

# ***Prescription for Nature: Healthy Forests for Healthy People***

## ***2012 OFA Conference Primer***

Seven billion humans now inhabit this planet. Never has the pressure on forest health been greater, nor a healthy forest been more significant to human health. Recent studies have uncovered how trees and nature have subtle and important impacts on our well-being just at a time when we are dealing with new pressures on forests.

Ontario has a rich history of forestry and is blessed with a landscape suited to forest growth. The influence of past forestry practices and our social and economic behaviour has shaped our current forest landscape. Urbanization has changed the way in which we interact with forests. As a result of our modern lifestyle we have seen an increase in chronic heart disease, obesity, and poor mental health. However forests can help reverse this trend by acting as a source of medicinal resources, as protection from weather extremes, pollution, water and soil loss, and support physical and mental well-being. As we learn more of the range of ecosystem services forests provide and their role in our health, we also change our view of what healthy forests are and what is required to sustain them.

This year the OFA Annual Conference will explore forest health, human health, and the connections between them. We will examine these health issues from the perspective of Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Prescriptions with the goal of helping to expand our understanding of what it takes to sustain a healthy forest and ways they can benefit our own physical, mental and economic health.

### **Symptoms: Signs to look For**

Invasive species, insect infestation, tree decline, severe weather disturbance. We all want healthy forests, but what exactly is a healthy forest and what do we look for? Increased stress, increased immune and respiratory diseases, obesity, heart disease. We all want to be healthy, but what are the signs of lower health outcomes related to our changed relationship with forest ecosystems? We will examine some indicators that link health problems to the environment and explore the symptoms of forest health issues throughout the province. Learning about the state of human health as it relates to forests can give us new perspectives on the key indicators in the forest that need to be considered when evaluating forest health.

### **Diagnosis: Analyzing Cause**

There is growing evidence that natural environments improve our mood, concentration and performance; green environments lower blood pressure and strengthen human immune systems. Human values and social behaviour have led to deforestation, climate change, introduced species and other degradation of forest ecosystems. Determining the causes of ill health and understanding the connections between natural environments and healthy humans is a necessary step in evaluating potential actions we can take to maximize the health benefits of forests, and ensure forests are managed to provide the essential goods and services crucial for human health.

### **Prescription: Plan of Care**

New strategies are required to minimize the impact of human induced stresses on healthy forests and to maximize benefits for human health. Among these are preservation of forest system biodiversity for the medical treasures as yet undiscovered, getting individuals connected with the outdoors, and ensuring forest ecosystems are close at hand in urban settings, among others. We will examine ways to mitigate and remedy the increasing stresses on forest health such as strategies for invasive species and managing woodlots for improved returns from non-fiber values.

### **Personal Application**

Whether our activities are intended to influence forest health or are the consequence of unintended actions, we can all contribute to healthier forests and the health of our communities. By learning about new strategies to address threats to our woodlands and new perspectives on the connection of people to the forest, we all stand to benefit from healthier forests. We all have a responsibility to influence the direction our forest management and social practices take. Indeed, with Ontario's legacy of forested landscape and more than 85% of Ontarians now living a modern lifestyle in urban centres, our health and our forest health depend on it.



# 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual OFA Conference and AGM

## February 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 – Alliston ON

*Healthy Forests sustain us; our health depends on them. But what is a healthy forest? How do they enhance our well-being and why should we nurture a healthy forest? Whether we steward the land, depend on the forest for our economic livelihood, or simply enjoy exploring the beauty of the ecosystem, we all benefit from an understanding of our interaction and mutual dependence.*

**Registration 8:00-9:00**

**Welcome 9:00-9:15**

**Morning Plenary Session 9:15-10:00**

What is a Healthy Forest?

**Break 10:00 – 10:15**

**Concurrent Sessions 10:15 – 11:15**

**Human Health : Symptoms**

- Nature Deficit Disorder
- Effects of Reduced Green Space

**Forest Health : Symptoms**

- Climate Change and Forests
- Indicators of Good Forest Health & Healthy Markets

**Concurrent Sessions 11:30 – 12:30**

**Human Health : Diagnosis**

- Social & Therapeutic Benefits of Forests
- A Clinical Perspective

**Forest Health : Diagnosis**

- Ontario Forest Biomonitoring Network Update
- FSC Certification Costs, Benefits and Overview of Small Mills

**Auction - Lunch - Keynote Address 12:30 – 2:15**

OFA Awards Ceremony

Keynote: Biodiversity Strategy Renewal

**Concurrent Sessions 2:30 – 3:30**

**Human Health : Prescription**

- Access to Forests - Getting People Outdoors
- Importance of Biodiversity for Health

**Forest Health : Prescription**

- New strategies for improving returns from your woodlot
- Prescriptions for woodlots in light of EAB

**Concluding Plenary 3:30-4:30**

Landowner Panel - What a Healthy Forest Means to Me?

**AGM and President's Reception 4:30 – 6:00**