports by Registered Professional Foresters, and annually by certification audits to Canada's National Forest Management Standard CSA-Z809 and the international environmental standard ISO 14001.

Forest management objectives in Algonquin Park are not about "maximizing profits for corporate friends," but rather providing a balance of environmental, social and economic benefits -with more than half of the 251 sustainability indicators in the Algonquin Park Forest Management Plan being ecologically-based. The preservation of Algonquin's forest that was envisioned in 1893 when the park was formed has been successful, and Algonquin proudly supplies approximately 40 per cent of the Crown timber in Ontario's southern region on a sustainable basis. What's more, this industry supports rural communities by providing direct employment opportunities to 420 people and more than 2,400 people indirectly through mill and processing facilities.

For these reasons and more, Ontarians should also be proud to use and support local, sustainable forest products. These forest products (which most use daily) should come from our own backyard rather than be imported from unknown sources (consider what the carbon footprint is for multinational companies who ship wood products from all over the world). This approach is also more eco-friendly than substituting forest products with other building materials that produce even greater carbon footprints.

Although historical logging practices in Algonquin Park initially contributed to the decline in white pine on the west side of Algonquin Park, it is really the lack of forest disturbances in these "protected areas" that prevents the pine from regenerating here (this is well-documented by Ontario Parks). White pine is abundant and sustainably managed in the recreation zone of Algonquin Park where logging is permitted, primarily on the east side where the soils are drier and more suitable for pine and less so for hardwoods. Logging provides a disturbance mechanism that is needed to regenerate pine. For example, low rapid fires create suitable germinal conditions for fallen tree seeds. The suppression of fire, on the other hand, which is normally assumed as an accepted practise within protected areas, interferes with these inherent processes and inhibits the natural propagation of trees.

Thankfully in Algonquin Park we are able to plant pine trees in areas zoned for forest management, although much of the pine management in this area relies on natural regeneration from the residual trees left in place after partial harvest. The forest management system was designed to emulate low intensity fires which historically maintained pine on the landscape (before the days of fire suppression). In addition, these partial cutting systems should not be referred to as "cutovers," as they maintain forest cover on the landscape at all stages of management. This diversity in forest age and structure provides many benefits to the abundant wildlife that relies on these forests and ensures the development of future healthy growth.

Furthermore, curtailing forest management does not equate to "saving the forests" as some are led to believe; neither does suppressing fires that are needed in many forest types to maintain ecological integrity. A forest is not a museum that can be set aside indefinitely for display; forests are dynamic, not static. The forests of Algonquin are thriving and regenerating thanks to sustainable forest management practices, many of which were developed in Algonquin Park and are now applied on Crown land across the entire Great Lakes- St. Lawrence forest region of Ontario.

Fortunately, there are many people involved in the sustainable management of Algonquin's forests who are making an effort daily to sustain all aspects of this wonderful park, for current and future generations to enjoy for both recreational and livelihood purposes.

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