

New Urban Forestry Management Plan

Stewarding Ontario's urban forests has never been more important. With crises like the invasion of the emerald ash borer demonstrating vividly the fragility of our forests, we need to protect and sustain this vital aspect of our ecosystem. As part of its 2018-2028 Strategic Plan, the Niagara Parks Commission is developing a comprehensive Urban Forestry Management Plan. The plan is scheduled for final approval late in 2018, but key plan projects are already underway. The plan sets a number of research-based goals and strategies that will help Niagara Parks create a healthier and more resilient urban forest that supports wildlife and recreational opportunities, reduces pollution and helps mitigate the impacts of flooding, erosion and even climate change.

Five Strategic Goals

The Urban Forestry Management Plan identifies five strategic goals designed to guide a decade of progress in stewarding Niagara Parks' forest habitat.

1. Maintain and Increase Canopy Cover

Canopy cover plays a critical role in the sustainability of urban forests. Currently, Niagara Parks lands feature 28% canopy cover. Forests require at least 30% to be sustainable and as that percentage increases, sustainability increases exponentially. Niagara Parks is working to increase forest canopy cover to 35% through tactics including tree maintenance and planting, shoreline vegetation management and woodlot protections.

The plan also includes a supporting target of ensuring that 75% of the Niagara River shoreline is covered with native vegetation. These targets accommodate numerous scenic viewpoints along the shoreline.

2. Increase Species and Habitat Biodiversity

A diverse habitat is able to resist and rebound from the impacts of disease, drought and invasive species. The Carolinian Forest zone that is home to Niagara Parks features high biodiversity and allows Niagara Parks to plant a wide range of tree species according to a 5-10-20 planting strategy. This approach ensures that in any given habitat,

no single species makes up more than 5% of the canopy, no more than 10% of the canopy is one genus and no more than 20% is one family.

3. Mitigate Impacts

Niagara Parks' urban forest is under constant threat from a variety of sources. The plan identifies and addresses the specific impacts of invasive species like the emerald ash borer, human impacts such as recreational use and illegal dumping, urban development, low biodiversity and climate change.

4. Increase Awareness and Promote Stewardship

The Urban Forestry Management Plan will only be successful if it engages a range of partners, visitors and local landowners. A key aspect of the plan, therefore, is educating everyone with the ability to impact the plan.

5. Improve Data Collection and Monitoring

Monitoring Niagara Parks' natural lands will be an integral part of achieving the goals of the Urban Forestry Management Plan. Understanding the changes and reactions of the habitat will allow Niagara Parks to modify and enhance its programs, share insights and research with partners and ultimately create a healthier and more resilient urban forest.



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Already Working Hard

The development of the Urban Forestry Management Plan is not yet complete, but the pursuit of its goals has already begun. For example, working in collaboration with Niagara College, Niagara Parks has initiated an inventory of plant species along the upper Niagara River shoreline and identified planting targets. At the same time, work is underway on a new viewpoint strategy to ensure that visitors can enjoy outstanding views of the Niagara River and Niagara Parks properties from areas that also support Niagara Parks' environmental stewardship plans.

