



Springford comment sheet responses regarding the Woodlands Conservation Bylaw update

- 1) I think we should be able to clear our fence rows. We should be able to go back as far as it once was. We should not need permits for this.
- 2) I am generally in favour of maintaining the woodlands in our County, but this by-law is both over-reaching and heavy handed.

This by-law effectively transfers the control of the existing woodlands to Oxford County Council and makes peasants of the owners, who must make payments to the county if they wish to use their own property and to pay significant fines to the County if they disobey the law. This by-law is meant to benefit all the citizens of Oxford County, but it is financed by permit fees and fines from the woodland owners and their paid consultants and not from the overall citizenship.

This by-law allows exemptions as is outlined in 'Appendix A' to almost anyone other than farmers and rural estate owners. Each version of this by-law has become more intrusive to the landowner.

This by-law is all stick and no carrot. It has been enforced in an inconsistent manner. Enforcement can be by 'bullying' or 'let's make a deal' depending upon the nature of the individuals involved.

This by-law is written based on the best management practices for forestry but neglects the best management practices for modern agriculture. Woodlands naturally expand their boundaries each year by reseeding open adjacent agricultural fields. Clean-up of field edges by mowers or cultivators is required each year. Tree limbs extend into open fields and need to be cut back periodically.

The County Land Division Committee currently acts as the Woodlands Conservation Committee. This group is too urban-centred and represented to properly deal with woodlands issues. A new group of agriculturally-inclined individuals must take over this committee. A properly designed by-law which requires open consultation prior to major woodland committee exemptions and elimination of the minor exemptions would result in less cases for this group.

[Referring to subsection 3 of the draft by-law] Exceptions

No farmer should have to pay a fee to harvest his own trees. No farmer should have to submit himself to apply for a permit to harvest his own trees. The farmer should view the County woodlands personnel as a useful resource when dealing with woodlands.

Benefits to maintaining woodlands coverage extends to all citizens of Oxford. All taxpayers must fund this group.

[Referring to subsection 4 of the draft by-law] Exemptions

k(iii) – 20 logs or 20 cords of fuelwood

This section tries to limit the use of an owner's woodlot without any consideration of its size or of its use to him as a source of income. It should be withdrawn from the by-law.

[Referring to subsection 5 of the draft by-law] Minor Exemption Permit

It is no business of the County if a landowner wishes to clean the edge of a woodlot. It is completely bureaucratic to insist that the landowner submit to a by-law officer prior to pruning or trimming. It is even worse to require 30 days' notice, a completed Schedule 'C' and a fee of \$200 as per Schedule 'A'.

[Referring to subsection 6 of the draft by-law] Committee Exemption

There may be some justification for a fee to apply for this exemption, but certainly not \$500. Schedule 'D' is not difficult to fill out. There should be a consultation to discuss plans prior to the need for an exemption.

[Referring to subsection 9 of the draft by-law] Enforcement

ii) The County has no legislative authority to grant a power of unobstructed entry without a warrant. This power exceeds that of a police officer.

[Referring to subsection 10 of the draft by-law] Penalty

This penalty structure is clearly meant to force compliance but how can a landowner in Oxford County be forced to pay a significant fine when a landowner in a nearby County can clear cut his woodland with no penalty.

A program of education for all landowners is necessary. The existing enforcement program creates mistrust among those whose support is necessary for its success. A more open consultation between parties is needed but you'll need an entirely different staff than you have now.

The County could do more to show landowners that they aren't the only ones needed to work towards keeping up woodland coverage.