



Project aims to restore tornado-ravaged woodlots

Brent Davis, Record staff

August 21, 2012

HURON COUNTY — When a tornado roared ashore in Goderich exactly one year ago, it ravaged the scenic lakeside town, killing one man and injuring 37 others.

But it didn't stop there.

The powerful F3 tornado continued inland, its 300 km/h winds carving a 20-kilometre-long path along the banks of the Maitland River and through Benmiller, before finally dying out southwest of Londesborough.

Woodlots and forests were hardest hit in the rural areas, although several buildings sustained extensive damage.

It's estimated that more than 89 hectares (220 acres) of woodlots were severely affected by the storm, on properties belonging to more than 60 owners.

It's impossible to know for sure how many trees that represents. But Dave Pullen, forest conservation officer for Huron County, said the toll is considerable.

"You could probably say that tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of trees were either damaged or destroyed," he said. "There was just acres and acres of devastation."

The task facing those landowners was extensive, and expensive. Property insurance doesn't cover damage to trees, Pullen said.

"There was no assistance for them for the value of the woodlands, current and future, that were lost," he said.

That's where Trees for Benmiller comes in. By providing new trees and planting assistance, the initiative hopes to restore and enhance the tree cover lost to the tornado.

"So many people are excited about this project," said Rachel White of the Huron Stewardship Council, the lead agency for Trees for Benmiller.

A similar project called Goderich Trees is underway in the town to assist private landowners there, while the municipality is undertaking reforestation efforts on public land.

At Trees for Benmiller's launch in May, about 100 volunteers planted more than 1,200 trees and woodland shrubs comprising 15 different species at the Treblehill Farm near Benmiller.

"Our strategy for replanting is to compliment the natural regeneration that would occur," White said. Planting a variety of species will increase biodiversity and resiliency.



Trees. A swath of once-forested land cut down by an F3 tornado on Aug. 21, 2011. The downed trees in the area behind Goderich's Maitland Cemetery have since been turned to mulch trails that now weave through the area. More than 220 acres of woodlots were affected by the tornado. Janek Lowe/Record staff Source: Record staff

The project is expected to last for about three years, and White said "the sky's the limit" when it comes to fundraising efforts. The pilot project at Treblehill cost more than \$15,000, White noted.

For more information or to donate, call 1-519-482-3661.

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Remembering the tornado

A number of events are planned in Goderich on Tuesday to mark last year's deadly storm.

- Beginning at 6 a.m. — Canada AM broadcasts live from Courthouse Square
- 9 to 11 a.m. — walking tour departing from Lions Harbour Park
- 10 a.m. — open house begins at Huron Chamber of Commerce
- 1:30 p.m. — memorial dedication at Lions Harbour Park
- 3:30 p.m. — donor wall unveiled at town hall

On Aug. 26, a community church service will be held at 11 a.m. at Goderich District Collegiate Institute.

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