



## **Confused by Ontario government plan to risk our forests' future by closing tree seed facility**

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Tree seeds are of course critical to future forests. Management of high quality seed of known origin is crucial if our future forests are to withstand the impacts of climate change. Despite this, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) has decided to close the Ontario Tree Seed Plant (OTSP) in less than a year.

Located in Angus (west of Barrie) since 1923, it is a unique facility that is home to expert processing and storage of billions of tree seed. The OTSP is the seed bank for future forests in southern and northern Ontario, managed by 6 expert staff with an annual budget less than \$2 million. The shutdown decision came as a surprise – no analysis of other delivery or cost cutting options, and no consultation with clients, stakeholders and the community.

Historically, MNR Seed Program staff managed seed for government programs that annually planted over 100 million trees on Crown Land in Northern Ontario, and up to 20 million on private land in Southern Ontario. Those trees became the forests that surround us today.

In the mid-90's, cutbacks saw the MNR reforestation program dismantled. Tree nurseries, established by pioneering foresters Drury and Zavitz in the 1920's, were closed and sold, and plans made to privatize the Seed Plant. The Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA), working with stakeholders, helped MNR management understand that tree seed expertise was an irreplaceable ecological and social benefit. Even private nurseries advocated for keeping the Seed Plant in public hands.

In 1999, MNR leadership reconsidered, and recognized the value of the OTSP's critically important role in providing genetically adapted native seeds for planting programs. Tree nurseries were able to increase the propagation of locally adapted trees for our cities and countryside. OTSP seed was the foundation for the 50 Million Tree Program in 2007, without it the program could not have been built.

The OTSP closure is a game changer – with the potential to be a game ender. The FGCA and Forest Ontario's grower and planting partners are very concerned. Where will the millions of stored seeds go? Where will next year's seed crops be processed? Who will monitor seed quality and track seed source? Who will invest in the expertise needed to establish and maintain a long-term seed bank - a critical weapon to fight the impacts of climate change?

Dianne Saxe, the Environmental Commissioner recently reported that Ontario's forests are under increasing stress from climate change. Climate models show that southern Ontario's trees, adapted to a warmer climate, will be the best source of seed for Northern Ontario before the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. But many southern forests have been lost to agriculture and development. The remainder face introduced exotic plants, insects and diseases that challenge native trees from regenerating. Given these serious threats, seed management and banking capacity needs to be increased, not stopped.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Premier Wynne has shown leadership on climate change – a tremendously complex challenge. And the FGCA knows the best way to manage complex challenges like forest restoration is to make it easier for people to do the right thing. But this short-sighted decision by the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, to abandon seed management and banking, will make it very difficult to ensure the resilience of Ontario’s forest under climate change.

There is no future without forests, and no forests without seed. The plan to close the OTSP must be reconsidered.

**The FGCA invite you to ask questions and get involved. Join this mission to ensure our Government shows the leadership critical to our future.**

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