

Ecological Gifts Program

Donor Profile



Fee Simple Donation in Norfolk County

In 2019, Paul DeCloet, a long-time conservation champion in Norfolk County, donated approximately 23 hectares of prime Carolinian forest to the County through the Ecological Gifts Program. He chose the fee simple option, which involves the outright donation of land from donor to recipient. The Ecological Gifts Program requires that the recipient must protect the property and its natural features for future generations. Two years later he donated another 26 hectares to the County. These adjacent properties make up the Paul DeCloet Forest, Norfolk County's newest ecological treasure.

In 1953, ten-year-old Paul and his family immigrated to Norfolk County from Belgium. The family did well growing tobacco, and Paul continued in this business for some time before switching to Christmas trees. In the 1980s, he bought a few parcels of land, including those that make up the Paul DeCloet Forest, where he began restoring the natural cover.

Paul has contributed greatly to conservation in Norfolk County, including initiating a tree-planting program with the Lions Club, and serving as chairman of the Long Point Region Conservation Authority. His recent donation of prime Carolinian forest, strategically located close to many ecological hotspots, is in keeping with his strong conservation and community values.



“The ecological significance of this donation cannot be overstated,” says Adam Biddle, supervisor of Forestry for Norfolk County. The Paul DeCloet Forest is situated in Canada's Carolinian Zone, the most biodiverse region in the country. It is close to the internationally recognized Long Point Biosphere Region, as well as Backus Woods, the highest quality old growth forest remaining in Ontario. Twenty-six tree species, including tulip tree, sassafras, black gum, shagbark hickory and bitternut hickory are found on the property. Two branches of Clear Creek converge here before emptying into Lake Erie.



Paul began discussions with his children about selling the property 15 years earlier. When exploring options with his accountant, he learned about the Ecological Gifts Program, which offers financial incentives to landowners wanting to protect ecologically significant land in perpetuity. Paul then approached his local municipality, Norfolk County, with an offer to donate the land outright through the program, rather than selling. His family was supportive of his decision.



Ecological Gifts are donations with preferential income tax treatment, and therefore have specific requirements above and beyond other kinds of donations. In order for an Ecological Gift to meet these requirements, the federal Minister of the Environment must certify the property as ecologically sensitive, approve the recipient who receives the Ecological Gift, and certify the fair market value of the donation.

Norfolk County had no experience acting as a recipient for the program, so it took time for Council to discuss and agree to the idea, and for staff to work out logistics. However, the end result is a dream come true for Paul – the land he lovingly and skillfully stewarded for four decades is forever protected. **“This is my legacy; my gift to the County. I am very pleased with how it all worked out,”** he says.

**Do you own land that contains natural habitat, such as a forest, prairie, wetland or shoreline?
Would you like to see it protected for future generations?**

Through the Government of Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program, landowners can donate their land, or a partial interest such as a conservation easement agreement, to an eligible recipient organization that will care for it forever, such as a land trust, conservation organization, or government. In addition to the peace of mind that the land will be forever protected, donors can receive significant income tax benefits including elimination of any tax on the capital gain.

For more information, visit the Ecological Gifts Program website at:
www.canada.ca/ecological-gifts

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