



November 17, 2017

**The Honourable Kathleen O. Wynne**, MPP Premier of Ontario  
Room 281, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1  
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**The Honourable Kathryn McGarry**, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry (OMNRF)  
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**Re: Proposed Closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Plant.**

Dear Premier and Minister:

On behalf of the Arboretum at the University of Guelph, I am writing to express our deep concern about the proposed closure of the Ontario Tree Seed Plant in September of 2018.

The Ontario Tree Seed Plant (OTSP) was founded in 1923 during an era when the critical importance of reforestation in Ontario was first becoming better understood. During the past 94 years, the OTSP has continued to serve the tree nursery and forestry industries to meet needs that they would be unable to address on their own. These needs still exist, and, if anything, we've entered an even more critical juncture where threats from the loss of biodiversity, as well as a rapidly changing climate, require us to intensify our efforts even further to address these challenges moving forward.

The University of Guelph Arboretum has been actively engaged in the conservation of rare plants since the establishment of our Rare Woody Plants of Ontario Program in 1978. This program was initiated, with support from the OMNRF, to help archive genetic material that now totals 846 accessions from 32 species of trees and shrubs rare to Ontario. A number of these accessions represent populations that have since been lost in the wild. Offspring from these individuals have been planted into the Arboretum as living seed orchards in order to produce easy-to-access, locally-adapted seed representative of Ontario populations, while simultaneously reducing the seed collection pressure on the threatened individuals that still remain in the wild in Ontario.

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After over 30 years of development, these seed orchards are now beginning to produce bountiful crops. While we have been able to share some of this seed with provincial conservation authorities, restoration councils and tree nurseries, we've only been able to do this in a very limited capacity. Moving forward, we had counted on the capabilities of the OTSP to process, store and distribute these seeds to an ever-increasing number of stakeholders in need, as we simply do not have the facilities or capacity to do so on our own. We are not alone with this assessment - partnerships with the OTSP are crucial to a number of other organizations that we cooperate with.

Healthy forests will always be a critically important component of our natural heritage in the province. More recently, it's also been better understood that the restoration of natural ecosystems in Ontario is of equal importance to the exclusive replanting of economically-important timber species, as was the historical priority. To move forward with the restoration of biodiversity, the expansion of urban forests, the protection of threatened species and the development of healthy natural forests able to withstand the unpredictability of climate change, stakeholders need efficient and reliable access to locally-adapted seed, from an expanded range of species, and not simply seed made available based only upon the potential profit returns for private industry. The OTSP, as it already exists, is a centrally-located facility with an established infrastructure that can meet the needs of both existing and new stakeholders. Instead of moving forward to help make tree planting efforts more effective, diverse and cost-efficient in the long-run, we will instead be taking a significant step backward if the closure of the OTSP is allowed to go through.

Effective, long-term enhancement of our natural systems and green infrastructure requires coordination and cooperation on many levels across ongoing timelines. We are hopeful that you will reconsider this decision to close the OTSP, and instead engage in an open, transparent consultation process to not only keep the OTSP operational, but also to fully utilize its significant potential moving forward.

Sincerely,



Sean Fox  
Arboretum Manager & Head Horticulturist  
The Arboretum, University of Guelph

CC:

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