

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Amendments to County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law and Woodlands Conservation By-law

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Public Works

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law 5854-2016, being a by-law to provide for the governance and control of County Forests and County Lands in the County of Oxford, be amended as outlined in Report PW 2024-03;
2. And further, that the Woodlands Conservation By-law 6035-2018, being a by-law to prohibit or regulate the destruction of trees in woodlands, be amended as outlined in Report PW 2024-03.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of this report is to seek County Council endorsements to several proposed minor administrative amendments of the County Forests and County Lands Recreation by-law, as well as the Woodlands Conservation by-law.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Amendments to the County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law and Woodlands Conservation By-law will be implemented and communicated immediately following adoption via Oxford County social media and signage where appropriate.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations contained in this report as all costs are included in the 2024 Operational Budget for Woodlands.




Communications

Upon Council approval, the by-laws will be amended and the updated versions will be uploaded to the County website and shared with the Area Municipalities. The public will be informed via Oxford County social media and updated signage that includes QR (quick response) codes for mobile devices that link directly to the by-laws and other information.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendations in this report supports the following Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals:

| PILLAR 1 | PILLAR 2 | PILLAR 3 |
|--|---|--|
|  |  |  |
| Promoting community vitality | Enhancing environmental sustainability | Fostering progressive government |
| | <p>Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation</p> <p>Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment</p> | |

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

Oxford County currently has two by-laws which govern County-owned forests and properties (County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law 5854-2016) and woodlands management (Woodlands Conservation By-law 6035-2018). These by-laws are reviewed on a regular basis and updated once sufficient changes are warranted. The proposed changes to these by-laws are driven by property ownership changes that have occurred in recent years, as well as various updates proposed through a regular administrative review.

A more wholesome update is planned to be completed in 2025 once Community Planning has completed the next Official Plan review as per Report [CP 2023-289](#). This update will address governance and enforcement changes required to align with the updated Official Plan.

Comments

This report proposes amendments to the County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law and Woodlands Conservation By-law, including administrative updates and access improvements.

County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law Proposed Amendments

As shown in Attachment 1, proposed changes of significance to this By-law are listed below:

- Section 4 (General Approved Activities) subsection 4.1(e), clarification is added to state that dog leashes must be no longer than 2 metres. This is intended to eliminate excessive fixed or retracting leashes that counteract the intent of this by-law. This clarification is also updated in Schedule E, item 11.
- Schedule “B” County Lands No. 4 to be removed from the by-law. This change is resulting from the sale of the agricultural lands completed in 2017. The property no longer has the same recreation value and is too small to provide adequate hunting access.
- Schedule “B” County Lands No. 17 and Schedule “D” County Forests or County Lands Where Hunting (Bow Only) Permitted – Update Inset Maps, to change the name from “Oxford County (Beachville) Park” to “Oxford County Thames River Wetlands”.
- Schedule “C” County Forests or County Lands Where Hunting (Gun or Bow) Permitted, property No. 9 to be removed from the by-law for the reasons outlined above.
- Schedule “D” County Forests or County Lands Where Hunting (Bow Only) Permitted – to include Oxford County Thames River Wetlands Parts “D”, “E” and “F” from Schedule “B” County Lands.
- Schedule “D” County Forests or County Lands Where Hunting (Bow Only) Permitted – Update Inset Maps to include Oxford County Thames River Wetlands Parts “D”, “E” and “F” from Schedule “B” County Lands – Inset Maps.

Woodlands Conservation By-law Proposed Amendments

As shown in Attachment 2, proposed amendments to this By-law are listed below:

- Section 5 (Exemptions) subsection (m) (iii), the reference to the Oxford Natural Heritage System Study (ONHSS) is being revised from the 2016 version, to the 2023 or later version in order to ensure the latest ONHSS is the point of reference.
- Section 6 (Administration and/or Committee Exemption) subsection (g), this line item is proposed to include the wording “site restoration and/or compensation plan” in order to provide greater clarity on what would be considered reasonable and desirable when granting an exemption.
- Section 11 (Penalty) subsection (a)(i) and (a)(ii), this line item is proposed to change the wording from “a fine of not more than” to “a minimum fine of”. With land values regularly exceeding \$30,000 per acre, capping the potential fines at \$10,000 for a first offense and \$25,000 for subsequent offenses offers little, if any, prevention with respect to violating the by-law. Fines often exceed 6-figures in other jurisdictions and continue to increase.

Conclusions

The proposed amendments to the County Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law, as well as the Woodlands Conservation By-law, will ensure that County of Oxford demonstrates continuous service improvement over its County owned forests and woodlands, as well as open and transparent governance as intended under the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

SIGNATURES

Report author:

Original signed by

Travis Lockhart
Woodlands Conservation Municipal Law Enforcement Officer

Departmental approval:

Original signed by

David Simpson, P.Eng., PMP
Director of Public Works

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Proposed Amendments to Forests and County Lands Recreation By-law 5854-2016

Attachment 2: Proposed Amendments to Woodlands Conservation By-law 6035-2018