



NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION  
COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE

# NCC Forest Strategy

PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT  
FEBRUARY TO MARCH, 2021

Canada

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## I. Project description

### A. Background

The NCC is developing its first forest strategy. This strategy will guide how the NCC manages forests and trees on its lands. It will align our efforts, and prepare us to meet current and future challenges.

It will look at trees and forests in urban areas, as well as in natural areas like the Greenbelt and Gatineau Park. The strategy will provide a blueprint to make forests more diverse, connected and resilient.

The development of this strategy is in keeping with commitments made in the [Plan for Canada's Capital, 2017–2067](#), and the [Sustainable Development Strategy, 2018–2023](#).

### B. Context

#### The importance of trees and forests

The NCC's green network and its ecosystems provide essential benefits to people in the Capital Region. Trees and forests in particular provide many environmental, social and economic benefits:

- helping capture or filter air pollutants through their leaves, and releasing oxygen for us to breathe
- providing habitat for wildlife
- protecting us from the sun, and decreasing noise pollution
- helping to drain away excess rain and snowmelt
- increasing property values
- enriching the beauty of our landscapes
- contributing to the social and psychological well-being of our communities

According to a [2016 study](#), the estimated value of forest ecosystems on NCC lands is \$174 million per year.

#### Forests managed by the NCC

A [2019 study](#) mapped and measured the size of the extensive tree canopy in Canada's Capital Region. It found that 74 percent of NCC-managed lands are forested. Gatineau Park alone contributes over 30,000 hectares of tree canopy, and the Greenbelt contributes about 7,000 hectares. The tree canopy is not evenly distributed, with many areas having far less than the regional average of 46 percent.

The data from this study informed the drafting of the NCC's Forest Strategy.

## C. Long-term vision

A vision statement is a declaration of a project's aspirations. It shapes decision making, and serves as a road map to set up and reach goals.

The Forest Strategy includes the following vision for the next 30 years, which describes the strategy's desired outcomes:

*The trees and forests on federal lands in Canada's Capital Region are diverse, connected and resilient. They provide essential ecosystem services, enrich heritage and cultural landscapes, and promote health and well-being equitably for residents and visitors.*

## D. Goals, objectives and actions

The Forest Strategy includes five overarching goals that support the vision:

- **Understand** our trees and forests
- **Protect** existing canopy cover
- **Plant** the right trees in the right place
- **Manage** for resilience, safety and efficiency
- **Engage** with partners and the community

Under these goals, we have identified nine long-term objectives and 20 short-term actions. The objectives are the long-term tactics that the NCC will pursue to achieve the vision. Actions are the measures we will undertake in the next five years to meet the objectives and the vision.

## II. Public consultation process

### A. Overview

The Forest Strategy has benefited from the input of numerous stakeholders at every stage of its development.

#### **Engagement with Indigenous peoples**

The NCC engaged with the Algonquin communities of Pikwakanagan and Kitigan Zibi at multiple points throughout the development of the Forest Strategy.

#### **Public engagement**

As part of the planning process behind the strategy, we engaged the public and various stakeholder groups in 2019 and 2021. We also sought feedback throughout the project from the NCC's Board of Directors. A copy of the public consultation report for the previous phase of public engagement on the strategy is available [on our website](#).

#### **a. Consultation objectives**

- Promote transparency and accountability by making the full draft of the Forest Strategy publicly available ahead of its approval.
- Provide a final opportunity for members of the public to give their feedback on the strategy before it is launched publicly.

#### **b. Dates**

- February 16 to March 3, 2021

### **B. Consultation procedure and tools**

#### **a. Online consultation**

The final phase of public consultation on NCC plans and strategies emphasizes transparency and accountability. Members of the public were provided the full draft of the Forest Strategy, and a final opportunity to shape its contents before it is launched.

In addition to making the full draft of the strategy available online, we created a web page that summarized the most prominent features of the strategy, along with the general context in which it was drafted. Public feedback was collected via a comment box on the same page, as well as by email. Interested participants were also invited to review public consultation reports published as part of previous phases of engagement.

At the end of the consultation period, all comments were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, reviewed by the project team and assigned a series of tags corresponding to the type of feedback provided. This permitted the NCC to identify patterns and to more effectively summarize public input.

### **C. Invitation and promotion**

An email invitation for the online consultation was sent using Public Affairs and Sustainable Development Strategy distribution lists, which include the following stakeholders:

- interest groups, user groups and heritage groups
- residents' associations
- members of the general public

Messages were also posted on the NCC's social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter), soliciting the participation of all interested members of the public. A paid digital advertising campaign was also launched on social media throughout the survey period.

## **D. Participants**

### **a. Online consultation**

- A total of 116 comments were submitted via the web page comment box.
- The Contact Centre received seven emails with comments about the Forest Strategy, including three detailed submissions from the following groups:
  - Friends of Chapel Hill Forest
  - the Tree and Forest Committee of Manoir des Trembles
  - Friends of Carlington Hill and Friends of Hampton Park (joint submission)

## **III. Public consultation highlights**

Many participants greeted the draft Forest Strategy with enthusiasm, and provided detailed and thoughtful comments about areas they felt could be improved upon in the final draft. We would like to thank all members of the public who provided feedback on the strategy. The section below summarizes the issues and suggestions most frequently put forward by participants. These trends include the following:

- Strong support for tree planting initiatives, and a desire to see the NCC establish clearer and more ambitious targets.
- Concern with threats to urban forests, in particular those posed by development.
- A strong desire to see more engagement with partners and members of the public around forest management initiatives.
- Emphasis on the needs and challenges associated with the recreational use of forests and green spaces.

## **IV. Analysis of results**

### **A. Online consultation**

#### **a. Tree planting**

One of the clearest trends in the feedback provided by participants was a widely shared desire to see more trees planted in the National Capital Region. Participants emphasized the ecological, social and economic benefits of trees, and enthusiastically endorsed opportunities to increase the number of trees on NCC lands. In this same spirit, several participants deemed the language used to articulate the NCC's tree planting target to be too vague. These participants challenged the NCC to unambiguously commit to an ambitious tree planting target in its Forest Strategy.

Participants also stressed the importance of planting trees strategically, both in terms of the kinds of trees being planted and places selected for planting. This included recommendations to prioritize native species, food-bearing trees and biodiversity, as well as targeted planting in low-income areas and areas with below-average canopy cover. Some participants emphasized the importance of taking a "right tree in the right place" approach to tree planting, and adopting a

holistic approach to the evaluation of forest management initiatives that takes more granular measures of ecosystem health into account.

#### **b. Protecting forests**

Participants were keen to see that steps are taken to protect existing and future trees and forests. Urban development was singled out by several participants as a particularly concerning threat to trees. These participants opposed any initiatives that would see green spaces—and forests, in particular—cleared and built upon. Several participants expressed their opposition to an application submitted by the NCC to rezone a 3.7-hectare parcel of land between Slidell Street and Forward Avenue in Mechanicsville to build six embassies and parking space. These participants felt that such a proposal was incompatible with the spirit and goals of the Forest Strategy.

Participants urged the NCC to develop and implement measures geared toward managing pests and invasive species, including *Lymantria dispar dispar* (commonly known as the gypsy moth), buckthorn, ticks and different varieties of weeds. Resilience to climate change and fires was top-of-mind for some participants, who urged the NCC to take steps that would protect trees and forests from the risks posed by warmer temperatures and fire hazards. The bleaching and disturbances caused by dogs were also raised by a small number of participants, some of whom would like to see the presence of dogs on NCC lands curtailed.

#### **c. Collaboration**

Forest management was seen by many participants as fertile ground for public engagement and collaboration. A number of these participants asked how they could get involved in forest management and tree planting initiatives, and encouraged the NCC to create opportunities for members of the public to contribute to the achievement of the Forest Strategy's objectives. Others urged the NCC to develop education and outreach initiatives to teach interested members of the public about trees, forest management and sustainability, and to cultivate an affinity and general appreciation for green spaces.

Participants similarly encouraged the NCC to collaborate more closely on tree planting and forest management with its municipal partners and with local groups and organizations. Several participants endorsed a more integrated approach to forest management issues, with some pointing out a lack of coherence between federal and municipal planning and practices.

Several participants encouraged the NCC to work more closely with Indigenous peoples on land and forest stewardship. Some wondered how the NCC plans to integrate Indigenous knowledge into its forest management practices. A small number of participants objected to the use of “ancestral lands” to describe the relationship between the Capital Region and the territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation, recommending the use of “unceded territory” instead.

#### **d. Forest user experience**

A number of participants commented on the Forest Strategy from a recreational perspective. Some expressed concerns with the pressures of population growth, overuse, erosion from foot traffic, inadequate trail maintenance and the creation of unofficial trails. Others supported the

expansion of trail networks and access to NCC lands for recreational purposes. A few participants stressed the importance of access to NCC green spaces for mental health purposes, particularly in response to the restrictions and stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dogs also attracted criticism from certain participants in the context of their experience of NCC lands. These participants indicated that they regularly encounter dogs on NCC lands whose owners do not respect rules requiring that dogs be kept on leash, and urged the NCC to invest more effort in the enforcement of rules that apply to dogs and their owners.

#### e. Other comments

Some participants highlighted specific issues that they would like to see addressed in the strategy or addressed in greater detail. These included the following:

- implementation plans
- plans for specific forests
- the role of data collection and analysis
- resource allocation
- performance measurement
- risk analysis
- means of ensuring compliance with guidelines and policies
- the relationship between the Forest Strategy and other NCC planning documents
- approaches to forests located in ravines
- connectivity between forests and green spaces

Some participants also provided detailed feedback on how the formatting and design of the document itself could be improved.

The following table provides a few examples of the comments received as part of the online consultation.

Topic	Sample comment
<b>Tree planting</b>	<p>I think there should be a certain emphasis on food-producing trees, particularly in urban environments, but perhaps not exclusively so. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, if we as a society can consume more food that is grown in our region, that is an important goal in itself. It also helps us build food security.</p> <p>I am concerned to see the vague five-year planting goal of up to 100,000 trees. From 2014 until now, 20,000 trees were planted against a goal to plant 100,000 by 2022. So, to have a new five-year plan that merely suggests it could plant up to 100,000 trees seems like a smoke and mirrors game. The NCC should commit to a firmer planting goal in its five-year plan.</p> <p>The strategy is fairly comprehensive. Given the threat of global warming, I would recommend accelerating the planting of trees. Consider the concept of Miyawaki forests, that is letting nature reclaim manicured</p>



lands by planting trees in areas not used by the public, and let nature take over.

The ratio of trees planted for every tree destroyed should be significantly increased from 2:1 to at least 10:1.

Please plant more trees. I would happily pay for trees (nursery-grown, not just seedlings), if the NCC offered to take care of the planting in exchange for free trees. Try to engage the community in watering / caring for the trees after planting. A lot of areas could use more density (e.g. Ottawa River shore). Trees become more resilient when they grow close to each other, as they support each other through their roots. For trees to survive climate change, we need to densify our woodlands. Thank you for caring for our forests. Keep up the good work. Be more ambitious!

Great start! Please plant more trees by considering converting marginal agricultural lands in the Greenbelt to forested areas. Even 100,000 in five years seems underwhelming.

**Protecting forests**

If the regional goal is to increase tree canopy in areas where the coverage is less than 46 percent, the NCC should withdraw its application for Embassy Row and make this an urban forest. There are already over 150 trees on the area, and wildlife has already lost nearby habitat at Remic Rapids.

Recognize that all trees are not created equal. Cut back hawthorn bushes whenever possible. Avoid all “weed” trees (poplar, soft maple etc.).

With all the construction that comes with a forever-expanding city, the most important goal is to PRESERVE, as much as possible, forested areas close to residential areas, and to create/maintain trails for use all year long.

Despite the obvious lessons of some very dry years, and the Australian and Californian wildfires, there seems to be no shift in forest management practices but to just put in more trees (good). There is no fire management plan or actions identified that would make urban areas and homes safer (we don't want to repeat the 1900 fire). Some burning may be required to get rid of propellants.

I would like to see your plan address the pressure placed on the urban canopy by dogs. Dog urination and interference at ponds, wetland areas etc. is very destructive in my area. Clear bleaching at the base of all trees is present in my region and they are lost at a rapid rate.

**Collaboration**

I LOVE this strategy! Thank you so much for taking the time to lay out an ambition for our trees and canopy in such clear and measurable goals. My one comment is how can I help? Can you make some of this work —

including the planting — available to citizens? As part of understanding our trees/forests, could we have ways of identifying (digitally) them, and allow citizens to report sick or damaged trees, and volunteer their time to help monitor/nurture new plantings? We can help if you give us ways!

I think the NCC should support Indigenous lead stewardship on NCC lands and model a program after the Government of Canada's Indigenous Guardians Program where First Nations, Inuit and Metis lead land stewardship activities and monitoring.

A major problem in our region is the lack of coordination between the levels of government on issues like a Forest Strategy. There is no integrated planning, coordination and control that I can see. For example, there are urban forests in the City of Ottawa and Gatineau that link up with NCC forest areas, but there is no coordination on the walkways and pathways that would benefit citizens. I noted that the NCC says it will try to align with the City of Ottawa and Gatineau, but what does that really mean? There are no governance mechanisms to do that. The various levels of government do not even have common definitions and standards.

I believe that, in order to promote true sustainability and stewardship of the land, people must care and feel connected. Education and outreach awareness are critical! Fostering a love of the land will foster stewards of the land. Connection is developed through understanding and awareness. Everyone should know what is in their backyard.

**User experience**

Unwelcome contact with dogs, especially during COVID is an issue for the general public. Those who are afraid of dogs, including children, for example, are not being afforded safe spaces to enjoy parks and nature.

The strategy is a very comprehensive document, but it is overly optimistic. It does not sufficiently address the difficult issue of sustainability. With the increased pressure from population increases along with group expectations, sustainability is a difficult balancing act. The issue has been addressed in part at Mer Blue. It is a path limited to the boardwalk. Every person and every group wants to use every square inch for their sport/use. It is not reasonable to have every sport and unlimited access to every area. The NCC will have to make the difficult decision of how to allow usage, while at the same time limiting access.

Recreational use of NCC forest properties needs to be supported and maintained. The informal trails need to be supported and, in many cases, rebuilt to promote sustainability. A formal plan for trail maintenance and development is needed in Forest Valley in Orléans.

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NCC forests have been incredibly beneficial to my mental health and overall well-being during COVID-19 lockdowns. It is especially important at this time to acknowledge their recreational uses.

I support 100 percent any program involved in saving and helping our trees thrive in the NCR. The mental health aspect alone is priceless. During lockdown, trees have been one constant part of nature we had. “Seek out a tree and let it teach you stillness.” —Eckhart Tolle

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## **V. Response to public feedback**

The project team has reviewed all comments and ideas, and made improvements to the strategy in several areas:

- The target to plant 100,000 trees by 2026 was reframed from “could potentially plant” to “will plant.”
- New text was added to articulate why the two targets are more ambitious than they seem.
- The reference to the original Sustainable Development Strategy tree planting target was removed to avoid confusion.

## **VI. Next steps**

The final Forest Strategy will be publicly launched at the NCC Board of Director’s meeting on April 22, 2021, and an implementation plan will be developed to prioritize and execute the plan’s actions in 2021.