

November 27, 2017

The Honourable Kathleen O. Wynne
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

The Honourable Kathryn McGarry
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
Suite 6630, 6th Floor
Whitney Block
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Premier Wynn and Minister McGarry:

We are deeply concerned with the August 2017 announcement by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) that the Ontario Tree Seed Plant (OTSP) is scheduled for closure in September 2018. While we have very specific, immediate concerns about the repercussions of this decision, it firstly shows a disturbing lack of a vision for Ontario's forests within the context of climate change. What is the government's strategy to ensure that there will be sufficient supplies of high quality, locally adapted tree seed of native species? Where is government leadership in facilitating the implementation of this critical adaptive strategy, to ensure our forests will be able to provide the environmental services our society's welfare depends upon? Those services are highlighted in Ontario's Action Plan on Climate Change: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/climate-change-action-plan#section-11>

Specifically, we are deeply concerned that the Tree Seed Plant closure decision:

- was made without client and public consultation;
- was made without sufficient, expert analysis of its effects; and where in fact several MNRF management staff conclusions have been shown to be mistaken;
- was made without respect for the unique expertise of Seed Plant staff, including their extensive networking that has ensured high quality seed and seed source chain of custody;
- was made without taking into account that MNRF transformation and cutbacks since 2010 resulted in poor cost management that constrained the Plant's significant mandate;
- takes Ontario in a direction opposite to jurisdictions that recognise tree seed processing and banking as an essential social service to help adapt to climate change;
- does not recognise that the private sector alone cannot undertake this significant and necessary challenge to ensure the resilience of Ontario's forests;
- seriously constrains private sector growers' ability to follow government seed policy as per the Crown Forest Sustainability Act and the 50 Million Tree Program's objectives;
- is being enacted too quickly to develop short and long-term options that will provide seed for reforestation practitioners, and ensure the quality of the seed currently in storage;
- is proposing instead to put resources into a yet undefined *native tree seed genetic archive* for internal MNRF science needs, which will not address any of these challenges, and is actually already provided for by Natural Resources Canada's National Tree Seed Centre.

MNRF management staff have publicly stated that they will work with some clients to address options for their seed processing and banking needs; however little communications have happened, despite the very tight timelines faced by all clients.

There is great urgency for all clients to address short-term options for moving their seed, currently in storage at the OTSP, to other secure and expert banking facilities, which currently do not exist in Ontario for seed processing, needed annually, and as early as June 2018 for some species, to obtain the rare and highly skilled seed processing, banking and testing expertise that results in high quality seed which can be banked and made available over the long term (decades) to support climate change forest adaptation strategies.

We respectfully and urgently request that:

1. A Stakeholder Committee be constituted immediately that would include: Forests Ontario, Sustainable Forest Licensees, Growers, MNRF's partners in forest genetic resource management, local community groups (AWARE Essa, Friends of the Utopia Mill & Park), representatives of MOECC and OMAFRA, and MNRF Seed Policy staff;
2. The Stakeholder Committee report no later than four months from the date of it being constituted; the report to outline potential alternate modes of delivery, including via a non-profit entity, with the objective of possibly relieving ongoing operating expenses presently incurred by the Government of Ontario with regards to this facility;
3. Any and all actions on the closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Facility be immediately put on hold pending the outcome of a consultative process;
4. That an emergency meeting be convened through your offices, with the above representatives and yourselves as soon as possible.

Premier and Minister, there is an opportunity for the MNRF to engage in a proper consultation process that will result in solutions to this urgent challenge; solutions that must involve Government support and oversight, but most importantly leadership, on behalf of all of Ontario. We live in a forest – but there is no forest without seed.

Respectfully,

Members of the Canadian Institute of Forestry – Algonquin Section
P.O. Box 99, Mattawa, ON P0H 1V0

cc:

Bill Thornton, Deputy Minister, MNRF
Chris Ballard, Minister, OMOECC
Jeff Leal, Minister, OMAFRA
Dr. Dianne Saxe, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario
Donnie McPhee, Manager, National Tree Seed Centre, NRCAN
Dale Simpson, Scientist Emeritus, National Tree Seed Centre, NRCAN
Steve Hounsell, Chair, Ontario Biodiversity Council
Rob Keen, Forests Ontario,
Forest Gene Conservation Association of Ontario
Northeast Seed Management Association
Superior Woods Tree Improvement Association
Ontario Professional Foresters Association
Conservation Ontario
Landscape Ontario
Patrick Brown, Leader of the Official Opposition,
Andrea Horwath, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Jim Wilson, MPP
Mayor Terry Dowdall & Council,
Friends of the Utopia Mill & Park, Susan Antler