

We Need to Plant More Trees for a Healthier Planet

By Rob Keen, RPF

While many of us are at home and keeping proper social distance from our friends and neighbours, life goes on for nature. Trees continue to grow and make their environmental contributions, and we can help by planting more of them.

During the 2020 federal election campaign, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to planting two billion trees over the next decade. He described how trees sequester carbon and cool our planet. That promise came at a different time, but in the wake of COVID-19 we have an opportunity to improve our planet's health and revive our stalled economy. Simply put: *this is the time to plant new forests*.

Millions of Canadians are out of work. Meanwhile, tree nurseries across Canada are growing millions of seedlings. Job-seekers can be trained to plant these seedlings. This is an opportune time to mobilize the labour force, including our youth, with a national tree-planting strategy.

Health professionals have asked us to maintain social distance during this pandemic. Fortunately, tree planters work apart, often keeping a minimum distance of two metres between each other. Planting organizations across Canada prepared procedures identifying sanitation rules and protocols for planting crews to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Forests Ontario commissioned a study last year on the economic impact of planting trees. The study indicated that the roughly 2.5 million trees we plant annually creates approximately 300 seasonal rural jobs. It also revealed a 3:1 financial return from a GDP perspective.

Trees provide countless social and environmental benefits. Tree blossoms feed bees that pollinate farm crops. Trees shade our homes, lower heating bills and increase property values. Forests soak up excess water, mitigate flooding, reduce soil erosion, and provide homes for wildlife. A walk in the forest can strengthen the immune system and reduce blood pressure, among other health benefits. And some trees will one day become paper, furniture, art, musical instruments and building material for homes and office buildings – all products that we need for our standard of living and daily wellbeing.

Forests Ontario has the practical experience to assist in a nation-wide tree planting program. Forest Recovery Canada, our national tree planting arm, has planted trees in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. And we are the only non-profit organization in Canada that oversees all aspects of forest restoration – *from seed to forest*.

Let's put Canadians back to work planting trees and strengthen the health of our planet. We are ready to be a part of the solution.

Rob Keen, a Registered Professional Forester, is CEO of Forests Ontario and Forest Recovery Canada.

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.

Forest Recovery Canada is Forests Ontario's national division; visit www.frc-rfc.ca for more information.

Read *The Economic Value of Tree Planting in Southern Ontario* report here:

<https://www.forestsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Green-Analytics-Report-The-Economic-Value-of-Tree-Planting-in-Southern...-1.pdf>.

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