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OPINION PIECE

It takes a forest to fight climate change: How a made-in-Canada national tree planting strategy can help

By, Rob Keen, Registered Professional Forester and CEO of *Forests Ontario* and *Forest Recovery Canada*

Good news is rare, though it seems like nearly every day for the past few weeks there have been new commitments by global leaders to fight climate change by planting huge numbers of trees.

In my 38 years as a forester, I've never experienced enthusiasm for tree planting as powerful as what we've seen in 2019. The trigger? *Climate change*. So now, as Canadians, how do we harness and deploy large-scale tree planting on a national scale?

Planting one trillion trees around the world may be one of the most effective ways to combat the impacts of climate change, according to a recent study by ETH Zurich University and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The study determined that Canada has the third highest land potential to plant trees in the world - 117 billion trees over 78.4 million hectares, to be exact. This represents more than 10 per cent of the global trillion tree target, meaning Canada has real potential to become a climate leader on a global stage by putting these trees in the ground.

To step up to our global responsibilities, I propose a national tree planting strategy led by Forest Recovery Canada. Forest Recovery Canada, the national division of non-profit charity Forests Ontario, has already proven to have the unique expertise, infrastructure and network required to bring this mighty goal to fruition. There's no questioning it any longer – Canada can and *must* contribute to the world's growing need for trees and new forests.

Luckily, Forest Recovery Canada and Forests Ontario are well-versed in tree planting. With our dedicated partners, we have already planted trees across the country in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador – about three million trees per year.

In fact, we are the only non-profit organization in Canada that oversees all aspects of forest restoration from beginning to end, or from seed to survival.

The complexity of tree planting is far greater than many realize; from seed forecasting and collection to monitoring tree survival. We conduct site assessments to determine

the best-suited species for the site; use native trees grown in local nurseries with source-identified seed stock; and have expert local partners who undertake the planting, conduct survival assessments, and deliver appropriate care. All steps of the process are completed with an unmatched level of accountability and are reported online and in real time.

As the global spotlight increasingly shines upon climate change, Canadians are embracing the fact that our country has a moral obligation to respond. Planting trees is an excellent response. Not only does Forest Recovery Canada know how to plant trees, but it is the organization best-suited to deliver a home-grown, national-scale tree planting program. Canada's contribution to the climate crisis must begin today, and we are ready and eager to be a part of the solution.

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About Forest Recovery Canada

Forest Recovery Canada (FRC) is the national tree-planting division of Forests Ontario, a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to forest restoration. We work with planting organizations, municipalities, First Nations, ENGOs and corporate sponsors to plant trees where they are most needed to lessen the effects of climate change. FRC uses a comprehensive approach to tree planting, ensuring the trees we plant today will thrive in tomorrow's forests.

About Forests Ontario

Forests Ontario is a not-for-profit charity dedicated to re-greening the province through the support of forest restoration, stewardship, education and awareness. We promote Canada's greatest natural resource – our forests – because healthy forests sustain healthy communities and healthy economies. Forests Ontario is the voice of our forests. Visit www.forestsontario.ca or follow us @Forests_Ontario to find out more.