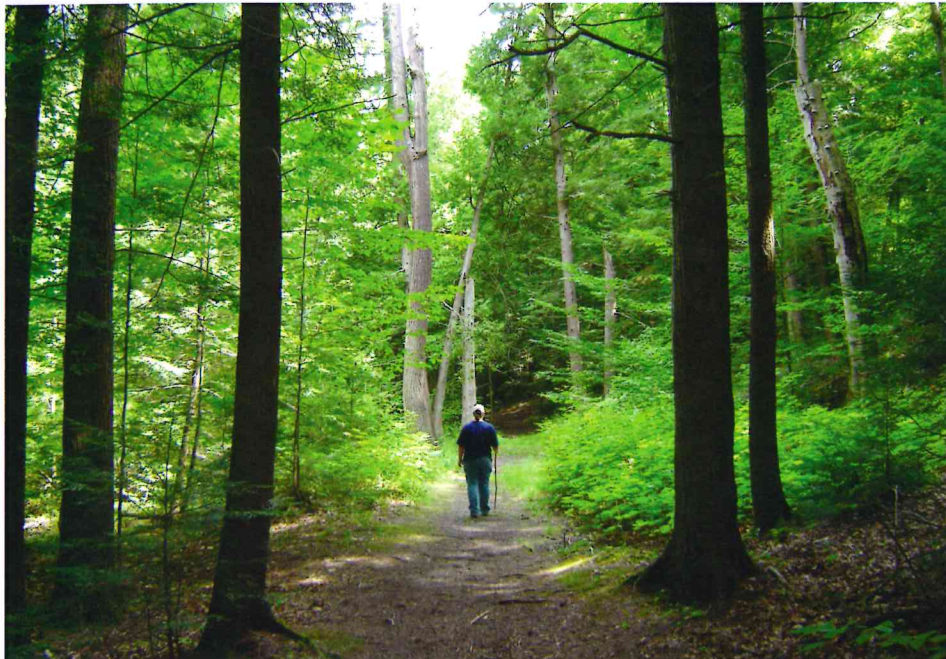


The Ganaraska Forest: From Trees to Dust to Trees



On the left, pine and poplar seedlings are planted in the Lindsay District of the Ganaraska Forest in 1947. On the right, a hiker strolls through the present day, regenerated forest.



If you listen closely, you can hear birds singing and a stream bubbling past your feet. In the distance, the rhythmic sound of a two-man saw cutting through a massive white pine interrupts nature's tune. It is the late-1700s and the sawyers are European colonists, harvesting oak and pine for timber to build Royal Navy ships. Permanent settlement in the Ganaraska River watershed did not occur until 1793 near the mouth of the river, and by the 1840's, communities were created all the way north in the Municipality of Port Hope.

As the headwater forests were methodically harvested, erosion prone soils were revealed, turning the Ganaraska River watershed, and a larger portion of the Oak Ridges Moraine, into a sand bowl. At the same time, the Ganaraska River experienced flooding at varying degrees. Between 1848 and 1937, thirty-four flood events were recorded by local residents and the media. The principal factors contributing to increases in the frequency of floods included deforestation within the watershed and drainage and development for agricultural purposes.

Reforestation of large areas was therefore proposed in *The Ganaraska Watershed: A study in land use* with recommendations for the rehabilitation of the area in the post-war period by A.H. Richardson (1944) to reduce the frequency of

floods and improve summer flow conditions. This monumental watershed planning document, and subsequent implementation, led to the current Ganaraska Forest, which was primarily planted from the late 1940's to the 1960's through the hard work and dedication of the local community.

In 1998, ownership of the forest transferred from the Ministry of Natural Resources (held through the Agreement Forest Program) to the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA). Since that time, the Ganaraska Forest has been managed by the GRCA through a Management Plan under the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program.

A suite of objectives are identified in the plan, including the conservation and protection of Ganaraska River headwaters, the protection of heritage resources, plantation thinning and production of sustainable forest products, maintenance of wildlife habitat, and the provision for outdoor recreation and education. Currently, the Ganaraska Forest represents one of the largest contiguous tracts of forested land in southern Ontario, and is a shining example of mixed-use integrated forest management.

At roughly 11,000 acres, the Ganaraska Forest is home to a wide range of recreational activities such as horseback

riding, mountain biking, hiking, orienteering, hunting, and dirt bike and ATV riding—all across 400 kilometres of trails.

Alongside these activities, the forest is managed to thin plantations, which make up more than half of the forest, as well as sustainable forest management for timber production. In any given year, roughly 4% of the forest land base is harvested to provide for biological diversity and a renewable, sustainable wood source. The former Durham Region forests represent the oldest plantations within the Ganaraska Forest with many areas planted in the early to mid-1930's. Today, these stands are reaching the end of their utility pole production potential and have converted through natural succession into a mixed wood structure with Red oak, White pine, and Maple.

The Ganaraska Forest is a living example of how the principles of integrated resource management can be used to balance many different uses of forested lands on a sustainable and ecologically sound basis. In 2017, the GRCA will submit a new Management Plan detailing the planned management of the forest for the next decade.

Article and images courtesy of the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority.