

THE MACK WILLIAMS WOODLOT STORY
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In 1946, at age 22, I purchased a 100-acre property on the Oro Moraine, north of Barrie. It is on dry sandy soil and is strewn with many stones and boulders. When exposed it is subject to wind and water erosion. Mostly it is gently rolling, except in one corner where it slopes steeply into a gully. Since 1946 it has been transformed from a semi-abandoned farm to a thriving young forest.

It had been a farm between 1870 and 1938. It was operated under several handicaps: dry sandy land, fields strewn with large stones, severe droughts, water supply not enough to support the farm family and their livestock during droughts, and the Great Depression of the 1930's. The family moved away, then neighbours pastured it off and on, the barn and house were rented.

My story, beginning in 1946, in several ways is unlikely to be repeated nowadays. The purchase price was \$1,800, complete with farm buildings, which were later removed. Over the next 15 years sales of Christmas trees more than recovered the property purchase price and taxes over that time. Tree seedlings were readily available from the provincial nursery at Midhurst, about 15 km away; without charge at first, then inexpensively for some time after. Planting was done entirely by myself, my parents, brother and sister-in-law, so there was no financial outlay. Some years earlier, when my parents did a major planting, planters felt they were well paid at \$2 per day.

There were, and still are, two parcels of hardwood forest, together about 22 acres; likely around 60 years old in 1946. Dense maple regeneration was taking place in several parts of the property.

Planting began in 1946, and was mostly red and white pine, white spruce and Scots pine, and a smaller amount of European larch. By 1955 place was largely forested. The farm field layout was retained, the fields, two hardwood parcels and central lane now make up 10 compartments, which are split into 30 subcompartments, based on species and age makeup. A trail system made up mainly of the central laneway and the various routes to farm fields and the two hardwood stands have since provided ready access to most of the property, for work or for enjoyment.

Several acres of Scots pine, along with some white spruce and red pine plantations, provided Christmas trees between 1953 and 1962.

Afterwards there were many residual Scots pine. Over time most of them were removed and the areas replanted to other species. In one area the trees were too large for this approach, so most were girdled, and that area is now a maple sapling stand.

After various changes like thinnings that altered species mix, and replacement of Scots pine, the property is now made up of: maturing hardwood 22%, hardwood sapling 17%, red pine plantation 40%, white pine plantation 12%, white spruce plantation 6%, roads, etc., 2%.

Apart from Christmas tree production in the early years, little happened on the property until 1978. I lived, then and now, in Toronto, 120 km. from the property. At that time, with a young family and a job that often took me away from home, I had little time or energy for the various improvements I'd have liked to make. But meanwhile my growing trees were gradually transforming the place.

In 1978 my red pine plantations, then 25 to 32 years old, had their first thinning. Every 3rd or 4th row was removed to provide access to the stands for future thinnings, and to give remaining trees more growing room. The trees were still small and low in value; luckily there was a pulpwood market for the thinnings.

The hardwood stands were also thinned in 1978 for the first time during my ownership. There were sawlogs, and a fair amount of firewood, from tops of sawlog trees, and from trees not of sawlog quality.

During the 1980's the red pine plantations were thinned again, and the white pine thinned for the first time. Most of this went for pulpwood and to a sawmill that specialized in using wood from plantation thinnings. In 1995 the red and white pine were thinned again, and other plantations for the first time. By then the trees were larger and the thinnings mostly sawlogs.

That thinning generated much economic activity. At least two loggers earned their living there for several months. Operating and maintaining all that equipment must have been important to the economy, likewise the large trucks that took

away the logs, and the sawmill where they went. There was also the consulting technician whose skill in selecting and marking the trees to be cut are vital to the future of the stands.

In 1995 the hardwood stands were thinned for the second time, and quite a number of sawlogs and a volume of fuelwood from tops and from low quality trees were taken.

In 2004 the plantations were thinned again. Larger trees again meant much higher wood quality and quantity. Loggers worked there for fur months, mostly with modern logging machinery. This time the products included poles, some 50 feet long, sawlogs, pulpwood and log house material.

For each thinning standing timber was sold, with qualified tree markers marking the trees to be taken and offering them for bid. The entire operation was conducted by the purchaser, under a contract that set a time limit and protected the property from needless damage or mess, and from taking of unmarked trees.

Over the years my objectives remain much the same, though the emphasis has shifted somewhat. First it was the rehabilitation of sandy farmland. Then it was to produce income from Christmas trees and then timber, and provide modest wildlife habitat (this potential is limited by absence of water). More recently it is to develop the trail system for recreation, education, forest management, and security.

As I age I relax on the property much more than ever before, with a folding chair at various points on the trails. I may read, or just enjoy what Mother Nature has been doing. It is exciting to see, within my adult lifetime, a transition from an open, windswept eroding sandy landscape, to plantations up to 59 years old, some with dense sugar maple understory. I have seen quality logs from trees planted by myself and by family members. I see it becoming a sheltered place of peace and refuge from a hectic world. I am aware of gradual changes happening in the soil. I marvel at the contribution I am sure it is making to quality of air and ground water. I dream that it may become a place for teaching health, biological and artistic subjects. I can see the potential growth that lies ahead, including both the maple syrup and timber potential of the hardwood parcels. I can also see much work I could have done, had I had more time and

energy, to make the stands even better. I can see other courses of action I could have taken, with equally exciting results.

I marvel that Canada is a nation of trees and forests, an ecological, economic, social and spiritual treasure. I wish more Canadians could share this awareness and appreciation. I wish more landowners could have similar dreams and the energy and skills to make them happen. I wish that society might recognize how much it benefits from such a forest, perhaps much more than the individual owners, and how it might benefit greatly from offering realistic support to those engaged in private land forestry. And I would hope that landowners everywhere will understand that it is never too early or too late to start.