



Staff Report to Council - for Direction

Title: Forest Conservation By-law - Update

From: Adam Stanley, Director of Transportation and Environmental Services

Date: June 19, 2025

Report Number: TES-2025-012

Staff Recommendation:

That Council directs a by-law to be brought forward to approve the recommended changes to the Bruce County Forest Conservation By-law.

Report Summary:

This report presents a series of housekeeping amendments to Bruce County's Forest Conservation By-law to enhance clarity, consistency, and transparency. These updates focus on refining definitions, clarifying permit application and approval language, and improving enforcement provisions. While the proposed changes are minor and administrative in nature, they support clearer guidance for landowners and more efficient implementation by staff.

A broader, more comprehensive review of the By-law is planned for 2026. That review will explore policy updates in areas such as personal use exemptions, fine structures, circumference-limit harvests, and a proposed 0.2-hectare woodlot designation. Future changes to be informed by broad public and stakeholder consultation. The goal of the 2026 review will be to align the By-law with current legislation and Bruce County's strategic and environmental policy framework (i.e., Strategic Plan, the Official Plan, and the Environmental Sustainability Action Plan).

Background/Analysis:

Bruce County's Forest Conservation By-law was enacted in 2004 to ensure the sustainable management of woodlands and to prevent overharvesting. The By-law applies to woodlands 1 hectare (2.5 acres) or larger and requires landowners to work with qualified forestry professionals to assess and mark harvests. A formal permit application must then be submitted and reviewed by County staff for compliance with sustainable forestry practices before a harvest can proceed. This regulation is particularly relevant for landowners who wish to harvest trees from their property.

Over time, language within the By-law has become inconsistent or unclear. Minor updates are now required to address terminology, streamline the permit process, and clarify the expectations for landowners and forestry professionals. These housekeeping amendments reflect current administrative practices and are intended to reduce confusion, support consistent enforcement, and improve the user experience.

Summary of Changes

The following housekeeping amendments are proposed:

| Section | Previous Language / Issue | Updated Language / Revision | Purpose |
|---|--|---|---|
| All | No introductory text under section headings | Introductory statements added to each section | Improve readability and document structure |
| Definitions (Section 1) | Inconsistent terminology | Standardized use of “Woodland” instead of “Woodlot” | Standardize terminology across the document |
| | Missing term for authorized representation | New definition added: “Authorized Agent” | Clarify who may act on behalf of landowners |
| | Undefined technical term “DCH” | Defined as “Diameter at Chest Height” | Improve understanding and technical accuracy |
| General Prohibition (Section 2.4) | Allowed verbal or written notice before cutting | Verbal notice option removed; written notice required | Align with current practice and ensure consistent tracking/record keeping |
| Permits (Section 5.1) | Unclear timing and submission requirements; did not prohibit premature cutting | Clarified timing; added that no tree destruction may begin until a permit is issued | Strengthen current procedural expectations and eliminate ambiguity |
| Permits (Section 5.2) | No mention of timely issuance | Added “permit shall be issued... in a timely manner” | Reflect current practice and provide reassurance to applicants |
| Minimum Requirements on Permit Applications (Section 6.1.i) | Inconsistent and vague language | Clarified that applications must be signed by the Owner or Authorized Agent, and be complete and accurate | Support administrative clarity and complete submissions |

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| Orders to Discontinue Activity (Section 7.4) | No language supporting evidence collection during inspections | Officers may take photos, videos, or gather evidence during inspections | Align with standard enforcement practices and support documentation |
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Next Steps

Subject to Council's approval, the updated by-law will be shared with stakeholders. Communications materials will also be updated to reflect the clarified definitions and procedures, including any guidance provided to landowners, forestry professionals, and municipal partners.

Looking ahead, a comprehensive review of the Forest Conservation By-law is planned for 2026. This review will include meaningful consultation with a range of stakeholders, including (but not limited to) the public, local landowners, forestry professionals, and municipalities. The review will explore potential updates related to personal use exemptions, revised fine structures, the consideration of circumference-limit harvesting practices, and the introduction of a 0.2-hectare woodlot designation.

The overarching goal of the full review will be to modernize the By-law, ensuring alignment with current legislation and best practices in sustainable forest management. It will also support the implementation of key Bruce County priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan, Official Plan, and Environmental Sustainability Action Plan (ESAP).

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

There are no financial, staffing, legal or IT considerations with this report.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

The Office of the CAO (Clerk) was consulted on this report.

Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:

Community and Partnerships - Enhance and grow partnerships

Environment and Climate Change - Build capacity to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change

Link to Departmental Plan Goals and Objectives, if any:

Transportation and Environmental Services 2025 Departmental Business Plan

Report Author:

Andrew Beumer, Environmental Services Manager

Departmental Approval:

Adam Stanley, Director of Transportation and Environmental Services

Approved for Submission:

Claire Dodds, Commissioner of Community Development

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Updated Forest Conservation By-law