
MEMORANDUM

PDS-C 3-2021

Subject: Treed Areas Estimation in Niagara Region

Date: January 13, 2021

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee

From: Karen Costantini, Planning Analyst

The purpose of this memorandum is to respond to the following Council Information Request from the October 22, 2020 Regional Council Meeting:

“Provide information respecting the current tree canopy and the Region's comparator municipalities with respect to the canopy percentage”.

As part of the background work for the review of the Regional Tree and Forest Conservation By-law, an estimation for treed areas in Niagara was calculated by staff in March 2019. The estimation for treed areas was reported as 17%, a figure which has been misinterpreted as tree canopy coverage.

Staff have not completed a calculation of tree canopy coverage in Niagara. Tree canopy coverage refers to the proportion of fixed area on the ground covered by tree crowns, which would include each individual tree in the region; information that is not comprehensively available or mapped.

The calculation of 17% refers to treed area. This metric is focused on larger groupings of trees within woodlands, swamps and other natural areas, and is not a figure that demonstrates the total amount of trees across the region.

While there is considerable discussion regarding the 17% treed area metric, Planning staff note that the 17% number does not demonstrate a quality measurement of trees in Niagara, or the overall biodiversity of natural areas and features across the region as it only captures large patches of trees. Additionally, treed area is not a representation of biodiversity, as other natural features, such as thickets, meadows, bogs, etc, support a range of species and ecosystem services.

Planning staff also note that compared to other municipalities, Niagara has a considerable amount of highly-intensive agricultural land, with orchards and agricultural crops that would not be included in natural feature and area analysis, but is still extremely valuable providing ecological benefits, linkages and facilitating habitat movement.

Future references to vegetation metrics in Niagara will use updated data developed through the recently completed Ecological Land Classification mapping project, presented at the December 2020 meeting of Planning and Economic Development Committee (PDS 33-2020). As noted during this meeting, Niagara contains 51,618ha of natural area, which is approximately 27.1% of the total land area.

Information on the updated Ecological Land Classification mapping project can be found at the Region's new [Niagara Official Plan](#) website.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Karen Costantini, M.A.
Planning Analyst