



**Society for Ecological
Restoration
Ontario Chapter**
<http://chapter.ser.org/ontario>

Society for Ecological Restoration, Ontario Chapter
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The Honourable Kathleen O. Wynne, MPP Premier of Ontario
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The Honourable Nathalie Des Rosiers, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
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**Re: Ontario Needs Government Leadership to Ensure Tree Seed
for Resilient Forests**

Dear Premier and Minister:

We are deeply concerned about the August 2017 announcement by the OMNRF that the Ontario Tree Seed Plant is scheduled for closure in September 2018.

The Society for Ecological Restoration is a global community of restoration professionals that includes researchers, practitioners, decision-makers, and community leaders from Africa, Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Europe, and the Americas. For 30 years the Society has advanced the science, practice and policy of ecological restoration to sustain biodiversity, improve resilience in a changing climate, and re-establish an ecologically healthy relationship between nature and culture. Ecological restoration is a fundamental component of conservation and sustainable development programs throughout the world by virtue of its inherent capacity to provide people with the opportunity to not only repair ecological damage, but also improve the human condition. Since 1994 the Ontario Chapter has been active in Ontario, committed to the ecologically sensitive repair and management of ecosystems. Access to high quality native seed sources with known provenance is an important resource to carry on the practice of ecological restoration.

We have very specific, immediate concerns about the repercussions of the anticipated closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Plant to which we want answers!

This decision shows a disturbing lack of a vision for Ontario's forests under 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 on? Those services highlighted in Ontario's Action Plan on Climate Change: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/climate-change-action-plan#section-11>. We have a Ministry of Natural Heritage and Forestry, just recently changed to emphasize **Forestry**. How does this decision reflect the importance that your government has placed on management and renewal of those very forests?

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 using OMNRF management staff conclusions that have been shown to be mistaken;
- was made without respect for the rare and 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 OMNRF 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 who 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;
- does not support the goals and objectives of the Ontario Biodiversity Strategy, the Ontario Invasive Species Act or the Conservation Authorities Act;
- 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 OMNRF 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.

Premier and Minister, our members are the people who do the seed collection and tree planting, as well as design and build the wetlands and carry out erosion-control projects for public and private agencies across Ontario. We buy the trees that are grown from seed collected through and stored at the Ontario Tree Seed Plant, and some of us are the people who collected those seeds in the first place. If the seeds are not collected, documented properly, stored properly and provided to the nurseries to grow the trees, our future projects will be in jeopardy. This will be a loss to all Ontarians and it is completely avoidable at a very low cost. Many of the projects we work on are on public lands and require source-identified seed. Where will that seed come from without the tree seed plant?

Closing of the OTSP will also eliminate the knowledge base that has been created over decades. This, at a time when we are already stressed from retirements and downsizing that has left us with little of the historical OMNRF expertise accumulated over decades at public expense. Once we have lost the expertise in this field, it will take decades and millions of dollars to re-create. The cost of mistakes could be incalculable. Think for example, of the sale of the historical cattle herd nearly lost over the closing of the prison farms, a decision to be reversed by saner minds.

In British Columbia, the provincial government reviewed the status of their tree seed plant a number of years ago, planning to privatize or close it, but instead decided to designate it a *Mission Critical* component of the Ministry of Forests and Range plans. They recognized the importance of seed for their future forests.

Closure of the OTSP is a classic case of selling the furniture to pay the rent. It is a short-term way to reduce some immediate costs, while either eliminating an important government function, or creating a situation where government has to re-create the function at huge expense later when they realize the mistake that was made. Government programs that have a mandate to plant trees and deal with climate change impacts will have a more difficult time carrying out their work without the OTSP in place and functioning well. The province needs to modernize and renovate the OTSP and widen its mandate, not eliminate it.

OMNRF management staff have publicly stated that they will work with some clients to address options for their seed processing and banking needs. But little communication has 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, expert banking facilities, which currently don't 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, OMNRF's partners in forest genetic resource management, local community groups (AWARE Essa, Friends of the Utopia Mill & Park), representatives of MOECC and OMAFRA, and OMNRF Seed Policy staff;
2. **The Stakeholder Committee report no later than 4 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 proper consultative process.

There is an opportunity and stakeholder interest for the OMNRF to engage in a 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's no forest without seed.

Respectfully,

Nigel Finney, Chair, On behalf of the Members of the Society for Ecological Restoration, Ontario Chapter

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