LIMERICK FOREST 1940 -2010

70 Years - The Foundation of Limerick's Future

VALERIE KIRKWOOD

LIMERICK FOREST
LEEDS & GRENVILLE'S COMMUNITY FOREST
Your Community Forest since 1940

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Valerie Kirkwood
September 2010

United Counties of Leeds and Grenville

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Warden

September 13, 2010

Dear Readers

In the late 1930s the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville Counties Council became aware of the need to start reclaiming the severly eroded, abandoned farmlands which were scattered across the Counties. In April of 1940, the United Counties joined the Agreement Forest Program administered by the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests. The signing of this agreement with the Province of Ontario was the start of something which has benefited the citizens of Leeds & Grenville ever since.

Today, Limerick Forest is approximately 5800 hectares in area and supports many varieties of flora and fauna on a range of sites including plantations, wetlands and natural forests. The forest is enjoyed by many people for various recreational pursuits including hiking, bird watching, dog walking, horseback riding, mountain bike riding, motorcycling, ATV-riding and hunting. The forest has also served as a classroom for a number of generations of children who have been introduced to environmental studies such as biology, botany and forestry during their visits to the old Limerick Chalet and the surrounding trails.

Over the years Limerick Forest has benefited from the efforts of many organizations including the Ministry of Natural Resources, Grenville Land Stewardship Council, United Counties of Leeds & Grenville, Limerick Forest Advisory Committee, the Friends of Limerick Forest and many more.

This story of the past 70 years in the life of Limerick forest is dedicated to all those people and organizations, past and present, who have not only strived to make Limerick forest a shining example of a sustainably managed, community forest, but who have also in doing so, formed the foundation for its future!

I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this extremely interesting account of our community forest!

Sincerely,

W.L. (Bill) Thake
Warden

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With thanks – Valerie Kirkwood, 2010

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Thousands of Years in the Making

Eleven thousand years ago, this part of Canada groaned under the unimaginable weight of kilometer-thick continental glaciers. These huge masses of ice were so heavy that they fractured and depressed the earth's crust. In some places, the ice scoured the underlying rocks bare, carrying boulders kilometers from their place of origin. As the climate warmed and the ice retreated, gravel and sand became sorted and deposited by the rushing meltwaters. Waters from the Atlantic Ocean came up the sunken St. Lawrence River valley and filled the depressed land with a shallow, brackish sea – the Champlain Sea. Beaches formed along the edges of this sea, as did some sand dune formations above the shoreline.

Slowly the bedrock, relieved of the weight of the glaciers, grumbled and shuddered its way upward toward its pre-glacial level. This process, called isostatic rebound is what causes earthquakes in this part of the country. As the land rose, the brackish waters of the Champlain Sea became increasingly shallow at each stage leaving small, relic shorelines behind until eventually the sea vanished altogether.

The first plants to colonize the areas close to the retreating glaciers were typical of what we see in the tundra areas today. Lichens, willows, grasses and sedges were able to gain a toehold on the raw mineral sands, silts and clays, devoid of organic matter, left by the retreating glaciers. Scientists can determine the types of plants which existed at an earlier time in an area by studying the pollen trapped in sediment layers at the bottom of lakes. By these limnological studies, they have been able to tell us that tundra birch, alder and juniper gave way to spruce and poplar, which in turn gave way to pine and hemlock. As the climate continued to warm, trees from the southern, unglaciated areas were able to survive farther and farther north. Over time, hardwoods made their way into the area and became the dominant forest type, mixed with pine, cedar and hemlock on sites more suitable to their growth type. In rare cases remnants of the earlier forest, dominated by hemlock and black spruce can be found on very unique sites. These sites also harbour plants and animals which are seldom seen in the mixed forest.

Thousands of years of plant growth, decay, and other soil-building forces such as freeze-thaw cycles and chemical weathering led to the development of soils, often containing abundant organic matter. The true nature of the underlying geology – the scoured rock and the sands modified by water and wind – lay hidden under a canopy of vegetation.

Green to Brown – Less than Two Centuries

Recently, in geological terms of thinking, this part of eastern Ontario was covered by mature mixed hardwood forests comprised mainly of sugar maple, elm, beech, basswood and hemlock, interspersed with areas of wetland and occasional remnant forests of black spruce and hemlock, reminders of a cooler time in the post-glacial period. Some of the wet areas contained peat and sphagnum moss.

Various Aboriginal groups made use of the forest for hunting and gathering. A large settlement of Iroquoians was located near the present village of Roebuck. This group of about 1600 people would certainly have used the resources of what we now call Limerick Forest on a daily basis. They also had an agricultural system growing mainly beans, corn and squash. Several of the main roads which run through Limerick's boundaries were built on Aboriginal trails.

It was at Merrickville in 1794, at a set of rapids on the Rideau River, that William Merrick built a water-powered saw mill. Thus began the European exploitation of the area's forests.

The forest had existed in "climax" state for century upon century. Trees reached old age, died and rotted on the forest floor. The forest floor was deep with duff – rotting wood and leaves in all states of decomposition. Storm winds blew down groups of trees or sometimes, large swaths of forest. Fires from lightning burned through the area, more frequently on the shallow soils. New seedlings sprang up in their wake. To the Europeans, these forests must have seemed vast and interminable.

The most enterprising saw incredible opportunities in harvesting the huge white pines and oaks for the ship yards of England. Tree scalers, very nimble and brave men, would climb the tallest tree in an area and note the locations of other tall trees in the vicinity. They would then direct the loggers to these trees. Thus was the forest divested very quickly of the biggest and best of its trees.

European settlement in the Limerick Forest area began in earnest in the 1840s with the coming of Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine in their homeland. Many were from the County of Limerick in Ireland. It is said that Andrew Forsythe who settled on a 200 acre tract of land south of Bishops Mills in 1868, named the area in its honour. Although the land was granted rather than sold to the settlers, one condition of many of the land grants was that 12 acres of land had to be cleared within 5 years or the settler would lose title to the land. Sometimes land was sold several times before a family made a successful farming enterprise.

The settlers had walked from the shores of the St. Lawrence carrying everything they owned on their backs, including the seeds for the crops they hoped to grow. In those early days they had no horses, no oxen. Clearing the land must have been a daunting task. The settlers first houses, built from logs were nothing more than rough shanties to provide immediate shelter. They would build a better log house, sometimes on a stone foundation in a few years and only if they prospered. The remnants of these stone foundations can be seen scattered throughout Limerick today.

Ruins of an old farm house in Limerick North.
Photo by Geoff McVey.

The settlers had to plant a crop in order to survive the winter, and in order to plant a crop and prove their title to the land they had to get rid of the trees. Trees were everywhere, except in the marshes. Tamarac populated the sandy hills. Aside from maples which were valuable for their syrup and wild plums which provided a bountiful harvest of delicious fruit, trees were the enemy and had to be eradicated. The best of the trees were taken to sawmills to be used for boards and furniture-making. Cedar was cut and split for shingles. The rest were burned.

At times, the air must have been full of the smell of the smoke of these burning trees in areas which were being settled. Although money could be had in the selling of the resulting 'potash', fire was a dangerous weapon in the war against the forest. Wildfires sometimes resulted from these unrestricted burnings of tree limbs and debris. For the first few years, the settlers managed by sowing around the stumps of their forest foes and when they had the time or the inclination, the stumps, too, were set afire. The stumps burned and so, too did the organic matter in the soil surrounding them. The settlers were inadvertently and unknowingly destroying the only commodity which these shallow or sandy soils had to offer.

> *"... all grown over with large trees, some fresh and green, others half rotten and a great many rotten from top to bottom, and almost as many lying in all directions as are standing, with not a living creature to be seen or heard except a bird or two, and the owl screaming in your ears at night."*
>
> Account by an early settler

At first, the soils probably produced reasonable crops when the weather favoured them. Encouraged, the settlers cleared more land. Stones which the glaciers had left behind hampered the plowing efforts and the settlers dug them out and used them for fences. The settlers put in year upon year of back-breaking work but it was all for naught. The remaining organic matter in the soil rapidly depleted. Crops failed.

The soil in Limerick South developed from the sand dunes and beach remnants of the Champlain Sea, with no trees roots or crop cover to hold it in place, began to blow away. Very soon, any remnant of the organic layers was gone and the bright yellow of the nearly biologically sterile sands lay exposed to the elements. In Limerick North, on part of what we now call the Smiths Falls Limestone Plain, the shallow soils over the solid, glacier-scoured bedrock dried out quickly in the summer heat. Here too the crops failed. With no trees and no crops to make use of the precipitation which fell on the area, the water table rose and the marshy areas expanded, adding more difficulties to the farmers' burdens.

The settlers were a hardy lot, often organizing work bees to help each other build fences and barns. The area in Limerick South in the vicinity of Ferguson, Forsythe and Cooper Roads was named "Shanty Knoll" because of the number of small houses crowded together in that location. Although nothing remains of this settlement today, there must have been some interesting times there when Limerick was more heavily populated. In a publication entitled 'Limerick Forest, Established 1940, (undated)' Delmar Robinson, a long-time employee of the MNR and a lifetime resident of Limerick reports "David and Jack (Forsythe) were known to shoot at each other through their windows during arguments".

Less than a century after these European settlers had arrived, many of the farms in Limerick became unproductive. The young people moved away searching for better employment. Soon many properties were in arrears with their taxes. Often, the families just up and abandoned the land, leaving it to the wind and the tax man. Frequently, the buildings themselves were sold and moved off of the property to be used as sheds or barns by the new buyer. Very little remains to show for the efforts on most of these abandoned farmsteads save for the occasional overgrown foundation or portions of some stone fences.

In Limerick South, the wind blew the sand into dunes. The blowing sand was so bad that at times it was difficult to see to drive the roads. In Limerick North, a few buckthorn bushes or apple trees gone wild from around the old farmsteads struggled to find rooting room in fissures in the bedrock. With nearly all of the original forest cover gone save for a few remnants in small woodlots or on knolls in some of the nearly inaccessible marshy areas, there was no seed source to regenerate larger vegetation. The land must have been a sorry sight; used up, abandoned and unwanted.

> *"Limerick North was like a desert. Grass would come up in the spring, but it would burn off in the heat of the summer. Everything was all dry and brown."*
>
> Alf Campbell, Forester (Retired)

Glimmers of Green – An Agreement Forest

Leeds and Grenville was not the only county facing the problem of abandoned farms and degraded soils. In parts of south western Ontario, where settlement had taken place a few decades earlier than in Limerick, the problem of soil degradation on extensive sandy areas especially on the shores of Lake Erie, had arisen that much earlier.

In 1908 a forester by the name of Edmund J. Zavitz wrote the report "Reforestation of Waste Lands in Southern Ontario". This would soon lead to the Reforestation Act of 1921 and eventually the establishment of the Agreement Forest Program. The purpose of these "Agreement Forests" was to stop soil erosion on vulnerable areas and to promote the development of productive forests. As part of these Agreements, there was no charge for seedlings obtained from the provincial tree nurseries which were growing the planting stock to reforest these areas. The Department of Lands and Forests (later named the Ministry of Natural Resources) would manage the lands under agreement.

As early as 1936, the Counties Council of Leeds and Grenville began discussing the feasibility of turning some of these abandoned lands into a conservation area. In August of 1939, Frank Simmons, a forester with the Ontario Department of Agriculture, Forestry Branch, made a survey of the lands under discussion, and found them suitable for the reforestation plan. Victor Purvis, then Reeve of "Yonge Front" headed a committee comprised of, in part, J. R. Ostler and H. G. McLeod, agricultural representatives for Leeds and Grenville respectively, to further study the issue. In November 1939, Counties Council accepted a report on the feasibility of the project.

There were still a few legal hurdles to overcome. The ownership of the lands which had been seized due to tax arrears had to be validated. This was done by Purvis, Reeve J.G. Langstaff of Kemptville and Reeve Gordon Myers of North Crosby. During the winter of 1939 - 1940, the Counties assumed ownership of 1100 acres of land.

Ruler given to each family at the Tree Planting Ceremony, 1940: Courtesy of Ralph Streight.

December 14, 1939

Agricultural Committee Studies the Map.

Frank Simmons, Forestry Branch, Toronto, (sitting) left' is showing the location of the proposed counties forest in Grenville County. Sitting, also, are Victor Purvis, Chairman of the Committee (centre), and Wm. Jelly, Clerk of Leeds and Grenville. Standing, left to right: J. R. Ostler, Agricultural Representative for Leeds; Gordon Myers, Reeve of North Crosby; Carl Reilly, Deputy Reeve of Edwardsburgh; Wilfred Weir, Reeve of Augusta; Frank Latourell, Reeve of South Gower.

Leeds and Grenville Plan a County Forest.

Waste Land in Three Adjacent Townships Will be Planted—Tax-deliquent Property Will be Put to Good Use—Council Appoints Committee to Secure Options.

Photo courtesy UCLG (Farmers Advocate).

On April 24th, 1940 the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville (UCLG) entered into the Agreement Forest program with the Department of Lands and Forests. The official dedication of the new County forest was held on May 14, and the first tree was planted by United Counties Warden, E.A. Connor.

The purpose of the agreement was to reforest the abandoned lands in order to control soil erosion, provide wood and wood products, enhance wildlife habitat, protect source waters, and to provide opportunities for recreational activities. The initial agreement was for 20 years but with extensions the program lasted a total of 61 years,

Re-Greening Begins

In the early years of Limerick Forest, thousands of trees were planted by planting crews, Boy Scouts and school children. For years, Mr. Charlie Timanus of the local school board organized a “tree planting day” for the Grade 7 and 8 students from Brockville and the surrounding area. Timanus would provide information on how many classes were coming and how many students per class and the Kiwanis Club would arrange the transportation. Prior to planting day, the school teachers would give a lesson to their class about the benefits of reforestation. On planting day the students arrived in a big caravan of buses at around 10:00 in the morning. They were expected to bring their own shovels and pails.

Based on Timanus’s numbers, the Lands and Forests staff would have prepared a 10 to 15 acre planting site by plowing furrows and staking out where each class would work. If the site was dry, the trees would be planted down in the furrow; if it was wet, they were planted on the up-turned sod.

All available Lands and Forests staff, technicians, conservation officers, foresters, etc., were recruited to help supervise this flurry of activity. They would demonstrate for each class the proper way to plant the trees, and later check to make sure that the trees were well planted. Usually white spruce or red pine was planted.

Photo courtesy of UCLG.

This was a very popular program, with as many as 700 students participating at once, planting 10,000 trees in one and a half hours! The children had a great time during this day off of school, working and eating lunch outside. For their efforts, they were rewarded with milk and ice cream at lunch time; and of course the thrill of knowing that they were doing a good thing for these impoverished lands for generations yet to come.

These plantings survived surprisingly well despite the lack of planting skills of the enthusiastic school children. Unfortunately, there is no written documentation of where and in what year these plantings were made.

Limerick Expands

Forester Alf Campbell began to work with the Department of Lands and Forests in 1956 as a Reforestation Officer. Part of his job was to recommend to Counties Council which lands should be purchased to add to Limerick’s land base. Families were still leaving the farm and some land was purchased for as little as 50 cents to $1.00 per acre. At that time, even $5.00 might have been too steep a price to be acceptable, although later in the 1960s, some parcels were purchased at $15 - $20 per acre. Land purchases all but ceased in the 1970s.

There were certain criteria for the purchases. Sandy or wet land in proximity to existing portions of Limerick was favoured. Later, some isolated blocks of special interest were added to the inventory. Today, Limerick Forest is approximately 5,782 ha (14,287 acres) in area and has 175 compartments.

The Communities of Limerick Forest

Limerick South

At one time, many people called the Limerick South area home. ***McReynolds*** *and* ***O'Reilly's Hill*** *to the north and* ***Shanty Knoll*** *were the named places. Shanty Knoll, located in the area of Ferguson and Cooper roads, was large enough to support Goodin's Protestant Church at the corner of Forsythe and Ferguson roads. Shanty Knoll School was located on the north east corner of the intersection of Ferguson and Cooper Roads. Both were built in the early 1900s. The community was at its peak between 1918 and 1930. Potatoes were a favourite crop on the sandy soils. They were taken to market in Prescott. Milk went to Sanderson's factory in Oxford Station or to the Roebuck Cheese & Butter Factory. At one time, hops which grew on tall poles were cultivated. Some were sold and some were used for moonshining. People often worked very hard to try to make ends meet. The holes for the first line of hydro towers which crosses Limerick South were dug by hand. The wires were tightened by a teamster with a horse.*

> *"Limerick Forest is full of basements"*
>
> Delmar Robinson, life-long Limerick area resident and 30-year "Limerick employee".

Ralph Streight, long-time Limerick area resident, remembers going to the Shanty Knoll School. He recalls that every day children would draw water from the Typhair farm across the road to the west for use in the school. At lunch in the winter time, children would go sledding on the sand hills across the road to the south. The school population varied widely, with as many as 35 children attending in the winter when their help wasn't needed on the family farms.

The school was closed by 1940. Now all that remains is an easily-overlooked square foundation wall amidst a maturing stand of pines. Goodin's church burned so the parishioners went to East Oxford. Shanty Knoll, deep in the worst of the sandy soils was the first to succumb to the economic pressures of the time. A few farms on slightly better soil on the northern fringes hung on for a while and some remain even today, but the heart of the community has long since vanished.

Three generations of the Streight family were born in this house in Limerick. Photo courtesy of Ralph Streight.

What happened to the buildings? Made of logs and wood, these buildings often succumbed to fire. Quite a few were sold separately from the property when a family decided to leave. The buildings were moved to other locations to serve as barns or other outbuildings.

The names of some of the early families in the area have been preserved in the naming of roads and trails within the present day forest. Family names include, McReynolds, Cooper, Typhair, Beulah, Forsythe, Tait, Robinson, Boyd, Kinch, O'Reilly and Cotton.

Limerick North

Newmanville fared much better than Shanty Knoll and still exists today. It was prosperous enough to have a post office, blacksmith shop, cheese factory, church and two schools. One of these was built of brick in 1914 at a cost of $2,300. This school closed in 1941 and was sold for use as a house.

The better success of this community may be due to nearby Deeks Quarry, which in its hey-day employed as many as 200 men. Operations peaked in 1926 and shut down in 1932. During WW II the quarry was reopened. Fourteen railway line spurs held boxcars of supplies including airplane fuselages and wings. These boxcars could be shunted onto the main tracks at a moment's notice and be in Halifax the next day.

The huge marsh west of Newmanville was a popular place for picking huckleberries (lowland blueberries). People would come from miles around to gather these delicious berries for eating and preserving. Access was difficult through the swamp, sphagnum and brush and a local guide was almost always needed. Sometimes heifers would wander into "Dead Man's Marsh", and would never be seen again. Huckleberries still grow in Limerick North and South, though locations and access are well-guarded local secrets.

The Green Learning Curve

Reforestation in Limerick didn't always go smoothly. Limerick North with its shallow soils over bedrock had an additional serious problem. The soil was full of the white grub larvae of June beetles. Taking two or more years to mature and emerge as a flying insect, they would over-winter in the fissures of the bedrock and eat voraciously during the spring of the year prior to emerging as an adult insect. They ate the roots of the seedlings killing them quickly. There was also a problem with the red pine sawfly, which ate the needles of the trees. DDT curtailed the sawflies. Aldrin, a granular, easy to handle insecticide was very effective against the white grubs. When using Aldrin, the planting teams consisted of 3 people; one to dig the hole, one to spoon in a dose of Aldrin, and one to plant the tree. DDT and Aldrin are now banned from use.

The seed source of the seedlings used in the tree planting programs also varied. Tree nurseries were established throughout Ontario near railways for shipping and on sandy soils to prevent frost heaving damage to the seedlings. According to Alf Campbell, the very earliest seedlings planted in Limerick Forest likely came from the provincial nurseries in Midhurst, near Barrie, or Orono, located just east of Oshawa. Once the G. Howard Ferguson Forest Station opened in Kemptville in 1945, the bulk of the seedlings came from there although some planting stock also came from Petawawa.

Generally, it is preferable to reforest using seedlings that come from the same climate zone. Jack pine is a very tolerant tree and although it doesn't naturally occur farther south than Petawawa, it can do well on more difficult sites in other areas where other types of trees might not survive. Although these trees came from farther north, they initially did well in Limerick especially on the dry, shallow sites. The best performer in terms of planting survival and overall growth however was and remains red pine.

Occasionally when planting crews ran short of trees from nearby Kemptville, additional seedlings would have to be brought in from St. Williams. The growing season in St. Williams was two weeks earlier than in Limerick, so the seedlings would arrive in a more advanced, tender state of development and did not survive as well.

Packing and storage techniques for the seedlings also improved dramatically over the decades. Initially, the bare-root seedlings were packed root to root and surrounded with peat moss (some of Limerick's peat was used by the Ferguson Forest Station), then layered with paper and enclosed in burlap. A stick was stuck through the package to help with the handling and then the bales were pulled tight with wire to keep the contents air tight.

These bales were taken to the planting site where a trench had been prepared in which to store the seedlings. The bales were opened and the seedlings were put into the trench and covered with soil until they were needed. This was known as "healing in" the seedlings.

"Tree Planting Day" in Limerick. Photo courtesy of UCLG.

Eventually the use of local cold storage facilities improved on the trench system. Limerick planting crews used a cold storage area in a converted cheese factory (Sanderson's) in Oxford Station. The seedlings were picked up at the nursery on a daily basis and moved to the cold storage. Planting survival improved from 50-80%.

Newly established pine plantations generally did quite well without the use of weed control. It was found however, that with seedlings planted in a band to which herbicide had been previously applied, the planting crews could get the seedlings into the ground earlier and with better overall survival. Unfortunately, sometimes an area would have to be planted 3 or 4 times before the right combination of tree species, site and forestry technique(s) was found.

Buried Treasure

Back at the turn of the 20th century roads were not as navigable as they are today. The roads had been made by horse-drawn scrapers and specialized wagons with moveable planks in the bottom to unload stone. In the low, wet areas, corduroy road was built but it was very rough to travel. There were huge mud holes in which motorized vehicles often got stuck and in the spring, water would flood over the roads. These roads were suitable only for low-speed traffic. In fact in the winter, it was common for people to drive their teams of horses and sleighs through the fields rather than attempt the rutted, drifted roads

During Alf Campbell's tenure in Limerick, special government funds became available for forest access roads. Work began on the main north-south road (now called Forsythe Road), moving north from the Roebuck end.

Men hired from the local community dismantled the stone fences left behind on the failed farms and trucked them to the work site to use for a better road bed in the wet areas.

The original version of Forsythe Road generally followed the rolling contours of the land. The work crews endeavoured to level it out. They dug through the first two sand dunes, and filled in the low spots.

The third sand dune was a bit of a conundrum to the foresters. The native forest had contained white pine (Alf Campbell has seen remnants of huge stumps there), but the replanting had been done with red pine. Campbell had wondered why those trees weren't doing so well; the trees looked chlorotic (yellow) and there was also a problem with a pine beetle infestation in the same area. However the road workers found the real answer; gravel.

The whole hill was gravel, covered by a thin layer of sand. This gravel was packed so tightly that the trees couldn't reach through with their tap roots to the water table.

To Limerick and the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, it was "buried gold".

Now the road builders had an easy source of materials right at hand. Gravel from this pit was used in the construction of many of the roads in Limerick South. Since then Augusta Township has used gravel from this pit for other road projects adding additional Limerick-based revenue to the United Counties coffers. As well, the sloping sides of the pit have become a favourite area for many recreational activities such as motocross and ATVs in the summer, and sledding in the winter.

A Community Employer

Tree planting provided much needed income to many local families. The tree planting window was small, only a few weeks during April and May. The planters were supplied with an insect repellent called 6-12 to protect them from the hordes of black flies and mosquitoes.

During the hey-day of tree planting in Limerick, from 1940 to the mid-1970s, as many as 80 people would be employed on the planting crews, which worked not only in Limerick, but on private, Woodlot Improvement Act properties throughout the Counties.

The planting crews were initially all-male crews and worked in pairs or trios, depending on whether insecticide was being applied at the time of planting. A farmer with a horse and plow was employed to turn the planting furrows.

Alf Campbell instituted mixed planting teams of one man and one woman in each team. The man would dig the hole and the woman would carry and plant the trees. He found that quality control increased because the women wouldn't plant unless the hole was at the proper depth and spacing. Some years later, Campbell introduced the change from a daily rate of pay to piece-work pay, and subsequently the planting rate increased.

"Most people, when they see Limerick today, think that the trees have always been there, and have always been this big. They have no idea what it takes to grow a forest from seedlings."

Alf Campbell, Forester (Retired)

With access to various types of government funding, the Lands & Forests/MNR was able to hire many seasonal workers, and several full-time staff. There was always work to be done in the forest. In addition to the day-to-day forestry operations, old, broken farm equipment was hauled away from the abandoned farmsteads and sold for scrap. Some was left behind however, as evidenced by the archaeological study completed on the site of the Limerick gravel pit in 2001. The surveyors found the remains of two pre-1920 vehicles, several fence lines and two piles of cans and bottles. Despite the presence of lilac bushes which usually denote an old farmstead, no traces of buildings were found.

Keeping Limerick Green and Growing

Managing Limerick Forest for optimum health and productivity required a great deal of labour-intensive work. There were numerous tasks which needed to be completed on a regular basis. From time to time, particularly when the economy slowed down in the 1980s and early 1990s, government funding became available to aid employment. The managers of Limerick Forest took advantage of this to hire workers and summer students to complete many of these seasonal operations and maintenance tasks.

Pruning

When funding and manpower permitted, work crews would cut the lower branches off of young white pine trees to increase the amount of knot-free lumber the tree would produce in its lifetime. Studies have shown that such pruning is often a good economic investment. Pruning is normally carried out in one or more stages up to a height of 5.2 m (17 ft.). In plantations where thinning would remove every third row, only the two rows which were to remain were pruned. Generally, two men worked at the task, one with a hand saw for the lower branches and one with a pole saw to reach the higher ones. More money was paid to the workers who pruned spruce than those who pruned pine because the wood was denser and usually had to be pruned with an axe. Workers learned quickly that pruning outside rows was not a preferred option. The outside limbs which benefited from the increased exposure to sunlight were much thicker and harder to cut.

Thinning: How and Why

Limerick Forest was originally planted at very high densities, in part because the foresters were not sure how many seedlings would survive, so they wanted to err on the side of caution. Occasionally there were more seedlings than land available to plant them on, so the planting density seemed to "tighten up" the further one got away from the roads. These dense plantations needed to be thinned at regular intervals. This was done in order to provide space for the best trees to grow to market size and to allow the understory to develop into the next generation of crop trees.

For example, the red pine plantation behind the old Chalet was established in 1940. In 1972 this plantation was thinned by removing every third row to provide additional growing space to the remaining trees and to allow machinery to move within the stand in future operations. In addition, some trees were selectively cut from the remaining rows. After this thinning, the remaining red pines put on a growth spurt as more nutrients and sunlight became available due to the loss of their neighbouring competitors.

In 1982 a second thinning removed selected trees from the plantation. Hardwoods are now starting to grow in the understory. In the near future after 1-2 more thinning operations only the final crop trees will remain. Other trees will be removed from around them to give them room to grow. Perhaps a very few will be selected to remain to spread their seed for the next generation of forest cover in Limerick. The final forest will be mostly hardwoods with a few scattered pines and other conifer trees, much like what was here before the Europeans arrived.

In plantations with access problems, the thinned trees were just dropped and allowed to rot on the forest floor, thus recycling their nutrients to the remaining trees. In more accessible areas, every attempt was made to find markets for the thinned wood. Occasionally, government-sponsored economic development programs have allowed thinning to be carried on when no markets were available.

> *"I don't think that to this day all of the people involved truly appreciate how much their individual contributions to Limerick Forest were recognized and valued by others."*
>
> *Dave Chapeskie, Forester (Retired)*

Although logging contractors do not usually find it economically feasible to perform the early, pre-commercial thinning operations in small, privately owned woodlots, the large size of Limerick sometimes makes it possible to tender for thinning in larger, more economically viable units. Also, due to the age variation in the stands it is possible to tie the tender of some of the less valuable stands to ones of greater value to the loggers.

The wood market ebbs and flows with the economy. Producers are always looking for a destination for their wood, particularly for firewood and pulpwood. Some markets have recently developed for small dimension timber. This is an important development for Limerick because red pine in particular must be thinned at an earlier age than white pine. In fact if it is not thinned, it does not reach its growth potential and eventually stagnates, losing its value. Plantations receiving the benefit of timely and appropriate thinning operations will produce larger trees which are marketable as saw logs and poles. Potential markets down the road may include wood pellet fuel, pallets and biofuel.

Wildlife and Water Levels

As in many places, Limerick has had its share of problems with beavers, which if left unchecked can cause flooding on roads or in plantations. In the past, ditching dynamite (a series of charges initiated by lighting the first charge), was used to blow problem dams. Today, trappers continue to harvest beavers and a variety of protective cages and beaver baffles are used to protect particularly vulnerable culverts.

Porcupines have been a problem particularly in young plantations. Alf Campbell recalls shooting as many as 20 per day during winter tree pruning operations.

Ducks Unlimited Sign, 2006.
Photo by Geoff McVey.

In 1998, a 30 year agreement was undertaken with Ducks Unlimited to stabilize the water levels and help rejuvenate the wetland vegetation in the 9.3 ha wetland behind the old Limerick Chalet. In the past, the water level would change drastically from flooded to almost dry. Now it is managed via boards in the control structure, allowing for consistent water levels thus providing habitat for many species of birds and wildlife such as Mallards, Blue-Winged Teal, Wood Ducks and Canada Geese. Turtles have also found this pond suitable for breeding and nesting.

Wildlife populations have changed through the years as the land use changed from abandoned fields to young and eventually mature plantations. Hunting is allowed in Limerick which supports a number of hunt camps, as well as being a venue for transient hunters of deer, wild turkey and waterfowl.

Fire and Water

Limerick Forest has been fortunate not to have had a problem with fire. It was prudent however, to develop and maintain a fire plan for the forest. This included in the very early days using a tractor and disks to create a fire break around new plantations. Fire ponds were created in strategic locations. Often these were natural ponds which were deepened by blasting so that they would hold enough water to be useful for fire-fighting efforts.

Trails and Recreation

Limerick has always been used as a recreational area by the local community and today it is visited by people from much further away for special rallies and events. Forester Alf Campbell was an enthusiastic promoter of outdoor activities. At one time the staff of Limerick provided track-set trails for cross country skiing and groomed trails for snowmobiles. Care of those trails has now been taken over by the local snowmobile association.

The “Alf Campbell” Trail.
Photo by Geoff McVey.

At the moment, recreational trail use is concentrated mainly in the South Tract with an increasing number of dirt bike and ATV users. Trail use by all user groups continues to increase every year and work has now begun on expanding and publicizing the trail network in the North Tract. Other forms of recreation occurring in Limerick Forest include mountain biking, horse-back riding, cross country skiing, hiking and dog walking. Geocaching is a relatively new and growing activity that is also drawing people to Limerick Forest.

Limerick Forest is considered a “working forest” in the 20 Year FMP. However Counties Council also recognizes that Limerick has many potential user groups and remains committed to the current multi-use philosophy. Maintaining the balance between the various forest users, keeping the trails from succumbing to over use and protecting the many other forest “values” is a constant challenge for staff.

The Limerick School

The Limerick School was an iconic building in the forest for many years. It was built in 1876 and was attended by as many as 35 students. It combined S.S. 20 for students from Oxford Township, and S.S. 22 for students from Edwardsburg. The school had neither electricity nor running water. Students carried water every day from the Forsythe farm across the road. Outhouses were out back. There was a ball diamond on the front lawn and two maple trees graced the front of the property, one on each front corner of the lawn, only one of which remains today.

Mrs. Mae Beulah was the last to teach in Limerick School before it closed. Mrs. Beulah, nee Kinch, grew up on the farm at the corner of Beulah Road, and married her neighbour, Sam Beulah, who lived and farmed at the end of Beulah Road. Jean Newans taught music at the Limerick School in the years before it closed in 1958. She recalls that she would have 1/2 hour at Limerick School, once per week. The Limerick School did not have a piano; the students had to make do with rhythm instruments that Newans carried from school to school in her car. For her travels, Newans initially drove a 1932 Model A Ford 2 door car. Mrs. Beulah was driven to school by her husband in a horse-drawn buggy. The roads, apparently, were phenomenally bad.

Limerick Chalet, Post MNR. Photo courtesy of UCLG.

Limerick School, 1956. Teacher Mrs. Mae Beulah, centre rear. Back (L-R): Barb McReynolds, Gordon McReynolds, Unknown, Gary Spiro, Ruby Robinson, Delmar Robinson. Centre: Allen Robinson, Eddy Barber, Larry Barber. Front: Unknown, Clarence Robinson, Faye Barber.
Photo by Jean Newans.

Area children had good memories of Tree Planting Day in Limerick Forest. Lionel and Janet Mohr of Oxford St ation enjoyed the excitement of getting ready for the bus ride, likely their own Blair bus, and planting trees with children from other schools. Carol Crozier from S.S. No. 8, Oxford Mills wrote: "Arbor Days were good (a day for tidying the school yard), but the occasional jaunts to plant trees for reforestation projects were better. The times we went to Limerick Forest stick with me especially." The school closed in 1958, with the few remaining students going to Bishop's Mills school or the Brown School. Mrs. Beulah moved to Kemptville and taught at the Mills School until 1964.

Several years after the school closed, the Department of Lands and Forests got permission to use the building, which was besi de their Limerick garage complex, for storing tools. In 1964, it became office space and in 1974 wings were added on each side of the main building to accommodate additional staff. It became known as the Chalet because of its long, sloping roofs. Forest workers have many fond memories of social events which took place there after hours.

The new Limerick Forest Interpretive Centre.
Photo by Valerie Kirkwood.

When management responsibility for Limerick Forest returned to the Counties the Chalet had been closed and boarded up for some time. It was soon re-opened and used for LFAC meetings, Open Houses and other meetings. However, lacking proper air circulation and winter heating, problems developed with mould contamination as well as bats and bat guano in the attic. These problems were serious enough that the building was no longer safe to use and was closed in 2007.

In the autumn of 2009, the decision was made to tear down the old school and build anew. With funding from the Federal Government's Action Plan Canada economic stimulus program via the National Trails Coalition, matched by the UCLG, the new Limerick Forest Interpretive Centre was erected during the winter of 2009-2010. What makes it special is that the red pine building logs and the white pine used for flooring were harvested from Limerick plantations just down the road. Many local businesses have contributed to the finishing touches. This beautiful building is designed with meetings and public outreach in mind and should serve the Limerick Forest community for many decades to come.

Forest Operations

Managing a fully operational forestry program for a 5800 ha county forest was a tremendous undertaking. Although the program was administered out of various District Lands & Forests / MNR offices over the years, the heart of the operation was the garage. For 30 years, Delmar Robinson, a life-long Limerick resident worked out of the garage and maintained all the various vehicles and equipment used in the program.

The garage was centred in a cluster of other buildings to the east of the old Limerick school house. Some were purpose- built and others had been moved from the grounds of the Kemptville College of Agricultural Technology. The latter were chain sawed through the walls at the corners and were reconstructed out in Limerick. In 1964, an office was created to assist with the day-to-day running of the program. It was situated in the old Limerick schoolhouse. After wings were added onto the sides of the building in 1974 and the roof extended in long lines to cover them, it was re-named "The Chalet".

During busy summers, as many as ten vehicles would be stationed there. During the winter, the fleet was reduced to 3 or 4, including a plow truck and a tractor. Robinson's favourite tasks were driving the big trucks and trailers for moving equipment, or plowing for tree planting.

Robinson takes great pride in having worked in his own neighbourhood for the betterment of the people in the county. He was responsible for training seasonal workers and summer students in the correct use of chain saws and ensuring they were properly certified to use MNR vehicles and other equipment. He found many inventive ways to keep summer students in line and working conscientiously and safely. He also took great joy in breaking in newly-minted, certified foresters in the day-to-day realities of working in the field.

Often, it seemed like it was a full time job to maintain the facilities and the forest so people could enjoy them. There continued to be problems of senseless vandalism and theft including smashed water pumps, outhouses destroyed or stolen, vehicles drained of oil or stolen and left running at the side of the road, and theft of chainsaws and other tools. Garbage dumping was and is still a problem today.

One of the most unusual items found in the forest by Limerick workers was a safe, still locked. It was turned over to the police and the employees never did find out what it contained.

Robinson is a great believer in handling situations himself where possible, rather than taking things to a higher level of administration. He says, with a chuckle, "If I told the bosses everything that happened, I'd be on the carpet for the next 40 years!" Robinson was successful at his job; no major accidents occurred on his watch.

A life-long connection to Limerick: Delmar Robinson stands in front of the new Limerick Forest Interpretive Centre. The red pine logs and white pine for flooring were grown in Limerick on land which used to belong to his mother. Photo by Valerie Kirkwood.

Showcasing Limerick

Counties Council Tours
Starting in the 1980s bus tours were planned for members of the Counties Council and other interested groups. These education and awareness tours provided excellent opportunities to discuss natural resource management issues and programs with local politicians, who could then take this information back with them to address the questions and needs of their local taxpayers.

These tours would stop at different locations each year so that a variety of management techniques could be discussed. Details of the geology, soil, species of trees planted, past and future management plans, and costs and expected economic returns were part of the discussions at each site. Demonstrations of various forestry techniques such as pruning were also often part of the day.

Forest Management Trail
This 3 km trail, developed in 1985 behind the Chalet, was designed through the efforts of an Environment 2000 project. The trail was originally designed to highlight various forest management techniques used throughout the forest.

Official Opening of the Forest Management Trail.
Photo courtesy of MNR/UCLG.

As the forest has changed over time, the original interpretive signs became dated and have since been removed. Limerick volunteers are in the process of developing a new set of interpretive signs which will soon be posted along this trail, now known as the "Chalet Loop". The highlight of the trail is the boardwalk located in the NW corner of the property. It was built by County staff and members of two different federal government employment programs in 2003-04 and 2005-06. Lumber used in the board-walk was milled from cedar cut in nearby Limerick compartments.

Open House
More recently, an annual Open House has been held in the autumn of the year. This event, open to the public attracts hundreds of people interested in their community forest and the activities which take place within it. During the Open House visitors can take a guided tour to see plantations and hardwood forests in various stages of growth and can also visit displays sponsored by some of the many forest user groups.

Envirothon
High school environmental competitions hosted by the Grenville and Leeds Land Stewardship Councils, the Ontario Forestry Association, the Eastern Ontario Model Forest and the United Counties are run out of the Chalet each April. The purpose of this annual event is to increase awareness of the environment in secondary school students. Competitions are held at the regional, provincial and North American level. The 2011 Envirothon will be hosted out of the new Limerick Forest Interpretive Centre.

The boardwalk - part of the "Chalet Loop" trail network located behind the new Interpretive Centre. Photo by Geoff McVey.

Limerick as a Research Venue

From the time of its inception, Limerick Forest has served as a forestry research area. In the early days it was "learn-as-you-go", insofar as which species of trees to plant, seedling handling and storage techniques, planting densities and other cultural practices. Just getting trees growing on the bare sand or grub-infested shallow soils was a feat in itself. Initially, there were not too many types of seedlings available to choose from. Later, as more species of seedlings became available the foresters were better able to match them to the various soil and moisture conditions. One of the major earlier efforts was the planting of white cedar on suitable sites.

It wasn't too long before actual experiments were designed and implemented. These included planting non-native species to see how they prospered in comparison to native species on the same site. Non-native species included European and Japanese larch, Norway spruce and Austrian pine. As it turned out, many of these non-natives, or "exotics" did not grow particularly well here and porcupines seemed to prefer them to native species.

Different harvesting methods were also tested. Strip cutting on shallow soils was tried to see if hardwoods would seed into the understory. This worked best if there was a hardwood seed source nearby. Planting hardwoods in the understory, although possible was rarely successful due to deer and rodent browsing.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, hybrid poplar clonal trials were established in several Limerick compartments to test the growth rates of various clones on specific soil types. This program ended in the early 1990s when the Domtar mill in Cornwall closed.

Limerick was home to a number of these "trials" because it was often easier to establish them on government-managed land than on privately owned properties, whose owners were more interested in managing their forest for specific end-products than for testing new technologies.

Limerick's size has proven to be an advantage in many cases. With its wide variety of soil types and moisture regimes, it can be used as a showcase to demonstrate to farmers and woodlot owners what can be done to reclaim wasteland or to improve existing stands.

Deep in the woods behind the new Interpretive Centre, just off of the "Chalet Loop" nature trail, a few wooden stakes mark the site of an acid rain study which was established in the 1980s. This plot, one of many scattered across Ontario, is now part of the Ontario Forest Biomonitoring Network and is visited on a regular basis by scientists studying the long term effects of regional air pollution and climate change on our forests. This study is now under the direction of the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Branch, Phytotoxicology Investigations Unit.

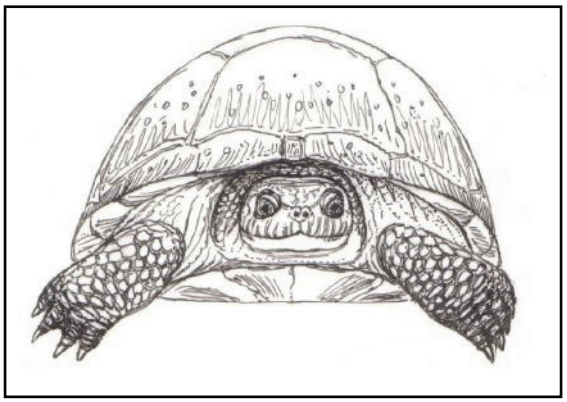
Ontario Forest Biomonitoring plot, Limerick Forest. Photo by Geoff McVey.

According to Dave Chapeskie, a retired District Forester with the MNR, general results indicate that acid rain has the potential to contribute to the decline of hardwoods, but frequently other factors such as soil texture, drainage and natural acidity, grazing by livestock, insects and disease, high-grading, severe weather episodes and climate conditions have a greater impact on trees.

Limerick has proven to be a good venue for long term research of other sorts, too. Dr. Fred Schueler of Bishops Mills has traveled the Limerick roads for more than 30 years studying the habits of frogs, toads, turtles and other wildlife. He notes that many types of amphibians call Limerick home, including, (in order of frequency): *Rana pipiens,* Leopard Frog, our most often seen frog; *Pseudacris crucifer,* Spring Peeper, our most often heard frog; *Rana sylvatica,* Wood Frog, the frog that breeds in quacking congresses in spring-filled forest ponds; *Bufo americanus,* American Toad, the rough-skinned garden toad that fills spring evenings with long trilling calls; *Rana clamitans,* Green Frog, the banjo-twang aquatic frog; *Rana septentrionalis,* Mink Frog, the shy hammer-blow aquatic frog; *Hyla versicolor,* Tetraploid Gray Treefrog; and *Rana catesbeiana,* Bull Frog.

Dr. Schueler's interests include breeding and migration habits of these frogs, natural and man-made over-winter hibernacula which he monitors on a regular basis, growth rate, colour variations, and effects of timing and duration of precipitation on mass movements of frogs.

Also found in Limerick are Garter, Redbelly, and Smooth Green snakes; Blue-spotted, Yellow-spotted and Eastern Redback salamanders; and Painted, Snapping and Blanding's turtles. Blanding's Turtles have only recently returned to Limerick Forest. This turtle is listed as a "Species at Risk" and is considered to be "Threatened" in Ontario. Dr. Schueler thinks that these turtles have benefitted from the rising water levels created by the increasing local beaver population. He notes that he started seeing the Blanding's Turtles on Limerick roads as adult females in the 1990s.



Drawing of Blanding's Turtle courtesy Aleta Karstad.

Over the past few years, Athens District High School has used Limerick Forest as a teaching and research venue. A biological study using Ecological Monitoring & Assessment Network (EMAN) protocols was established in Limerick compartment 174 by Athens District High School students under the direction of teachers Jim Wilson and Linda Ross. The students monitor for insect and disease incidence and vegetation changes in a white pine plantation as it is thinned over time as part of their "Natural Resource & Outdoor Studies" course. The students also clean and maintain Wood Duck boxes in February and count eggs in May.

This program is designated by the Ministry of Education as a "Specialist High Skills Major" (SHSM) focusing on the environment which makes it a full-day program earning the students 4 course credits towards their successful secondary school graduation. The UCLG is extremely pleased to be partners in this worthwhile initiative with the Athens District High School.

Limerick in Transition: The LFAC Years

In the mid-1990s, restructuring and downsizing in the MNR caused them to step back from their Agreement Forest commitments.

While the Agreement Forest program had helped to re-establish the forest, it also grew a huge operating deficit, incurred by the MNR. To help offset the expenditures, any revenues derived from the forest (e.g. harvesting) were applied against the accumulating debt. However, by the end of the program approximately $1,680,000 of accumulated debt remained.

These were challenging times for Limerick Forest. The Woodlands Improvement Act program was being shut down and the wood market was in decline. Domtar stopped taking pulpwood which had an economic and operational impact on Limerick. The spiral downward continued as layoffs followed and building maintenance and forest operations suffered.

In 1997 after the MNR announced its plan to drop the Agreement Forest program, the Grenville Land Stewardship Council approached the UCLG expressing their interest in playing a continuing role in the management of the Limerick lands through some form of landowner representation.

Ed Reynolds, who was MNR Area Supervisor at the time, linked up with Jack Henry, coordinator of the Grenville Land Stewardship Council. Between them, they tried to locate Limerick's records which had been dispersed to a number of different offices. It was a difficult job because they knew what records should have been there, but found that many had already been lost.

On March 21, 2001, over one hundred people attended a public meeting in Roebuck to lend their support to the proposal that Limerick Forest continue to be managed by the United Counties in conjunction with some type of public participation. On April 1, 2001, the UCLG assumed management of Limerick Forest after negotiations with the MNR concluded with them forgiving the outstanding debt against the forest.

> *"People wanted to know what had happened to Limerick forest. They wanted to get on board, to have input into its future."*
>
> Ed Reynolds, Limerick Forest Manager (Retired)

Reynolds, who helped create a new Limerick Forest program within the Counties, credits Jack Henry's assistance, the support of Les Shepherd (Director of Public Works, Planning Services and Asset Management, UCLG), and the hard work of Forest Technician Rob Ross for much of the success in getting the program started.

On June 27, 2001, the Limerick Forest Advisory Committee (LFAC) was officially formed with the goal: "To manage Limerick Forest on a sustainable basis for a wide variety of goods and services." LFAC consisted of members of the public and Counties Council, with interests in a wide variety of topics relative to Limerick Forest.

Five sub committees emerged from this meeting:

Harvesting/Commercial
Financial/Administrative/Planning
Recreation
Health (Ecosystems/Research)
Education (History/Outreach)

Five draft objectives were determined, based on input provided by the members:

1. Ensure Limerick Forest continues to provide a source of economic activity for local people;
2. Manage Limerick Forest effectively in order to maximize benefits to the UCLG;
3. Provide a wide range of quality recreational opportunities in a safe environment;
4. Protect the ecological features and values of Limerick Forest;
5. Provide outdoor education opportunities and to foster a strong understanding of sustainable resource management.

Gradually the program took shape as LFAC evolved into a working entity with a Terms of Reference and Ed Reynolds being hired as the County Forest Manager. Reynolds believes that the crowning achievement of LFAC was the bringing together of so many diverse people who had an interest in the Forest. This made a great impression on the politicians of the time who were for the most part, very supportive of the concept.

LFAC provided advice on the management of Limerick to Reynolds, who reported to the County Public Works Committee which ultimately approved all actions and expenditures for the program. LFAC was unique in this way, in its balancing between the wishes of the volunteers and the financial accountability to the Counties.

Initially, the plan was for Limerick to be self-supporting, i.e., annual expenses had to be recovered in wood sold. This was a challenge in that that there was no longer a pulpwood market. Additionally, forest thinning schedules rarely coincided with County fiscal schedules. Efforts were made to market higher value products such as poles, where more money could be obtained for less wood, however it was obvious that this would still not cover the operating deficit. Fortunately, Counties Council realized that the relatively small fiscal investment in Limerick was well worth the multitude of benefits available to the local citizens. Continued sustainable management of the forest would also ensure its use and enjoyment for generations to come.

"The objectives for Limerick Forest were developed in the 1940s by progressive municipal officials in collaboration with forestry professionals. They were worthy multiple use objectives which have withstood the test of time and are as relevant today as they were in the 1940s."

Dave Chapeskie, Forester (Retired)

In addition to the traditional forest management activities other projects including maintenance of the Chalet, construction of bird nesting structures and a boardwalk were funded with an annual operating budget provided by the County. Funding was also obtained from other sources such as the Community Fisheries and Wildlife Improvement (CFWIP) program and Human Resources Skills Development Canada. Annual Open Houses were instituted and were great successes. An internet web presence began in 2004, the same year that Mark Rowsell completed GPS trail mapping in the Limerick South Block. Work also began on an updated Fire Plan.

Through the years volunteers and staff worked hard adding new trails, developing signage and improving parking and outhouse facilities. Workshops and Open Doors events were held courtesy of several local naturalists.

Other priorities included working with the MNR to digitize maps of all the Limerick compartments and to conduct a resource inventory. Together with public consultation, this aided in the development of a Long Range Plan which was published in 2003.

The next step in the development of a management strategy for Limerick was to expand the goals and objectives defined in the Long Range Plan into a more comprehensive document, the 20 Year Forest Management Plan (FMP). The objective of the FMP is to provide a general plan for the management of the forest, including the objectives, management activities and standards to be used to achieve "specific" goals. This 20 year plan is reviewed every 5 years and is supported by annual work plans. The FMP was written by Arbex Forest Resource Consultants Ltd., of Oxford Mills, Ontario, in conjunction with LFAC and County Forestry staff. It was approved by Counties Council in September, 2007.

Forest Certification

Limerick Forest is located in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Forest Region where there are established standards that forest managers must follow to ensure the long term environmental, social and economic values of the forest. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, membership-based, non-profit organization that supports environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. Limerick Forest became FSC certified in May 2008 when it became a partner in the Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) Forest Certification Program.

> *"The use of these internationally accepted standards should go a long way towards ensuring the public that our community forest can in fact be managed to accommodate environmental, economic and social values on a long term basis."*
>
> Geoff McVey, UCLG Forest Manager

This program allows for numerous landowners and community forest owners to share the benefits and costs of FSC certification by certifying their lands under one certificate. FSC forest certification provides assurances to forest owners, managers, operators and consumers that the production of wood products from a certified land base does not damage the overall health of the forest, the stability of the ecosystems, or the livelihoods of local communities.

Limerick is now permitted to use the FSC logo to market its timber, and people buying wood from Limerick Forest can be assured that the well-being of the forest is top priority.

The Friends of Limerick Forest

In addition to achieving FSC certification, 2008 also saw the next step in the development of the Limerick program. LFAC evolved into the Friends of Limerick, with a new Terms of Reference based on supporting the implementation of the FMP.

Boardwalk Building Bee in Limerick North, February, 2010. Photo by Valerie Kirkwood.

This active group, in partnership with the Merrickville District Trails Society, continues in a co-operative effort to improve and develop Limerick into a place for members of the community to learn from and enjoy. In June of 2009 the two groups jointly hosted a public seminar on the identification of reptiles in eastern Ontario. In February of 2010, they joined forces once more and held a work bee to construct a boardwalk in the marsh in Limerick North. Both groups are continuing to work together on a number of projects including an interpretive trail in the Limerick North block.

Limerick's Future: Green and Growing

There continue to be constant management challenges including fluctuating wood markets, forest regeneration, dumping of garbage, vandalism, ongoing trail maintenance and constant surveying of the forest for signs of pest problems or invasive species such as buckthorn. Hand-in-hand with this is the ongoing balancing act between the needs of the forest verses the needs of the many user groups who visit Limerick on a regular basis.

However on a positive note, the number of people taking advantage of the many benefits which Limerick has to offer is increasing. Recreational user groups abound throughout all four seasons of the year. More and more plantations are starting to show the positive effects of a regular thinning regime. Recent completion of the new Limerick Forest Interpretive Centre located on the same footprint as the old Limerick schoolhouse and "Chalet", will provide an excellent location for education and recreation programs for school groups and other organizations and will strengthen the link between the forest and local community.

Limerick Forest is a tremendous investment in green space for the citizens of the United Counties."

Geoff McVey, UCLG Forest Manager

Most importantly, the forest cycle continues. In 2001-02 15,500 trees were planted and another 2000 in 2002-03. These were mostly red pine to fill in holes created by the 1998 ice storm.

Next year (2011), approximately 6000 white pine seedlings will be planted in compartments 38/42/46 which is where the red pine building logs and white pine for flooring for the new Interpretive Centre came from. A thinning was done there in the winter of 2009-10, so there is now room for planting the next "crop". Ongoing forest management techniques are also encouraging the natural regeneration of many other species of trees.

In 2006 , responsibility for the program shifted to Geoff McVey, the current Forest Manager and Rob Ross, the Limerick Forest Technician. Completion of the Long Range and 20 Year management plans and achievement of FSC certification have provided them with the necessary tools to sustainably manage the forest while still maintaining a "multi-use" philosophy. A new web site (www.limerickforest.ca), the naming of all major trails and their inclusion in the 911 system, completion of the Limerick Fire Plan and construction of the new Limerick Forest Interpretive Centre all point to a bright future for Limerick Forest and the citizens of Leeds & Grenville!

Nearly nine million trees have been planted in Limerick Forest since 1940.

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