



**OPEN LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY
REGARDING THE 50 MILLION TREE PROGRAM**

Submitted via e-mail to: minister.mnrf@ontario.ca

CC: Rob Keen, CEO, Forests Ontario, rkeen@forestsontario.ca

Wednesday 8 May 2019

Hon. John Yakabuski
Whitney Block 6th Floor Rm 6630
99 Wellesley St. W.
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3

Dear Minister Yakabuski,

The Ontario Urban Forest Council (OUFC) is concerned to hear that the Province of Ontario is cancelling the 50 Million Tree Program. This program ensures that millions of trees are planted each year, helping to offset forest loss and habitat fragmentation, especially in southern Ontario's urban and rural forests where most Ontarians live. We have found little rationale for scrapping this program, especially considering the ecological, economic, and social benefits that are associated with trees in urban and rural communities in Ontario.

It is common knowledge that trees provide immense benefits through carbon sequestration, pollution mitigation, stormwater attenuation, increased property value, and improved human health. This is now well documented across numerous scientific studies. Trees in southern Ontario would cost billions of dollars to replace and are providing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of services every year to residents¹. The 50 Million Tree Program ensured long-term forest sustainability to reap these benefits for future generations, with funding put toward Forests Ontario's planting partners as an attractive means to increase much needed forest cover on private lands. Recent work has shown that increases above 40 % tree canopy cover can reduce urban heat island effects at local scales², yet canopy cover remains as low as 5 % in some areas of southern Ontario, a threshold below which there is evidence of much higher rates of heat-related ambulance calls³. Ontario PCs have supported tree planting programs in the past—even hoping to see more ambitious tree planting targets than planned—and have demonstrated they understand the many benefits trees provide⁴. Thus, we are confused by this sudden drop of funding for such an attractive and important program for Ontario, which there is currently no expectation for continuing through private-sector activity.

The cancellation of this program comes shortly after the closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Facility, which has played a critical role in the sustainability of urban forests in Ontario. Its closure, coupled with the cancellation of the 50 Million Tree Program, will result in a long-term reduction in Ontario's capacity to support the management of both public and private forests. The effects of these cancellations will be felt by the millions of Ontarians who benefit each day from the forests in their communities. We now seriously question the future state of Ontario's forests.



Ontario's urban forests are already under immense pressures that are hindering our communities' abilities to meet goals related to biodiversity, invasive species, climate change, and sustainable growth. As an organization with over half a century of experience working in urban forestry in this province, the OUFC is familiar with the long-term and unintended impacts of cuts to provincial tree programs. The closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Facility and cancellation of the 50 Million Tree Program will likely exacerbate these issues that the Province has a responsibility to address.

This is not the first call for urban forest support at federal and provincial levels⁵⁻⁷. We strongly encourage communities opposed to these decisions to act now and voice their concerns with their local MPPs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Justin M. Gaudon". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Dr. Justin M. Gaudon
President
Ontario Urban Forest Council
on behalf of the Board of Directors

References

¹Green Infrastructure Ontario. n.d. State of the Urban Forest in the Greater Toronto Area.

²Ziter et al. 2019. PNAS, 116 (15), 7575-7580.

³Graham et al. 2016. Urban Forestry & Urban Greening, 20, 180-186.

⁴<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2019/04/26/news/tory-mpp-wanted-triple-ontarios-50-million-tree-program-2015-doug-ford-just>

⁵Green Infrastructure Ontario. n.d. Ontario's Urban Forests – Call to Action.



⁶Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. 2018. Back to Basics – Respecting the Public’s Voice on the Environment.

⁷Maloney, J. 2019. Insect Management in Canada’s Forest Sector: Strengthening National Cooperation Against Current and Future Outbreaks.