



To: Bill Pyatt, Chief Administration Officer
From: Judy Snider, Risk Manager & Mia Frankl, Forest Information Officer
Re: Forest Master Plan and Advisory Committee Update
Date: February 6th 2008

Report

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to present Council with an update on the results of the Forest Master Plan process, specifically progress with the Forest Advisory Committee, Trail Study and Open House & Public Forum.

2. Background

Following the approval of the Forest budget for 2007, County Council approved the staff recommendation to form a Forest Advisory Committee, representing 20 different forest stakeholders, to act as a sounding board for County staff and its consultants to test ideas and findings as well as to provide advice, critiques and suggestions as the Forest Master Plan progresses. Subsequently Council approved the hiring of the "Trail Studies Unit" from Trent University to conduct a comprehensive Trail Study in the Northumberland County Forest. The purpose of this study is to use GPS to accurately map the extent of the trail network, measure impacts of recreational use on the trail networks, survey trail users and assess trail signage.

To assist with the FAC workshops and public meetings, Council approved the services of a private facilitator, Ogilvie, Ogilvie and Company, to provide support and mediate all FAC workshops and public meetings. The facilitator also provides the following services: note taker-recording all conversations and converted into detailed summaries, an independent website with access to all workshop guides and summaries as well as any additional reports or studies provided to the FAC, including opportunity to post comments, and consultation in preparation for upcoming workshops and public meetings.

3. Forest Advisory Committee Deliverables

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) has met five times since May of 2007 and attended one forest visit. Topics for the workshops have been:

- May 16th 2007: Introduction to the Forest Master Plan process
- June 16th 2007: Forest visit & hiking tour
- September 27th 2007: Introduction and preliminary findings from the Trail Study

- October 25th 2007: Report on the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan from an environmental planner (Fred Johnson, a pioneer author of the plan and who now works for Ogilvie, Ogilvie and Company) and the County's solicitor on the matter-Paul Petersen
- November 29th 2007: Update from the Trail Study and tentative recommendations for recreational trail use
- January 4th 2008: FAC received the draft Trail Study, entitled "Trails, trail users and their management in the Northumberland County Forest"
- January 12th 2008: The FAC had the opportunity to present to each other from their perspectives, expressing their group's concerns and support on the trail study and other forest issues

4. Trail Study Deliverables

The Trail Study started in July of 2007. Dr John Marsh, the study lead, has since provided the County and the FAC with a comprehensive draft trail study report entitled "Trails, trail users and their management in the Northumberland County Forest." This Study was made available to the FAC prior to their January 12th workshop in order to allow for a well rounded discussion of the preliminary recommendations contained therein. The Trail Study is ongoing until late spring of 2008 with a final report expected in the summer of 2008. A summary of the draft recommendations is included in Appendix A.

5. Open House and Public Forum

The Open House and Public Forum event, held on January 24th 2008, was a huge success. An estimated 30 people attended the Open House throughout the day and over 100 members of the public came to the Public Forum in the evening. We also received coverage from a variety of press (CHEX TV, Northumberland Today, The Independent etc). There was no shortage of diverse voices for the forest. Some highlights of the public feedback received include the following:

- Several recommendations are particularly contentious, such as the non motorized zones, hunting, user fees and the recommendation to enter into a new type of agreement with the Scouts for the property they lease on County Road 45;
- There remains some disagreement about the meaning of the legislation applicable to the County Forest, particularly in how it applies to ANSI's and motorized use;
- There exists strong opposition to any form of motorized trail use in the forest;
- Further studies needs to be done/implemented to monitor the impacts of recreational uses on areas of ecological significance throughout the Forest to give assurance that the ecological integrity of the Forest is being maintained;
- It is unlikely that the public will come to a consensus about permitted uses but the public seems to acknowledge the need to accommodate all users and support designated user zones or trail routes

6. Next Steps

The draft trail study, FAC feedback and public forum have provided an excellent source of feedback on the progress of the Forest Master Plan so far. However, as identified in the above section, there are still some outstanding issues, needing further attention. The next steps to assist with the progress of the Forest Master Plan will be to:

- meet with the Township of Alnwick-Haldimand to address the issue of road allowances traversing the County Forest
- meet with the local Scouts Council to discuss the lease and future facility planning and development
- the Trail Study will continue to conduct user surveys and collect information until a final report is prepared by this summer (2008)
- A Fire Plan is nearing completion, prepared as a collaborative project with County staff, the Alnwick-Haldimand Fire Department (notably Fire Chief Dave Wright) and with the consulting services of Fred Bruin. Fire risk meter signs have also been designed and will be installed this Spring as part of a fire education initiative
- The County is pleased to continue our role as a partner in the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative partnership and will again be participating in a joint "Prescribed Burn Open House" and conducting a second burn at the North Burns property this Spring, for a total area of 19 ha (47 acres)
- Ongoing treatment of the highly invasive "dog strangling vine" with herbicidal application, including educational materials and signage
- County staff are also developing in house means to produce GIS and GPS maps with Auto CAD Map 3D. The ongoing support and expertise of the Lower Trent Conservation Authority will serve as a resource as staff improve skills and abilities
- Follow up with another Public Forum in the fall to re-address the Trail Study and other Forest Master Plan components

7. Financial Impact

A Forest Budget for 2008 will be presented to Council under the Corporate Services Department Budget.

Appendix A

Theme	#	Recommendation
Zoning		
	1	Designate the Beagle Club trail area as a non-motorized, no hunting zone with the exception of an east-west motorized route and emergency/fire access
	2	Designate Lookout Mountain as a non motorized, no hunting zone
	3	Designate the fire ponds as non-motorized, no hunting zones
	4	Investigate the future use of trails outside these 3 recommended non-motorized zones
Specific Routes		
	5	The County and Alnwick-Haldimand should discuss and decide the future of road allowances in the Forest
	6	Provide a non motorized Oak Ridges trail from east-west through the Forest
	7	Provide at least one trail accessible to the physically disabled
	8	Provide at least 3 interpretive trails
Reducing Trail Degradation		
	9	Install and maintain barriers to restrict motorized access to non motorized zones
	10	Restore the most degraded trails and adjacent areas
	11	Develop trail standards
	12	Implement a trail maintenance program in cooperation with user groups
	13	Develop and implement an ongoing monitoring and research program
Facility Development		
	14	Implement and maintain a comprehensive signage system
	15	Identify and construct at least 3 trail heads
	16	Use the former ski hill area/facilities (aka Cobourg Scout Reserve) for non motorized activities and a forest center
Safety, Risk Assessment and Liability		
	17	Develop a risk management program that would include assessment of trails and hunting in the Forest
Event Management		
	18	Develop, implement and communicate a policy and permit system for events in the Forest
Law Enforcement		
	19	Increase policing and trained volunteer patrolling of the Forest

Information, Education and Training		
	20	Improve information and education about the Forest and its uses
	21	Arrange training programs related to trails and other aspects of the Forest
Tourism		
	22	Determine the role of the Forest in tourism in Northumberland County
Financing, Staffing and Decision Making		
	23	Do not implement a permit and trail user pay system at this time
	24	Explore new sources of revenue
	25	Hire a full time professional employee to manage the Forest and its trails
	26	Continue to seek the advice of the FAC
Reporting and Planning		
	27	Prepare an annual report on the state of the Forest and its trails
	28	Once adopted by Council, incorporate the "Trails, trail users and their management in the Northumberland County Forest" study into the Forest Master Plan
	29	Integrate "Trails, Trail users and their management in the Northumberland County Forest" study with County and Provincial trail plans and systems