

Proposal to Turn Dump Site 41 Into A Simcoe County Forest Tract

By John Bacher and Danny Beaton Turtle Clan Mohawk

Dear Steve:

We have a proposal to turn Dump Site 41 which is owned by Simcoe County, into a forest. It would be planted and subsequently managed by the Simcoe County Forests department. Since all these Simcoe County Forests have names, it would be named for Steve Odgen who struggled for over twenty years to stop it.

It is possible that if adjacent lands are still owned by Miller Wastes, that they could be included into the Steve Odgen Forest Tract. If they are owned by Miller Wastes, the company could transfer their ownership to the County, for a charitable receipt. In addition to tax advantages, the company could improve its image, tarred by the long struggle to stop the dump (which will be made worse by your on-going Municipal Freedom of Information Act requests) through such a donation. If the County cannot issue this directly, an arrangement could be made through the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This could bring the extent of the forest area to around 1,000 acres- which would be of great ecological significance.

Apart from the ecological value of reforestation, one of the reasons this should be done is for longer term protection of the land. If the dump site and adjacent Miller Waste land is put on the open market, the County will likely sell the property the highest bidder- likely a land speculator. Such speculative interests, would in the longer term attempt to alter the agricultural zoning not only on the former dump site lands, but in the general vicinity. Although the land is scheduled to be re-zoned to agriculture, this can change as part of the normal five year reviews of official plans under the Planning Act. Road improvements to facilitate the construction of the dump will make this area attractive to land speculators.

As you are aware the Simcoe County Forest system has a wonderful history. The irony of its actions to build a dump over the pure water these forests protect was brought home during the bail hearings of those arrested in the Simcoe County Court House. Close to the court room is the photograph of one of the creators of this system, the former Premier, E C Drury. Although one of the Simcoe County Forest Tracts is named after him, there is no mention of his role in bringing back to life the forests of the county in the Court House. You will be a worthy addition to Simcoe County's great pantheon of environmental heroes.

The planting of the first tree at Steve Odgen Tract 51 could come in time for the 90th anniversary of the Simcoe County Forest on May 8, 2012. The birth date usually set for the system is May 8, 1922, in the Hendrie Tract. (past which we walked on the march to Toronto).

Before the planting of the first tree in the Hendrie Tract, Simcoe County was pocketed by desert like wastelands. These wastelands were created by the assaults of European-style

agriculture, especially through burning for land clearance, on lands that had previously been well managed by native Canadians. These blow sand areas threatened to expand to bury the entire county in a Sahara-like wasteland, as the prophetic architect of Simcoe County's municipal forest (now the largest municipally owned forest in Ontario), Drury warned.

Today the Simcoe County Forest covers 31,000 acres dispersed over 50 separate named tracts. These forests protect habitat for a number of significant species, such as bear, deer and wild turkeys. They enhance green land corridors which are critical for species such as waterfowl, reptiles and trout that inhabit cold water streams such as the historic Nottawasaga River. The County recognizes the importance of their forests to "produce oxygen, filter pollutants from the air and help to stabilize the climate by absorbing carbon dioxide the main greenhouse gas."

A half century ago, Drury recognized the harm that climate change induced from deforestation was causing Simcoe County through negative impacts on climate. In addition to spreading deserts, deforestation was causing torrential flooding from more intense storms, in place of the gentle showers of the past. Now deforestation has contributed to climate change on a catastrophic global change. Part of the remedy for this is more forest cover.

Although Simcoe County has stopped desertification, its task of expanding forest cover is not complete. The County has a long way to go to put half of its rural lands in forest cover, which scientists recognize is necessary to protect the health of cold water streams that support healthy trout populations.

A cairn should be erected at the entrance to Steve Odgen Tract No. 51. This would complement the cairn at the Hendrie Forest Tract No. 1. The cairn was erected to commemorate the birth of the County Forest system across Ontario. The ceremony spearheaded the movement to successfully create Conservation Authorities across Ontario, at the first field days of the Ontario Conservation and Reforestation Association.

The wording on the memorial plaque on the cairn will help to inspire future generations to continue our efforts to protect the environment after we have all passed away. It could read as follows, "This cairn commemorates the struggle to protect the world's purest waters below from a proposed waste dump, which was known as Dump Site 41. It lasted 20 years and was aided by Steve Odgen for whom this forest was named."