



Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Closure of the Ganaraska Forest

Why is the Ganaraska Forest Closed?

On May 21, 2022 a significant windstorm (Derecho Storm) struck the Ganaraska Forest. This storm is the largest natural disaster to ever impact the Forest. The storm has resulted in over 250 hectares (600 acres) of tree blowdown throughout the Forest and significant trail impact from downed trees and hazard trees. As a result, the Ganaraska Forest is closed to all recreational access and activities until September 30, 2022.

What are Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority staff doing during the closure?

Recovery of the Ganaraska Forest is a priority of the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA), and staff continue to clear trails and carryout harvesting and salvage operations 7 days a week. Trail work does not occur during thunderstorms or when winds are over 40 km/hour, given health and safety concerns.

“The Conservation Lands department consists of five full time staff and four summer contract staff.” explains Pam Lancaster, Conservation Lands Coordinator. “Staff are tasked with planning and implementing all aspects of storm recovery including assessments, which are now complete; coordinating and inspecting salvage and harvesting operations; and clearing trails. These same staff are responsible for the ongoing management of the additional nine conservation areas owned by the GRCA, as well as the grounds and infrastructure at the Ganaraska Forest Centre and the administrative buildings.”

Why are volunteer events not occurring to support Forest recovery?

To date, staff from Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, Rideau Valley Conservation Authority and Northumberland County Forest have supported recovery efforts. The GRCA thanks them for their work.

Most of the trail clearing work is dangerous and complicated. This makes it unsafe for the public to assist GRCA staff in hazard tree removal. “Many of the downed tree situations include very dangerous spring poles, cracked and/or unusually compressed trees.” Explains Ed Van Osch, Forest Recreation Technician. “GRCA staff and contractors are highly trained professionals with many years of experience and are equipped to deal with hazardous forestry situations.”

Opportunities for volunteer events will be considered as recovery efforts continue. Events will be communicated through www.grca.on.ca and the Ganaraska Conservation Facebook page.

Why isn't the Ganaraska Forest open yet, it has been months since the storm!?

The May 21, 2022 windstorm (Derecho Storm) is the largest natural disaster to impact the Ganaraska Forest. Immediately after the storm, the priority was supporting rescues of recreational users and their belongings that were left in the Forest.

Within the following weeks, staff had to assess:

- All properties and infrastructure for damages.
- The Ganaraska Forest for forest health impacts and forest management considerations.
- The harvest sites sold in 2022.
- Recreational trail impacts.

During this time Forest roads were being cleared in order to gain access into various locations. Aerial surveys (using planes and drones) were undertaken to understand the extent and locations of the damage.

Time has been spent planning recovery efforts, coordinating salvage logistics in order to engage with logging companies, re-opening impacted conservation areas and education programming areas, and clearing trails, which began with Forest roads.

High wind events have occurred since the storm, which has caused further downed trees on trails that were already cleared. The impacts of more high wind events cause more trees to fall than what normally occurs in the Forest given the unstable environment.

The East Forest will remain closed even though it was not as severely impacted by the storm event compared to the West and Central Forests. The East Forest does not have the capacity or the parking areas to support an abundance of recreational pressure.

What will the Ganaraska Forest look like when it re-opens?

Storm damaged areas will be evident but are being managed appropriately in a forest management framework.

“Timely salvage of blown over Red Pine is integral to preventing further forest management issues from arising. Downed material not only increases fire risk in the Forest, but it also acts as a breeding ground for bark boring beetles.” explains Gus Saurer, Forester. “Healthy Red Pine can normally defend themselves from these pests, however they become more susceptible when they are stressed by other factors such as drought, old age and root disease. All three of these pressures are common issues across the Forest’s plantations.”

Salvage operations will prioritize plantations first to capture as much of the timber resource as possible before its value is lost to staining from the summer heat. This clean-up will aid by removing debris that would otherwise impede future tree planting recovery efforts.

The GRCA is in the process of creating an adaptive operational recovery plan. The plan is considering the Ganaraska Forest ecosystem as the primary focus with education and recreation as the secondary focal points.

Implementation of the operational recovery plan will result in the permanent closure of certain Forest areas, access points and trails to recreational users, but also new trails/trail modifications where appropriate. Decision making will be based on ecological factors, as well as health and safety of recreational users and future trail maintenance ability.

Forest roads and dual track trails will be restored where appropriate. Single track trails will be restored where appropriate and when possible, through partnerships.

The operational recovery plan is being informed by the Marsh Report and the consultation conducted as part of the 2016 Forest Management Plan update. Further, trail use in the Ganaraska Forest will consider municipal road and neighbouring property interactions.

The GRCA is committed to providing recreational opportunities to all user groups and the storm is being used as an opportunity to make improvements to the trail systems, recreational experiences, and the connection of the Ganaraska Forest to the local community.

What is going to happen with my Forest Membership?

The GRCA values its Forest members and as such, Ganaraska Forest memberships will be extended as follows:

- Ganaraska Forest memberships (except for cross country ski memberships) purchased between June 1, 2021 and May 21, 2022 will receive a 12-month extension from the original membership expiry date.
- Ganaraska Forest cross country ski memberships that expired during the Ganaraska Forest closure (between May 21, 2022, to the re-opening date) will be given a 6-month hiking membership.

Upon expiry, Ganaraska Forest memberships will be automatically renewed for a year, and an email notification will be sent. Once the Ganaraska Forest is opened, a 6-month hiking membership will be automatically issued to cross country ski members and an email notification will be sent.

What can you do to help?

- Please be considerate and respectful to GRCA staff. The GRCA is committed to the recovery of the Ganaraska Forest – both the ecosystem and the recreational opportunities.
- Understand that there will be changes to the trail system and access points into the Forest. These changes will be for the benefit of the Forest ecosystem, local watersheds, the recreational experience and the Forest user. All recreational types will be welcomed back to the Ganaraska Forest.

- Respect the closure of the Ganaraska Forest. Please do not enter.
- Support local businesses. The GRCA is aware that many local businesses and local tourism in general will be impacted by the closure of the Forest. Please consider visiting and staying in the region while and exploring other trail networks, events, festivals, tourism services and communities.
- Consider visiting other recreational areas and trail networks within the region.
- Stay up to date by following Ganaraska Conservation on Facebook or visiting www.grca.on.ca