



# Urban Forests Should Be Part of Our National Forest Strategy

by Philip van Wassenauer, President

In the year 2003, Canada will adopt a new National Forest Strategy (NFS). The new document will be unveiled at the 9<sup>th</sup> National Forest Congress (<http://nfc.forest.ca/program.html>) to be held in Ottawa on May 1-2. Over the last 20 years, the National Forest Strategy has evolved from a document focused on timber supply and forest renewal to a one that is supported by a coalition of over 50 parties that represent many of the social, economic, environmental and cultural dynamics of the forest that are important to all Canadians. At the same time, the meaning and definition of "forest sector", has grown to encompass a broad forest community that includes government, public services, Aboriginal peoples, industry, academia, institutes, interest groups and the public at large. The next NFS provides another opportunity for all Canadians to work together to develop a common vision and address key challenges facing our nation's forest and landscape.

In October 2000 the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Urban Forest Conference was held in Lake Louise, Alberta. At the conference, the chair of the National Forest Strategy Coalition (NFSC), Mike Apsey, addressed the delegates to inform them about the National Forest Strategy. In particular, he noted that in this document to direct Canadian forestry practices there was indeed not one reference to the Urban Forest. Mr. Apsey also expressed his point of view that Canada has but one forest that encompasses the mosaic of forests from coast to coast. Recognizing that the urban forests are a part of that mosaic, Mr. Apsey laid down a challenge to the delegates: "The people gathered in this room are the people who can provide the input to the NFSC such that urban forests are represented in the next National Forest Strategy "

Having already proposed that the Ontario Urban Forest Council and York Region would host the next Canadian Urban Forest Conference, I was struck by Mike Apsey's comments and thought that the conference would be a great venue to gather the required input from a variety of Canadian urban foresters. The 5<sup>th</sup> CUFC was organized around the theme of Urban Forest Planning: Sustainable Forests for Healthy Communities. Underlying the organization of the conference was a need to participate in the consultative process for the new NFS. A series of workshops were held on key issues facing the urban forest. The results of the discussions were recorded and presented back to the delegates.

In the fall of 2002, a series of six cross-country workshops were held to consult Canadians on the development of the new National Forest Strategy. Those unable to attend a workshop were involved via the Internet and regular mail. Dr. Andy Kenney and I took the results of the workshops and combined them with other relevant information about Canada's urban forests

to craft a formal submission for the consultations of the NFSC.

The paper was received, along with all other comments and consultations, by the NFSC and after these results were analyzed, a discussion paper was drafted. The paper was the document to be discussed at the National Forum held in Winnipeg on January 20 – 21, 2003. At that forum, delegates from across Canada were invited to participate in discussions to refine the discussion paper. I joined Michael Rosen of the Tree Canada Foundation, Mike Allen of Viburnum Tree Experts, Martha Barwinsky from the Coalition to Save the Elms and several others in advocating for the inclusion of Urban Forests in the new strategy. At the end of the forum there were many objectives proposed to the NFSC with one of them being an objective to address urban forestry issues.

The final stages in the preparation of the new strategy are now underway. The results of the Winnipeg Forum have been reviewed and the NFSC has released the Draft Strategy for comment from the forestry community and citizens of Canada. The draft can be viewed at: <http://nfsc.forest.ca/draft1.html>

Please take the time to look at this document and provide your comments by e-mail by March 14 th , 2003.

We are very encouraged to see that urban forests are included in the vision, background and strategic themes sections of the draft. Of the final seven themes/objectives proposed in the draft, there is one that addresses the urban forest!! Currently urban forests are part of Objective 6 that states:

Actively engage rural and urban Canadians to recognize the diversity of values and importance of Canada's forest by:

- a) Maintaining and enhancing urban forest ecosystems; and
- b) Effective communication and outreach programs.

Ultimately we would like to see an Urban Forest objective that is 'stand alone'. The objective that has been proposed is:

Establish mechanisms to advance the planning and management of urban forests based on an ecosystem approach.

There has also been a rationale and action items proposed to accompany this objective. As mentioned earlier, there is little time left to comment on this draft of the NFS. Once the new Strategy is finalized it will be at least five years before we have a chance to provide input and influence on this National document.

We hope that having Urban Forestry recognized and addressed in this strategy will enable Canadians to begin to plan and manage their urban forests more effectively in the near future.

I once again encourage everyone who is involved with any aspect of the urban forest to support this initiative and provide comments to the NFSC by fax 613-947-9038 or by e-mail [nfsc@forest.ca](mailto:nfsc@forest.ca) before March 14, 2003. Many thanks to all of those that have already participated along the way.