

Save French's Hill Forest

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(l): Dr. John Bacher and Danny Beaton

Tiny Township is blessed to have some of the rarest and largest old growth forests in southern Ontario south of the Canadian Shield, an ecosystem known as the Mixed Woods Plains. It is tragic that one of the best examples of this precious and threatened relic of Turtle Island before the impact of Euro-Canadian colonization, is now threatened by a proposed zoning amendment. It would change the zoning of lands

now protected as Rural and Agricultural and designated as Significant Forest by Tiny Township, to permit the expansion of the existing Beamish quarry.

In addition to devastating forests the Beamish quarry expansion proposal is an attack on the world's purest water, the same important source for the Alliston Aquifer that was battled over in the long struggle against Dump Site 41. Elaine Stephenson a champion of the French's Hill Forest, has explained how she appreciated from childhood how the purity of her well water from this unusual geological feature. On this basis the quarry scheme was denounced by a leading foe of Dump Site 41, Stephen Odgen, at a October 13, 2009 meeting of the Tiny Township Council.

Part of the opposition that the Beamish scheme encountered when it was put forward at two meeting of Tiny Township Council in the winter of 2015 was that the pit proposal should not go forward until the work of the Severn Sound Environmental Association on the natural heritage of Tiny Township is properly reflected in its land use planning and zoning documents. This is an excellent critique since current land use planning both in Tiny Township and throughout Simcoe County does not make the best use of scientific studies of wildlife habitat, forest cover and old growth.

The critique of residents who have mobilized themselves into a Save the Waverly Uplands alliance is bolstered by the background environmental research that has been done into the provincially significant woodlands that surround the existing Beamish quarry. The work of the Severn Sound group builds on an earlier study, which in a tragically slow way, is shaping environmental planning in Simcoe County. This is report on "The Development of a Natural Heritage System for Simcoe County." It was prepared by the Gartner Lee engineering firm for the Simcoe County Council in 1996.

The Gartner Lee report, now almost two decades old, provides a reasonable way in which to protect Simcoe County's forests. It called for the protection of large blocks of forests of around 40 hectares in size, which is responsible for the current mapping of French's Hill as a provincially significant woodland. Such woodlands straddle both sides of the border between Tiny and Tay townships.

The slowness in the adaption of the Garner Lee report into the Simcoe County official plan is one of the reasons the municipality has been ridiculed by the respected Neptis Foundation as the "Wild West" of urban sprawl.

The Gartner Lee study recognizes that, "The extensive tracts of forests" that are found in Tiny Township "are important habitat for a number of forest interior species as well as for mammals such as Black Bear, Martin and Fisher which have large home ranges."

The Gartner Lee report recognizes the value of the large tracts of forests that endure in Tiny Township that are old growth as surrounds the Beamish quarry. It expressed amazement that here there are still "vast tracts of forest" in predominately hardwood old growth conditions. They are it stressed, a vivid contrast to the coniferous plantations established in other parts of Simcoe County to rescue it from desertification.

The old growth forests of Tiny Township Garner Lee stressed "represent the last vestiges of what southern-Ontario looked like in pre-settlement times. Unlike much of southern Ontario, where the original woodlands have become highly fragmented" these forest remain in "unbroken forest blocks." Such conditions it found are important for wildlife as "refuges from predation" for "foraging habitat" and to secure "diversity in the landscape."

The insights of the Gartner Lee report in protecting the old growth forests of southern Ontario are reflected in the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) Natural Heritage Manual. They stress that old growth forests “are particularly valuable for several reasons, including their contributions of species genetics and ecosystem diversity.” One obvious example of this is that their survival allow winds and birds to transfer native hardwood species to managed plantation forests.

The MNR manual provides a careful definition of what constitutes an old growth forest. This is done through hitting any of three measures, age (around 100 years), basal area or diameter width. One basic approach is 10 or more trees at least 50 cm in diameter per hectare, or 8 trees of the same area of 40 cm.

When I saw tree cutting recently at French’s Hill I was horrified to see an old growth forest slashed for no apparent reason than to downgrade its rating in the MNR manual. The forest was of predominately giant sugar maples, regenerating in a healthy fashion with a blanket of seedlings. However, the quite recently stumps seemed to offer proofs that many giants had been cut with the deliberate purpose of reducing the density per hectare required to be considered an old growth forest.



Danny Beaton a Mohawk of the Turtle Clan has viewed the destruction of the French’s Hill Forest. On it he notes, that “The Nanfan Treaty states that the Iroquois Confederacy have a right to hunt and fish on our shared territories with the Ojibway, Huron and Wendat Nations in Georgian Bay. Why do corporations continue to rape and pillage our forests, wetlands and water ways in Georgian Bay? Why do company’s

continue to stake claim to the last endangered trees and forests with immunity from County of Simcoe Governance? Why are citizens being ignored in county meetings that are set up for citizen participation and shared authority over land rights and development.? Are the lawyers, architects and engineers who support developers, the real threat to Mother Earth? Through unity and focus then can we organize our self for change and environmental protection through peaceful building and organizing our self? During Site 41 a unity of citizens, farmers and Torontonians emerged to defend and protect the Alliston Aquifer. Then the mega quarry was denounced by citizens, farmers, and native and good lawyers. We as citizens of Ontario must unite with the Conservation Authority, Environmental Organizations, Farmers, Native Nations and Good Minds with Good Hearted People before everything is cut down or polluted. Mother Earth is being raped on the French Hill in Waverly. The developer will say he bought the land which is old growth Sugar Maples and other hard wood trees so that all should be clear cut for a quarry As a Mohawk man with grade 6 education I can tell you from our Traditional Culture no one has the right to destroy this large unique incredibly beautiful healing place full of creation for our children's children."

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