

Niagara Woodlot Association Heartland Forest Tour - February 11, 2023

Heartland Forest General Property History

At the time of drafting the 2019 Managed Forest Plan renewal the management records from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) had not been located since being put in storage. There is evidence of an old OMNR timber cruise and tree marking for a sawlog harvest in yellow and then more recently in blue. The sawlog trees were never cut.

Dan Bouwman purchased the property in 1999 from Harry Oates. Mr. Bouwman wanted to provide a facility where people (especially children) with physical handicaps could experience nature in a safe, accessible & natural setting. In 2004, work began on a 650 metre trail system with a crushed stone base that would be suitable for wheelchairs. In 2005, Norman Kreger was hired through an Ontario Trillium Fund grant to assist in developing the property and specifically extending the trail system another 800 metres. On July 4, 2005, Paul Robertson & John Potter inventoried the woodland and flagged in the boundary between compartments 1 & 2A. On July 11, 2005 Paul R. & Norm K. flagged in the 800 metre trail extension & inventoried compartment 2B. A Managed Forest Plan (MFP) was prepared in June 2005 to take effect January 1, 2006. At this time, conservation lands in the form of provincially significant wetlands (PSW) were identified in all three compartments and the landowner participated in the Conservation Lands Tax Incentive Program (CLTIP). Annual CLTIP renewals were received and applied for until 2010 when no renewals were received by the landowner for the conservation lands in compartments 1 & 2A. He was informed by the program manager for the Ministry of Natural Resources that the two compartments had been dropped from the program because silvicultural activities had taken place in them. This came as a surprise because all the management activities were designed to improve the woodlot and had been recognized and approved in past MFPs.

In 2007 Compartment 1 was separated into two (2) sub-compartments to facilitate the harvest and sale of a large amount of firewood spread over a large area. The sub-compartments were marked using the same prescription. The eastern third was awarded to Dave Hall, Niagara Falls and completed from February 2007 to October 2009. The western two thirds sub-compartment was awarded to Oliver Clee, Toronto and commenced in October 2007 to is scheduled to be completed February 2011. The harvest plans are included in Appendix C.

On August 21, 2007, Paul R. And Dan B. met to discuss the location, design & material acquisition for a wheelchair accessible tree house to be built beside a large vernal pool. The structure was constructed using primarily wood materials supplied from the forest and it was completed in fall 2008.

Tree identification signs were installed in September, 2007 in a partnership with the Niagara Woodlot Association and Land Care Niagara.

In 2007, during summer and fall field visits Gypsy Moth larva, egg masses and defoliation were observed. Severe oak defoliation occurred in 2007 with lesser amounts in 2008.

The firewood harvests continued until 2010 when new permits were issued to allow completion of the harvests and a new contract was awarded to Oliver C. for the western most portion of Compartment 1 and an additional property owned by Dan B. called the Dannco property. area in the northwest corner of the property.

Environmental Features

The MFP has two compartments; Compartment 1 (C1), which is 116.18 ac and is an uneven-aged tolerant hardwood slough forest, and Compartment 2 (C2), which is 188.20 ac, which contains 43.55 ac of participating CL & a 5.10 ac landing/meadow, and is an early successional hardwood forest. The balance of 2.37 acres is open area that is used for parking and various educational activities & structures.

Heartland Forest is within the Thompson Creek watershed, which drains directly into the Welland River. The creek itself meanders along the south boundary of the property. OMNR has evaluated 186.86 acres of provincially significant wetlands (PSW) over the three properties. Only the southern-most property is participating the in the 2011 CLTIP. One important aquatic component of forest ecosystems, often overlooked, is vernal pools, several of which are found in Heartland Forest. These land depressions in the terrain of a woodland fill with water under wet conditions, creating temporary wetlands. They provide important breeding and larval habitat for many amphibians and macroinvertebrates in an aquatic environment free of preying fish.

Heartland Forest's mature forest is typical of the lowland hardwood forests that dominate the Niagara Peninsula's clay plain. It is within Corridor 4 of the Niagara Natural Heritage Framework. Corridor 4. Corridor 4 is the only north-south corridor with a pre-dominance of good quality wetlands cover. The forest is also described as a core forest where it is part of an unbroken block of forest (100 ha or >250 ac). Core forests are rare in Ontario and provide critical forest interior habitat conditions.