



# Our Case for the Ontario Tree Seed Facility

Prepared for  
The Honourable Jeff Yurek,  
Minister of Natural Resources and  
Forestry

By AWARE Essa and  
Friends of the Utopia Gristmill & Park

Tuesday, August 28, 2019



# Introducing...



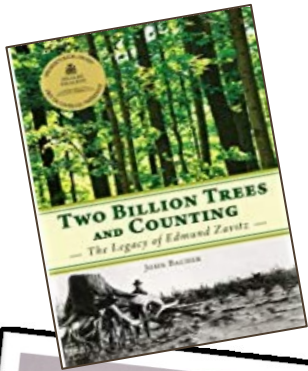
Centered in Simcoe County, AWARE Simcoe is a citizens' group that works for transparency and accountability in government and to protect water, the environment and health. AWARE Essa is an affiliate of AWARE Simcoe and is based in Essa Township.

Since 2011, we have focused efforts on promoting tree preservation, planting, maintenance and raising awareness of trees in our community.



Friends of Utopia Gristmill & Park is a registered non-profit raising funds for the preservation and restoration of the 140-year-old Bell's Gristmill located in the Utopia Conservation Area. Special events are hosted throughout the year at the Utopia Hall to support this work while building community engagement. The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority leases a portion of the Utopia Conservation Area to the Friends of Utopia Gristmill & Park for the purposes of conservation and restoration.

# The Ontario Tree Seed Facility: A Quick Look Back



- John Bacher's book, *Two Billion Trees and Counting, The Legacy of Edmund Zavitz* provides insight into the history of trees in our area—how once-abundant pine and mixed hardwood forests fell to the sawmills of the lumber industry and the clearing of land for agriculture.
- The photographs in the book are a stark record of a landscape without trees—growing deserts, soil erosion and increased flooding. Thanks to the efforts of Edmund Zavitz and his many associates, the reforestation of Ontario in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a success story.
- After the importation of infected seedlings caused an outbreak of White Pine Blister Rust, the need for a healthy, local source of native tree seeds led to the creation of the Ontario Tree Seed Plant in 1924. AWARE Essa's first tour of the Tree Seed Facility in Angus was an eye-opener. We were introduced to Seed Zones and seed tracking from collector to client, to the impressive expertise of employees and their innovations in seed extraction and storage.
- More tours were organized over several years to introduce friends and community members to the fascinating work going on at the OTSF.

# Closing the Tree Seed Facility????!!

- Having some knowledge of the important work the OTSF does, compounded the shock we experienced when the MNRF announced the facility's planned closing.
- Friends of Utopia Gristmill & Park and AWARE Essa quickly joined forces to do whatever we could to reverse this unacceptable decision.
- A full-house, standing-room-only public meeting was held at Utopia Hall with MNRF representatives; virtually all the people who attended were unanimous in their opposition to the proposed closure.
- An online petition collected more than 12,000 signatures. (Refer to Appendix 1, page 8.)
- A letter-writing campaign went unacknowledged by the previous Liberal Government.
- A number of marches and rallies were held outside the Tree Seed Facility.
- Special thanks to Jim Wilson, our MPP, and his staff. He advocated on behalf of his constituents and raised the Tree Seed Facility issue at Queen's Park.
- Jim's efforts and our new Conservative Government's decision to put the closure on hold, has created new opportunities for revitalizing and reimagining the critical work of the Ontario Tree Seed Facility.



# The Need for Tree Seeds Has Never Been Greater



- Ontario's trees and forests are threatened by the effects of climate change: drought, rising temperatures, wildfires, microbursts, extreme weather fluctuations, insects and diseases.
- Although the MNRF currently manages forests on Crown Lands in Northern Ontario successfully, industry experts have raised the alarm about special circumstances in Southern Ontario and the negative impact of urbanization, invasive species and extensive agricultural practices.
- The crucial goal of increasing biodiversity in Ontario depends on restoring woodlands and forests large enough to support healthy populations of wildlife connected by habitat corridors.
- The need for reserves of high-quality native seed to facilitate reforestation and afforestation has never been greater—especially in light of the numerous, horrific forest fires we have seen this summer.
- We support the six recommendations of the Ontario Tree Seed Coalition in their document "*Tomorrow's Forests: Tree Seed Management in Ontario*," (p.32). We believe the OTSF has the potential to resume and expand its role as a link connecting government policy based on research and science with the hands-on processing of seeds and the needs of clients.
- As members of the public and environmentalists, we especially relate to in the fifth recommendation, "Awareness" in the document (p.32).

# On behalf of the people of Ontario, we are asking:

1. That the closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Facility is kept on hold.
2. That consultation continues with expert input. The Tree Seed Coalition's document, *"Tomorrow's Forests: Tree Seed Management in Ontario,"* contains valuable recommendations that should be part of any decision-making process concerning the Ontario Tree Seed Facility.
3. That interested stakeholders, including Friends of the Utopia Gristmill & Park and AWARE Essa, be involved in the formulation of next steps.
4. **That the original site of the Ontario Tree Seed Plant is kept in public hands and that its potential for economic development will be explored.** As early as 1999, the Robinson Business Plan identified that the Ontario Tree Seed Plant had the potential to become at least revenue neutral. The location of the site, close to the GTA and Central Ontario, at a crossroads of four-season tourism, lends itself to becoming a destination in itself. (Ref. Appendix 2, pages 9 & 10.)



Some additional possibilities include:

- As a centre for Urban Forestry to help achieve the goals of the 50 Million Tree program. Small and medium-sized municipalities have space for tree planting but often cannot afford expert arborists. Education in the value of trees on municipal land and private property as well as access to expertise on tree selection, maintenance and preservation would have ongoing benefits.
- As a living laboratory for educational institutions to provide students with "forest literacy."
- As a communications centre to raise awareness of issues such as the benefits of native plants in supporting biodiversity, the threat of invasive species etc.
- As a hub for organizations and non-profits that support the work of the MNRF.

# Conclusion

- We believe that the decision to close the Ontario Tree Seed Facility is short-sighted. We know that within the Ministry, there are strong, loud voices advising that closing the facility is the prudent choice economically.
- The plans put forward by MNRF staff are incomplete. Little consideration seems to have been given to the fact that trees and forests are much more than an economic resource.
- Furthermore, not enough consideration has been given to the broader economic ramifications of the closure, such as the financial losses to trained seed cone collectors, tree nurseries, including Somerville Nurseries and Ferguson Forest Centre; or the possible increase in the price of seeds and seedlings that could affect ongoing tree planting.
- The crucial question remains: Where will the quality native tree seed to support reforestation in Southern Ontario come from?

As the newly appointed Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, you have the opportunity to ensure that question does not go unanswered.

We thank you for this opportunity to meet and discuss the future of the historic Ontario Tree Seed Facility.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and your Ministry.



Respectfully submitted by  
AWARE Essa and Friends of the Utopia Gristmill & Park

# Appendix 1 – Copy of change.org Petition

To the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Natural Resources & Forestry

**There are no forests without seed.**

After 94 years of invaluable contribution to reforestation and for the public good, the Ontario Tree Seed Facility is scheduled to close in September 2018. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry proposes that tree seed collection, processing and storage be **left to the private sector.**

This decision was made internally by the OMNRF with **no public consultation** and came as a **shock to municipal officials, forestry stakeholders, the community and environmental organizations.**

- Both public and private sector experts have vehemently disagreed with the internal government decision and have expressed their concern:
- "This decision takes Ontario in a direction opposite to jurisdictions who recognize tree seed processing and banking as **an essential social service to help adapt to climate change.**"
- "We had hoped that [the OTSF] would not only continue, but be enhanced, in service to Ontario's forests, which face **the triple threats of overdevelopment, invasive alien species and climate change.**" (Forest Gene Conservation Association)

AWARE Essa and the Friends of Utopia Mill and Park respectfully request that Premier Doug Ford and Minister Jeff Yurek:

1. Put on hold any actions on the closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Facility.
2. Begin a comprehensive public review to explore innovative ways to revitalize the OTSF. This review should include:
  - expert analysis of the real value of the Tree Seed facility and the vital service it provides in seed collection, processing and storage. Tracking seeds by seed zones gives native trees a genetic link to local conditions that improves forest resiliency
  - an assessment of the key role that OTSF plays in mitigating and adapting to climate change and increasing habitat to promote biodiversity
  - recognition that the private sector alone cannot meet the challenges of ensuring the resilience of Ontario's forests
  - acknowledgment of the unique expertise of Ontario Tree Seed Facility staff in tracking seed source and processing tree seeds
  - recognition of the significance of the Ontario Tree Seed Plant and its founders in Ontario's history



# Appendix 2 – OTSP Business Plan, 1999. Prepared by Robinson Management Consultants. Showcase Option 5.4 Page 21

## **5.4 Showcase Option** (See Fig 5.4-Appendix V1)

The showcase option is based on the premise that:

1. The Ontario Tree Seed Plant has a unique history and position in the forestry and silviculture activity in Ontario. It also has a history of involvement in the sector and has delivered educational and technical support programs.
2. The facility is relatively attractive, located within a one hour drive of an urban population of approximately five million people.
3. The current facility has significant under utilization of the buildings and resources generally.
4. Current and future seed plant activities are unlikely to require the current space and resources.
5. Assembly of a facility of similar capability, infrastructure and resource base would be very expensive if not impossible, to assemble. (Relevant to the current salvage value or privatization sale recovery).
6. There is an on-going and growing interest in trees, Native species trees, tree planting, and the role that trees play in the overall environment, forest management practices, and forest-based crafts by the general public, environmental and educational interest groups, public corporations and some government agencies.<sup>8</sup>
7. Moreover, forest management companies have an interest in getting across their message of responsible forest management to the general public.

# Appendix 2 – OTSP Business Plan, 1999. Prepared by Robinson Management Consultants. Showcase Option 5.4 continued Pg. 22

The showcase option received positive, although not overwhelming, support from survey participants in Southern Ontario. The town of Angus was supportive of the concept in principle, given the potentially positive impacts of the concept and would see potential for an operating partnership in their area.

In view of this level of support we would suggest that MNR initiate a Showcase Development Committee to study the management, operational and mandate issues associated with the option. In this environment we believe that the Tree Seed Plant (Angus Tree Seed Foundation and Native Species Institute) could potentially provide a lightning rod or focal point for development of a regionally significant showcase display and communications centre for:

1. Educational programming and a communication program on forest management practices and programs for the forest industry and the ministry of natural resources.
2. Native species trees and shrubs (including a native tree species gardens/seed orchard) and their display and sale of commercially available plant materials from sponsoring partners, in the nursery sector. Sponsoring partners would buy “space” to display products and/or indicate the availability of native trees and shrubs that are suitable for planting in the visitors local area.
3. Forest-based crafts, silviculture and wood products, showcase and business incubation centre. Partnering suppliers would also rent “space” to show their product wares. Incumbent start-up businesses in this area would access the resources of the facility.
4. The native species, craft programs and partner services would be supported by an integrated marketing support program. E.g. partner links on to the Internet, sharing of booth spaces at the trade shows, and joint promotional programs. This may represent the highest and best use of the facility within the overall MNR mandate. At the same time this activity would:
  - I. Require significant investment resources
  - II. Require significant investments in facilities development
  - III. Require initial sponsorship and funding activity