Ontario Stewardship
Program Guidelines

Background

This decade is unfolding major changes to the relationship between landowners, government, corporations and groups with an interest in caring for the land. The financial pressures on the Ontario government have forced fundamental shifts in the structure and function of land related agencies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources, Conservation Authorities and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Interest groups have faced similar changes.

MNR initiated Ontario Stewardship in recognition of the significant challenges shared by those who have a common interest in healthy natural environments and sustainable resources.

In the years of relative financial affluence, it was easy for organizations to operate with single and separate purposes. Today, and for the foreseeable future, the greatest progress will be made by organizations that can see common and compatible objectives and work together for their mutual benefit.

Principles

This program will respect the following principles:

- Progressive and cooperative work must jointly involve landowners and land interest to attain private land stewardship
- This program is not to be a government control program, but rather a program based upon influence, shared among those who accept the program's common purpose.
- The program is to encourage resource agencies to work together to provide complementary services and support to landowners.
- The program will respect land ownership (i.e. the rights of landowners to make decisions on managing their lands).
- Landowners and those with an interest in the land, must influence the program from the community level.
- Associations must continue their role as strong advocates, and are challenged to play a greater role in direct resource management delivery, information and education, and monitoring of changes in the resource.
- The contribution of MNR will be compatible with its long term strategy, Beyond 2000 and other strategic documents and directions. The same will be the case for other agencies such as OMAFRA and CA's, and their internal directing documents.
- Ecological sustainability is MNR's corporate mission, thus contributing to the economic, environmental and social well-being of Ontario, and enabling the Ministry to commit significant staff and financial resources to support the success of this program.

Important Concepts

Landowners have generally taken pride in being good stewards. In this decade, society and resource managers have become more deeply concerned with the appropriate management (stewardship) of the land to ensure the long term sustainability of ecosystems and the amenities that the land provides. The concepts of sustainability and stewardship are continuing to evolve. Those who initiated Ontario Stewardship felt that there was an adequate consensus around the following description of these terms:

Sustainability:

Ecosystem Sustainability:
The ability to maintain the long term health of an ecosystem. Health is subjective, but indicators are being developed that will provide an ability to monitor lack of health, such as loss of biodiversity.

Sustainable Development:
This was defined by the Brundtland report as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Developing Sustainability:
This enables focusing on the process of weighing the factors of ecosystem health and development (use) values. It requires a broad consideration of the environmental, social and economic effects and their relevance on various scales (from individual properties to ecosystems and landscapes).

Stewardship:
The responsible use of resources based on a balance of economic, environmental, and social values, in order to sustain production of these amenities and values to people, and all life, today and for all future generations. The essence of land stewardship is taking responsibility for actions today which directly influence the protection of values for future generations. Good stewardship implies action directed toward the common good for society and the environment.

Community:
A Community is people living in a definable area who have common interests. The units will be designated by commonly recognized municipal boundaries (e.g. county or regional municipality boundaries).

It is understood that there is a diversity of opinion and attitude about descriptions such as these. There is a spectrum of interest around the placement of emphasis on such things as use and protection. There is not an end point in time when we will have resolved this concern. There must always be a dialogue to find the acceptable balance - to reach the best possible decisions based upon the assessment of the best available science and weighing of human values, in the short and long term.

Vision

People working together to advocate and implement resource stewardship.

Purpose

To bring together landowners

- landowner and resource associations
- land interests
- resource agenciesto meet collective stewardship goals.
- Bringing people together requires developing working relationships. To do that, people must see that they share a common goal (e.g. stewardship) and can agree that they have mutual, or at least compatible, objectives.

Benefits

This program acknowledges that its outcomes must ultimately be of tangible benefit to landowners. The benefits that are envisaged are: a forum for landowners to express their needs and ideas

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- easier access to a host of agencies and associations
- opportunity to work with others
- new learning opportunities
- respect for the right of landowners to make decisions on the management of their land
- practical ecosystem management being part of the building of the program

Bring People Together

It is important to bring people together to work toward collective stewardship goals. It is anticipated that the large number of agencies, associations, and individuals with an interest in land stewardship will be able to identify common, or at least compatible, objectives related to:

- responsible land care
- sustainable resource use
- taking an ecological approach
- a healthy environment

Cooperative effort will be achieved through the strength of relationships and common interest- not through legislation or other forms of control. It recognizes financial restraint and the importance of landowners rights and responsibilities - as well as the wider range of people who wish to support responsible stewardship that is driven from the community level.

The following is an indication of the types of relationships that will be essential:

- Community Relationships
- Community stewardship councils representing community scale unit involving community interests and key people

Municipal Relationships

Expanded role in direct management delivery, information and education, and monitoring of changes in the resources

- accept the common purpose
- monitor changes (environmental health)

Landowner Relationships

- respect and responsibility for their decision making in stewardship

- government influences through cooperative and collaborative action
- incentive awareness vs incentive based
- information, recognition and awareness

Industry Relationships

- support and advocate strong sustainable industry
- encourage cooperation
- promote self regulation

Resource Agency Relationships

- cooperative, collaborative and efficient
- working in partnerships

  The people will be brought together through the following mechanisms:

  - Community Stewardship Councils
  - Stewardship Coordinators
  - Associations
  - Provincial Stewardship Steering Committee
  - Private Forest Sustainability Fund

Community Stewardship Councils

The Community Stewardship councils are to be an active group that share a strong commitment to the program purpose and represent landowners, land interests and resources in the area. They will be respected people who can provide a forum to recognize and influence community involvement and interest in private land stewardship. Landowners would include: farmers, woodlands owners, cottages and rural property owners. Land interest would include: naturalists, recreationers, loggers and other forest users. Representatives may also be sought from municipal governments and aboriginal communities, particularly where they are major landowners. Councillors are to be apolitical and non-partisan.

They will provide a forum to foster stewardship, influence responsible land care by landowners and land interest, and seek funding opportunities to support their initiatives.

The councils are to integrate with existing community groups - not duplicate or replace their efforts, but compliment their work and pursue opportunities for synergy. They are also to encourage cooperation among agencies and associations through their focus on projects that require shared efforts.

A council will be considered to be established when it has: a group of between 8 and 15 people who are: respected members of the community, committed to the program purpose; able to represent the spectrum of landowners and land interests a terms of reference

- administrative guidelines, including appropriate (auditable) means for handling money
- this may involve affiliation with an agency that is prepared to provide banking services, such as a CA, county or association
- general operating guidelines
- a general strategy to give guidance over two or more years; includes a specific goal and objectives, and indication of priorities, candidate activities and potential opportunities
- a basic work plan for the current year
- a simple means to track community and agency participation and contribution to the attainment of the work plan and council's targets
- a Stewardship Coordinator working with them
- agreement(s) that they will abide by the criteria established by their funders.

It may not be necessary that they have a constitution, providing that they are not handling money but are depending upon on one of the supporting partners to act as their "banker". It is intended that they not become another agency.

Provincial Stewardship Network

This group will be comprised of representatives of the provincial level agencies and associations that support the purpose of the program. It will be chaired by MNR. They are to provide guidance from their organization to the program and to take advice back to their organization regarding ways that they can better support the Community Stewardship Councils. They are to recognize that the "strength" rests at the Stewardship Council level and that the primary function of the Committee is to blend the efforts of the agencies and associations that support the program - building relationships and capacity.

Associations

Associations are groups of people joined together to realize common goals - in this case, goals that are compatible with the purpose of Ontario Stewardship. Associations are advocates - for their perspective on stewardship. They are willing and able to actively assist with the task of helping local people help themselves in their stewardship initiatives. They are experienced and capable in developing and implementing plans of action.

Associations have the potential of providing:

- land and resource management services
- marketing help
- education and training
- data
- monitoring of resources and opinion
- influence on program development
- advocacy for good policies

Associations that have local chapters could be expected to have an interest in having a representative as a member of the council, or at least liaising with council in order to keep their chapter in synchrony with plans an progress. Associations that do not have a local chapter may also participate as a member.

Resource Agencies

The government and non-government agencies that will participate will be those that have a mandate to further the management and protection of resources - and have a commitment to the purpose of Ontario Stewardship. They are staffed with people who can provide information and knowledge regarding many aspects of natural resources. Often they are in a position to offer financial, educational, product or advisory incentives to landowners, or supportive policies, services and programs.

Participation of the agencies will be in the context of the evolving understanding of "partnerships". Agencies are encouraged to contribute their tangible support and expertise for the good of Ontario Stewardship, and also because their contribution is a benefit to their agency, in achieving their goals.

Their contributions will range from advising on the development and management of projects, collaborative delivery of projects, to the provision of services to the Council (e.g. management of finances; clerical or technical support). It is intended that the community ultimately determines its own directions and that the agencies will fulfill a support role.

Stewardship Coordinators

Stewardship Coordinators are paid by MNR with the understanding that they work for the community through the Stewardship Council. Their task involves building the necessary relationships and partnerships, working collaboratively with agencies and associations, providing a window to the science and information within MNR and the extensive network that they are a part of. They may also take an active role as the spokesperson for the Council, and in the context of Ontario Stewardship, for the associations and agencies.

.They will have a responsibility to be an active participant in a network, which is a key to the success of this program. They will have a local network of personal contacts in the community. They will also be part of a regional/provincial network which will:

- create a broader sense of purpose (e.g. ecosystem and corporate approach)
- lend some consistency to the program
- maintain currency with programs and developments
- obtain and give advice on "how to" (e.g. relationship development; skills & techniques)
- create synergy and momentum

Private Forest Sustainability Fund

The fund will be provided with $500,000. from the MNR. It will be primarily for use by the Stewardship Councils, accessible via the Stewardship Coordinators and is to be used as "seed" money to lever additional money and resources (including in-kind contributions and "sweat-equity").

Stewardship Councils will receive an annual allocation of $10,000 to be used as seed money.
This money is for resource management activities, not for administration. Proposals will have most of the following characteristics:

- have broad community benefit
- have ecosystem value (e.g. not single use)
- have broad landscape impact
- incorporate cost sharing partners
- fully account for the landowner's contributions
- show a clear tie to sponsoring agencies and associations

- have community participation
- promote education and awareness (of concepts, techniques, programs, etc.)
- would not be considered to be research work
- not to be used for maintaining an entity
- project output can be measured (e.g. # of hectares treated, number of people involved)
- there is a sufficiently detailed budget proposal
- there is a communications component that identifies at least:
- how those involved in the program will be informed and enabled to implement the plan
- how the Ontario Stewardship program landowners and partners will be recognized
- how it will spread recognition of the program and success of the project (e.g. on tours, TV show coverage, other media attention)