
CHAMPIONING SUPPORT FOR THE FOREST SECTOR IN RENFREW COUNTY

Overview

Renfrew County's forest sector is at a crossroads. While Ontario has made meaningful investments in forest sector competitiveness, growing challenges associated with low-grade fibre utilization, biomass economics, workforce sustainability, species-at-risk regulations, and public understanding of modern forest management are creating significant uncertainty for one of Eastern Ontario's foundational industries.

More than 1,500 people in Renfrew County are directly employed by the forest sector, a significant number for this area with a total population of just over 100,000 and about 43,000 households.

The businesses that receive wood from forests in Renfrew County are family-owned, some having been in operation for 5+ generations. They are critical to the survival of our communities and have demonstrated that sustainable forest management is a way of life here – and hope it will continue to be for many more generations to come.

The long-term health of Ontario's forests depend on practical solutions that allow sustainable forestry to remain economically viable.

Priority #1: Biomass

We appreciate the Province's attention to the state of the forest industry through the **Roadmap to Protecting Ontario's Forest Sector, Forest Sector Strategy, Forest Biomass Program, Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program**, and funding that has been granted to proponents in our County through these programs. With only three pulp mills left in Ontario, the nearest destinations for our local mills are in Quebec, 250 and 400 kilometres away, with limited intakes.

Without a solution to the pulpwood crisis, some harvest areas with high pulpwood volumes are being bypassed, meaning sawmills will receive less sawable materials. The increased complexity and less area available for harvest will further exasperate the already challenged logging workforce, attracting less entrants and making it even less viable to invest in new equipment. There are also negative impacts on the forest in leaving allocated areas unharvested, as they will continue to decline and succumb to natural mortality, release carbon and present an increased fire risk. A recent study on biomass availability showed that our region has over 480,000m³ of surplus low-end material.

There is no viable forest sector without a market for low-end material. Biomass is one of the few industries capable of creating a large, long-term market for this material while also providing dependable, renewable baseload electricity. However, biomass cannot currently compete in technology-neutral electricity procurements because the cost of harvesting and transporting low-grade fibre is too high. Many inquiring proponents are under the impression that “waste wood” is free, when there is a real cost to getting this material out of the woods and delivered to a facility.

If biomass-specific power procurement is not being considered by the Province, then it should consider addressing the problem at its source by reducing the cost of utilizing low-grade Crown fibre.

We recommend establishing a provincial low-grade Crown fibre utilization program that reinvests a portion of Crown stumpage and forest revenues into incentives for every verified cubic metre of eligible fibre delivered to qualified Ontario facilities. This program should support any legitimate end use – including biomass energy, wood pellets, renewable fuels, biocarbon and other emerging markets – not just electricity generation.

This approach would:

- create markets for low-grade wood;
- support existing sawmills and forest operations;
- encourage investment in new wood-processing facilities;
- strengthen rural economies;
- improve active forest management; and
- help biomass projects compete within Ontario's existing electricity procurement framework.

Recently, three local mills were the recipients of funding to explore possibilities for local biomass facilities. Accelerated action and assistance is needed to get shovels in the ground on biomass projects – urgently – before the sector collapses.

Projects proposed include:

- **Golden Lake Power LP** (a 50/50 partnership between Ben Hokum & Son Limited of Golden Lake, and CEM Engineering of St. Catharines), is shovel-ready to build a 13.5 MWe gross biomass cogeneration plant in North Algoma Wilberforce, capable of supplying 12.5MWe of renewable baseload energy to Ontario's grid. The facility would consume approximately 150,000 green metric tonnes of low-grade forest biomass annually and generate approximately 104,000 MWh of electricity per year. In addition to direct plant employment, it would support a significant number of jobs in harvesting, trucking, chipping, forest management, equipment maintenance and other local services.
- **Roseburg Forest Products Pembroke MDF**, which is prepared to invest \$148 million for a new heat plant and cogeneration system in Laurentian Valley, securing 200 existing jobs and creating 8 new positions.

- **Harvest Bioindustrial Group**, which is at the engineering phase of building a bio-refinery on the Lavern Heideman & Sons sawmill site in Eganville. This would use 70,000 tons of roundwood pulp/year.
- **Town of Petawawa/TorchLight Bioresources**, which is proposing a biomass CHP plant using wood chips from low-grade timber and sawmill residues to provide local heat and district heating for the community.

Rural municipalities are being asked to support economic growth, energy transition, wildfire resilience, and sustainable resource development. The success of those objectives depends on maintaining a healthy forest sector and ensuring policy decisions are aligned across ministries responsible for energy, environment, natural resources, economic development, and finance.

Priority #2: Glyphosate

Pine-processing mills represent a major portion of forestry-related employment in Renfrew County. Recently, public opposition to the use of **glyphosate** in forests has increased exponentially in our area, fueled by misinformation. Without the use of herbicides as a silvicultural tool, maintaining or increasing the level of pine on the landscape to historical levels would become not only cost-prohibitive, but less successful. This is of concern to long-standing, multi-generational companies who rely on pine for their future wood supply, and also to the health, long-term carbon sequestration and diversity of the Ottawa Valley's forests.

Last year, a map of the entire Renfrew County was included in the MNR notification of upcoming aerial spray program. This led to many members of the public believing that the whole County would be sprayed, including private property, many of which were directed at our staff.

We believe that this issue can be tempered somewhat by the Province taking the lead on better communication, improved message in spray program notifications and making facts available for members of the public who are seeking information.

Ongoing Issue: Black Ash as a Protected Species

The County of Renfrew has submitted concerns at every stage of Environmental Registry of Ontario consultation on the listing and protection of **Black Ash**. Despite repeated reassurances that an exemption for sustainable forestry on private land was being considered, the recently enacted Species Conservation Act did not take the opportunity to correct this disparity between Crown and certified private land. As a result, many private land forests within the geographic protected zone for black ash remain functionally inoperable until trees have died – a missed opportunity which will not protect the species.

Although Black Ash is not a targeted species for harvest, the species is very present and scattered throughout the landscape. Leaving a reserve around each specimen over 8 centimetres in diameter creates detrimental access and logistical issues in nearly every forestry operation.

There are not enough forestry professionals in Ontario nor Provincial staff to handle the volume of assessments that would be required should reporting and registering be necessary. Although Emerald Ash Borer is present in our area, many Black Ash deeper in woodlands are still unaffected and would require assessment and protection for forestry to continue on County-owned and private land unless the conditional exemption is passed.

This is prohibitive in small-scale forestry and is discouraging the management of private and County-owned forests.

Request for Support

- Champion, continue to partner with and provide financial support to biomass projects ready to supply solutions in Renfrew County, like those described above.
- Work with the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, and the Ministry of Finance to establish a long-term Ontario strategy for low-grade Crown forest fibre.
- Work with other Ministries to ensure permitting and hydro infrastructure are not process or investment prohibitive in biomass project start-ups.
- Provide access to funding or cost-sharing for grid connection.
- Not ban the use of herbicide spraying on forests in Ontario.
- Change the way aerial spray programs are announced to the public with accurate maps including the affected area in hectares or percentage of or percentage of the managed Crown forest land base.
- Designate staff and resources to developing public education and outreach materials including facts and frequently asked questions about glyphosate that can be easily accessed by those with questions, including municipal councils and staff.
- Work with the Ministry of Environment, Conservation & Parks (MECP) to develop an exemption to the protection of black ash during sustainable forest management activities on private land.

Why Your Support Matters

A healthy forest sector is not only about forestry. It is about rural jobs, renewable energy, wildfire resilience, climate objectives, and the long-term stewardship of Ontario's forests. Renfrew County is asking the Province to help remove the barriers that prevent those outcomes from being achieved.