

Independent Forest Audit

Provincial Action Plan

-2013-



Photo Credit: John Stephens

Dryden Forest

Kenora Forest

Ottawa Valley Forest

April 1, 2008 – March 31, 2013

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources



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Submission Page

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Endorsement Page

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Introduction

Independent Forest Audits (IFAs) covering the period from April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2013 were conducted on the following three Forest Management Units (FMUs) in Ontario in 2013:

- Dryden Forest
- Kenora Forest
- Ottawa Valley Forest

The audits were undertaken according to the Independent Forest Audit Process and Protocol (IFAPP) which meets the requirements of the Crown Forest Sustainability Act (CFSA) and on Crown lands the conditions of MNR's Class Environmental Assessment for Forest Management in Ontario (2003) as amended. It also meets the requirements of Ontario Regulation 160/04 made under the CFSA (governing Independent Forest Audits).

This action plan was developed based on the requirements of the IFAPP (2013). The action plan addresses the 2013 IFA recommendations directed to corporate/regional

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources now referenced as the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), the same. Sustainable Forest Licence (SFL) extension recommendations are provided at the end of the action plan.

Provincial action plans must be submitted annually for MNR approval within two months of receipt of the last final audit report for the year, unless otherwise directed by the Minister. For 2013 audits, the last final audit report for the year was accepted by the Forestry Futures Committee on 2014-07-10. Therefore, this Provincial Action Plan is due for submission on 2014-09-08.

The approved provincial action plan will be made available through the government's public website once the audit reports are tabled in the Legislature.

The progress towards implementing this action plan will be reported in a separate status report submitted two years following approval of the action plan.

Recommendations

Principle 2: Public Consultation and Aboriginal Involvement

Dryden Forest Recommendation #1

Corporate MNRF should review the current protocol for the submission, approval, and posting of ER Information Notices and make improvements as necessary to avoid delays in approval and posting of Notices.

And,

Kenora Forest Recommendation #3

Corporate MNRF shall examine its EBR procedures for reviewing, approving, and posting EBR notices that publicize FMP public consultation opportunities, with the intent of streamlining the process to avoid unnecessary delays.

Action:

In 2012, MNRF prepared a summary of the processes and timelines involved in order to have FMP Environmental Registry Information Notices posted. In January 2013, the key timelines related to these Environmental Registry postings were incorporated into the FMP Project Plan template. Beginning in 2012 and 2013 respectively, these materials have been provided to planning teams, including by MNRF Forests Branch as part of Provincial FMP training at the applicable stages of FMP plan production. These materials have successfully assisted Planning Teams in meeting the Environmental Registry posting timelines. The FMP Environmental Registry Information Notice posting process and FMP Project Plan template will continue to be reviewed annually during Provincial FMP training and these materials will continue to be updated for any process changes.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Evaluation and Standards Section, Forest Skills Assurance and Education Unit, Supervisor.

Deadline date:

Ongoing

Method of Tracking Progress:

Yearly review and update of key timelines for Environmental Registry postings in the FMP Project Plan template, and delivery during Provincial FMP training.

Principle 3: Forest Management Planning

Dryden Forest Recommendation #2

Corporate MNRF should work to ensure that the delivery of FRI products is better synchronized with forest management planning schedules.

And,

Kenora Forest Recommendation #14

Corporate MNRF shall implement measures to ensure that the time interval between imagery acquisition and FRI production is not so long as to jeopardize the quality of the FRI products.

And,

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #2

The MNRF must ensure the delivery of new forest resource inventories is consistent with its commitment to complete new inventories on a ten-year cycle. All inventories should be coordinated with Phase 1 management planning.

Action:

The Provincial Forest Inventory Advisory Committee wanted the benefits of the new program to be realized as quickly as possible by all the forest management units scheduled for inventory production during the first ten year cycle. Accordingly, the Committee recommended that the FRI Section acquire all imagery for the ten-year program in the first five years, in order that the new, high-quality digital imagery would be available for operational use.

However, this would mean that some management units would experience a longer than usual delay between the time of imagery acquisition and final FRI production. Discussions are currently scheduled with the Committee for the fall of 2014. Those discussions will focus on design of the second 10-year inventory period and aligning the FMP and FRI production schedule more closely.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Science and Research Branch, Natural Resources Information Section, Forest Resources Inventory Unit, Coordinator.

Deadline date:

May 31, 2016

Method of Tracking Progress:

Records of Discussion from meetings with Provincial Forest Inventory Advisory Committee, FRI Production updates and ongoing discussions with other FRI user groups.

And, regarding Kenora Forest Recommendation #14, a meeting with licensee, MNRF district representative and contractor scheduled by FRI Specialist prior to commencement of photo interpretation

Kenora Forest Recommendation #8

Corporate MNRF shall ensure that the next version of the FMPM identifies the roles and responsibilities of the planning teams and MNRF regional and corporate levels in determining the most appropriate basis for setting plan objectives and targets and other components of the FMP.

Action:

The Forest Management Planning Manual (FMPM) requires project plans to be prepared for the production of a forest management plan. The FMPM requires the project plan to identify who will participate in the development of the long-term management direction (e.g. setting objectives, targets), and the tasks they will be responsible for, recognizing that forest management planning experience and capacity varies across the province.

The FMPM also requires mandatory objective categories and indicators to be included in a forest management plan. Some of the desirable levels for the indicators are provided in forest management guides and are standards (i.e. a component of a guide that provides mandatory direction) or guidelines (i.e. a component of a guide that provides mandatory direction, but requires professional judgement for it to be applied appropriately at the local level).

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

Action Complete

Kenora Forest Recommendation #9

Corporate MNR shall continue to consider how to provide direction to planning teams on how to recognize climate change in FMPs and shall consider the inclusion of information regarding the carbon balance in the Forest over time.

Action:

MNRF scientists are studying carbon balance, the potential impacts of climate change on Ontario forests, and the means to address them. MNRF will review the latest science and revise the direction in the FMPM as appropriate.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

The timelines associated with the completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual anticipated fiscal 2016.

Method of Tracking Progress:

Completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual

Kenora Forest Recommendation #12

Corporate MNRF shall review the direction in the 2009 FMPM regarding the determination of the planned harvest level and consider how to revise this direction so that the planned harvest levels are set at realistic levels, and develop a process to allow the plan author to make adjustments to the planned harvest as events play out during the plan term.

Action:

The available harvest area is determined in the development of the long-term management direction and deemed sustainable as part of the determination of sustainability. In the development of the long-term management direction planning teams are required to set targets for harvest level indicators. When setting targets for harvest level indicators the planning teams are required to consider historic wood utilization, Ontario Forest Accord Advisory Board benchmark harvest levels, as identified in the Regional Wood Supply Strategies, and maximum even-flow harvest volume by major species group.

The planned harvest levels reflect the available harvest areas as determined by the approved long-term management direction and the determination of sustainability. During the development of the next FMPM MNRF will investigate options to identify risks or possible implications of not harvesting the planned harvest levels as part of the development of the long-term management direction.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

The timelines associated with the completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual anticipated fiscal 2016.

Method of Tracking Progress:

Completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual

Kenora Forest Recommendation #13

The MNR FRI Section shall work with District MNRF and Miisun to ensure that the FRI update for the Kenora Forest will include all information sources that are feasible to use, and are relevant to changes to the Forest during the interval between the date of imagery acquisition and eFRI production. Further, MNRF FRI Section shall work with

District MNR and Miisun to design and implement a quality assurance program for the eFRI to determine the reliability of key stand attributes.

Action:

The Kenora Forest FRI is currently scheduled in the FRI production cycle. The Natural Resources Information Section (Forest Resources Inventory Unit) will schedule a meeting with the licensee, MNRF district representatives and the FRI production contractor prior to the photo interpretation phase of production. The meeting is scheduled to facilitate exchange of key information products that can be used by the production contractor in order to ensure the new forest inventory is as up to date as possible. No other specific action is required as this update is on target for completion. However, inventory schedules can change due to management unit amalgamations and other unforeseen planning circumstances.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Science and Research Branch, Natural Resources Information Section, Forest Resources Inventory Unit, Coordinator.

Deadline date:

November 2015

Method of Tracking Progress:

Meeting with licensee, MNRF district representative and contractor scheduled by FRI Specialist prior to commencement of photo interpretation

Kenora Forest Recommendation #16

Corporate MNRF shall develop prescriptions for the protection of Canada warbler and olive-sided flycatcher habitat and mandate their use as a matter of course for all forests in which these species are known to occur.

Action:

MNRF will continue to prioritize the species at risk needing direction for forest management purposes and will address the Canada warbler and Olive-sided flycatcher and transfer this direction to planning teams.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

2019 (to meet 2022 FMP for Kenora Forest)

Method of Tracking Progress:

Review of species at risk operational prescriptions developed, approved and implemented for the 2022 Kenora Forest FMP

Kenora Forest Recommendation #17

Corporate MNRF shall ensure that management direction related to incorporation of newly classified SAR into FMPs shall be promptly developed by Species at Risk Branch or MNR Regional Offices after a species has been designated. This management direction shall be distributed to all planning teams in the species' ranges.

Action:

MNRF will continue to develop direction related to species at risk for forest management purposes and transfer this direction to planning teams in a timely manner.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

Ongoing

Method of Tracking Progress:

Monitor transfer of direction related to species at risk for forest management purposes to planning teams.

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #3

Corporate and Regional MNRF should re-evaluate how the Long Term Management Direction is documented. A discussion of the integrity of the forecasts and degree of uncertainty that is present in the Long Term Management Direction should be required.

Action:

The forest resource inventory (FRI) is the primary data on which model projections in the Long-Term Management Direction are based. In response to the recommendations from the Minister's Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness MNRF has assumed responsibility for the FRI program. MNRF's objective is to ensure the FRI is current and is an effective snap shot in time to help support strategic forest management and land use decisions. Enhancements to the FRI program include shifting from a 20 year cycle to a ten-year cycle, evolving from a complete rebuild of an inventory to a more continuous automated inventory update that integrates both traditional FRI metrics with ecological land based classifications, use of modern field equipment such as GPS and lasers to improve the spatial accuracy of plot data collection, higher plot sample densities to enhance the photo interpretation calibration process, and evaluating the inventory at the provincial forest unit scale.

MNRF will provide instructions to planning teams during policy transfer sessions to consider the quality of the forest resource inventory when assessing mid and late term targets in the development of the Long-Term Management Direction. The next policy transfer session that will incorporate this message will be Long-Term Management Direction session for the 2017 Hearst planning team. The Hearst planning team is

preparing their 2017 Phase I forest management plan. This policy transfer session will take place in Timmins, ON and is scheduled for October, 2014.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager (Lead)

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Evaluation and Standards Section, Training Coordinator

Deadline date:

October 2014

Method of Tracking Progress:

A policy transfer session will be conducted in Timmins, ON. The policy transfer session content (e.g. PowerPoint slide decks and supporting materials) will be posted on the "Learning Compass", which is a Learning Management System that tracks training attendance and houses archived training materials.

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #4

Corporate and Regional MNRF should re-evaluate the use of "regional" or "standard" forest units. A best practice would be to utilize the same forest units from one forest management plan to the next as determined by local field foresters.

Action:

Forest units consider not only the local forest management conditions, but also the link to available science. In Ontario, research related to growth, yield, landscape and habitat relationships, and natural succession, is based on standard forest units. The science and research supports forest management planning and forest management planning tools. If local forest units differ from the standards, application of the science and use of the tools is problematic.

The use of standard forest units improves forest unit consistency at both the management unit and regional level over time. As forest management plans incorporate standard forest units, continuity from one forest management plan to the next plan will improve.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager.

Deadline date:

Complete

Method of Tracking Progress:

NA

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #5

Corporate MNRF should re-evaluate the use of large tables of redundant information in forest management plans.

Action:

The Long-term Management Direction for the 2011 Ottawa Valley Forest Management Plan was prepared and documented following direction from the Forest Management Planning Manual (FMPM), 2004. The FMPM was revised in 2009. As part of the revisions, documentation requirements were streamlined and some FMP Tables were removed.

Forests Branch will review the FMP Table documentation requirements to identify additional streamlining opportunities during the development of the next version of the FMPM.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager.

Deadline date:

The timelines associated with the completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual anticipated fiscal 2016.

Method of Tracking Progress:

Completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #8

Corporate and Regional MNRF should clarify the apparent difference between buffer requirements for confidential values in the Forest Management Guide for Conserving Forest Biodiversity at the Stand and Site Scales and the general habitat description for the same value.

Action:

MNRF ESA-CFSA Integration Team is currently working on integrating the requirements of the ESA into forest management planning. The team will develop solutions to align conflicting requirements in the Forest Management Guide for Conserving Forest Biodiversity at the Stand and Site Scales and the general habitat description for the same value.

During the term of the ESA regulatory provision for forest operations on Crown land, habitat descriptions will not replace existing area of concern prescriptions under the Forest Management Guide for Conserving Forest Biodiversity at the Stand and Site Scales.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager.

Deadline date:

July, 2018 (expiration of ESA regulatory provision for forest operations on Crown land)

Method of Tracking Progress:

Posting of the revised Forest Management Planning Manual and any necessary policy documents on the Environmental Registry.

Principle 4: Plan Assessment and Implementation**Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #10**

Regional MNRF shall review empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the silviculture ground rule for three-stage shelterwood cuts of white and red pine in southern Ontario and revise the silviculture ground rule to reflect the results.

Action:

1. The available empirical evidence information will be analyzed and the results will be used in the development of the draft Forest Management Guide to Silviculture in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence and Boreal Forests of Ontario for use in Phase II planning.
2. The Silviculture Ground Rules (SGR) in the 2011-2021 Ottawa Valley FMP will be reviewed and compared with the direction in the draft Forest Management Guide to Silviculture in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence and Boreal Forests of Ontario during a one day session to be held between MNRF Pembroke District, Region and Ottawa Valley Forest Inc.
3. If necessary, MNRF Southern Region will work with the Plan Author, Ottawa Valley Forest Inc. to revise and update the SGR and any associated text and tables in the FMP to clearly describe the silviculture intentions for the forest. These will be consistent with the LTMD and related silvicultural strategies for the three-stage shelterwood cuts of white and red pine during planning for Phase II of the 2011- 2021 Ottawa Valley FMP.

Organization & position responsible:

1. MNRF Southern Region, Regional Resources Section, Resource Management Planning, Forest Science Specialist
2. MNRF Southern Region, Regional Resources Section, Resource Management Planning, Regional Operations Forester (Lead) and Forest Science Specialist
3. MNRF Southern Region, Regional Resources Section, Resource Management Planning, Regional Planning Forester

Deadline date:

1. Completed
2. November 1, 2014
3. March 1, 2015 (Before Information Centre)

Method of Tracking Progress:

1. Approval of the draft Forest Management Guide to Silviculture in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence and Boreal Forests of Ontario
2. Meeting minutes
3. Approved Phase II 2011-2021 Ottawa Valley FMP

Principle 6: Monitoring**Dryden Forest Recommendation #4**

Corporate MNRF should review its direction for SEM FTG assessments including the sequencing of FTG reporting in Annual Reports.

Action:

Forest Health & Silviculture Section (FHSS) has commenced a Silviculture Enhancement Initiative with the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of renewal and maintenance efforts and making improvements where required. Through this initiative FHSS will review its direction for Silviculture Effectiveness Monitoring (SEM) Free-to-Grow (FTG) assessments including the sequencing of FTG reporting in Annual Reports.

Organization and position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Health and Silviculture Section, Manager.

Deadline Date:

December 2014

Method of tracking progress:

Project report.

Kenora Forest Recommendation #21

Corporate MNRF shall add a requirement to the FMPM requiring the SFL-holder to track and report on the by-pass area on an annual basis.

Action:

The requirement for recording bypass was removed from the Forest Management Planning Manual in 2004. The requirement to report bypass was replaced by information required to be provided in the planning composite inventory that is used in the development of a forest management plan.

When preparing the planning composite inventory planning teams are to identify any restrictions to accessing a productive forest stand. The restrictions may be legal (i.e., ownership), political / land use policy (i.e., land use designation, road closures), and/or a natural barrier. Productive forest stands that are inaccessible are not to be considered as part of the managed landbase for forest management planning purposes.

Planning teams are also to identify any management considerations when preparing the planning composite inventory. The management consideration field in the inventory indicates whether or not ecological/landscape features or site conditions (e.g. natural barrier, exposed bedrock, steep slopes) are present within a polygon.

Areas left unharvested in harvest blocks are identified in annual reports. The unharvested areas are classified and removed from the available landbase, as appropriate, during the preparation of the planning composite inventory for the next forest management plan.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

Complete

Method of Tracking Progress:

NA

Kenora Forest Recommendation #24

Corporate MNRF shall review the utility of the Annual Reports since the process streamlining exercise. The review should include consultation with Company and MNRF foresters. Corporate MNRF should be open to the possibility of revising the annual report content requirements to re-insert information regarding harvesting and silvicultural activities.

Action:

The Forest Management Planning Manual, 2009 requires harvesting and silvicultural activities implemented to be reported in the annual report. The data are submitted in

geographic information system coverages rather than in tables embedded in the text of the annual report.

Coverages provide MNRF the ability to digitally and spatially monitor plan implementation over time. The requirement to report harvest and silvicultural information in the annual report text was removed as it is a duplication of effort for the forest industry.

MNRF will review the annual report content requirements during the development of the next version of the FMPM.

Organization & position responsible:

MNRF Forests Branch, Forest Management Planning Section, Manager

Deadline date:

The timelines associated with the completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual anticipated fiscal 2016.

Method of Tracking Progress:

Completion of the new Forest Management Planning Manual

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation #11

Corporate, Regional, and MNRF Pembroke District, in cooperation with Ottawa Valley Forest Inc., shall take appropriate action, including the services of outside parties, to address the longstanding compliance monitoring working relationship that has challenged the Ottawa Valley Forest for over ten years. Progress assessments shall be undertaken regularly until the issue is considered to be resolved by senior staff of MNRF and Ottawa Valley Forest Inc.

Action:

Note: The actions listed below should be considered in concert with the Pembroke District IFA Action Plan response to this recommendation.

1. Regional Resources Section will provide stream classification training to ensure consistency in the identification and verification of related operational issues.
2. Forests Branch will increase the frequency of District Compliance Visits to occur annually in Pembroke District. MNRF Southern Region, Regional Resources Section will be invited to participate. Visits will be continued until it is deemed by an involved District, Region, or Forests Branch manager to no longer be required to mitigate the issue. Training provided by Forests Branch will cover but not necessarily be limited to operational issues management and the application of remedies.

Organization & position responsible:

1. MNRF Southern Region, Regional Resources Section, Resource Management Planning Team, Regional Planning Biologist
2. MNRF Forests Branch; Forest Evaluation & Standards Section; Coordinator, Forest Operations Compliance and Senior Compliance Specialist (Lead), and

MNRF Southern Region, Regional Resources Section, Regional Operations Forester

Deadline date:

Ongoing

Method of Tracking Progress:

Annual analysis of compliance trends, statistics on course attendance, feedback on course content and effectiveness from course participants

Principle 8: Contractual Obligations**Dryden Forest Recommendation #5**

Based on the satisfactory completion of the conditional licence extension requirement imposed by the 2008 Independent Forest Audit corporate MNRF should promptly complete a review as to whether to extend the SFL for a further five year term as per the requirements of Section 26 (3) of the CFSA.

Action:

1. A review of the Dryden Forest will be conducted to ensure the licensee has complied with the terms and conditions of the licence. As part of the review, IFA recommendations will be considered in accordance with Section 9 of the SFL.
2. Results of the review will be evaluated and if satisfactory, will be included in the package advanced to the Minister for his consideration.

Organization & position responsible:

1. & 2. Forest Industry Division, Operations Branch, Timber Allocation and Licensing Section, Manager.

Deadline date:

1. Review completed by April 30, 2015.
2. Results will be provided within six months of completing the review.

Method of Tracking Progress:

Review completed. Briefing material forwarded to the Minister if review satisfactory.

SFL Licenses

Licence Extension

This section describes the licence extension recommendations made by the applicable auditors in 2013.

Dryden Forest Recommendation on Licence Extension

The audit team concludes that the management of the Dryden Forest was generally in compliance with the legislation, regulations and policies that were in effect during the term covered by the audit, and that the Forest was managed in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Sustainable Forest Licence held by Dryden Forest Management Company. Forest sustainability is being achieved, as assessed through the Independent Forest Audit Process and Protocol. The audit team recommends the Minister extend the term of Sustainable Forest Licence # 542444 for a further five years.

Kenora Forest Recommendation on Licence Extension

The audit team concludes that management of the Kenora Forest was generally in compliance with the legislation, regulations and policies that were in effect during the term covered by the audit, and the Forest was managed in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Sustainable Forest Licence held by Miitigoog LP. Forest sustainability is being achieved, as assessed through the IFAPP. The audit team recommends that the Minister extend the term of the licence to 2033.

Ottawa Valley Forest Recommendation on Licence Extension

The audit team concludes that management of the Ottawa Valley Forest was generally in compliance with the legislation, regulations, and policies that were in effect during the term covered by the audit, and the Forest was managed in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Sustainable Forest Licence held by Ottawa Valley Forest Inc. Forest sustainability is being achieved, as assessed through the Independent Forest Audit Process and Protocol. The audit team recommends the Minister extend the term of SFL #542529 for a further five years.

Licence review

MNR will undertake a review of the Sustainable Forest Licences (SFLs) to ensure the terms and conditions of the licence have been achieved by the licensee. The following outlines the planned details of this review program.

2013 SFL Licence Reviews

Actions required:

1. A review of the applicable SFLs for the above forests will be conducted to ensure the licensees have complied with the terms and conditions of the licence. As part of the review, IFA recommendations will be considered in accordance with Section 9 of the SFL.
2. Results of the reviews will be evaluated and if satisfactory, will be advanced to the Minister for his consideration.

Organization & position responsible:

1. & 2. Forest Industry Division, Operations Branch, Timber Allocation and Licensing Section, Manager.

Deadline date:

1. Review completed by April 29, 2016.
2. Results will be provided within six months of completing the review.

Method of tracking progress:

Review completed. Briefing material forwarded to the Minister if review satisfactory.