

Community Involvement In Reclamation and Urban Ecology Restoration

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Regional Municipality of Sudbury Land Reclamation Program

The Regional Municipality of Sudbury is located in northern Ontario. A community of over 164,000 people, Sudbury is a centre for mining, smelting, refining activities, mining related manufacturing, research, health services, colleges and university, and government services. Sudbury, is also a service centre for Northeastern Ontario and serves as a transportation hub.

The Regional Municipality of Sudbury's Land Reclamation Program is well known to the Society for Ecological Restoration. The Land Reclamation Program is very successful and has truly helped to transform the Sudbury landscape over the past decade. What was once barren land, with black rock, is today a treed landscape. What was once a landscape suffering, is today a landscape that is thriving and flourishing. What was once a community with a negative reputation, is today a community gaining popularity.

The Regional Municipality of Sudbury initiated its Land Reclamation program in 1978 to restore damaged lands within its urban communities and along its road corridors. Today over 3,200 ha of the most damaged land have been revegetated with grass cover, through the application of lime, fertilizer and seed. In these same areas 4,400,000 trees comprising of 15 different coniferous and hardwood species have been planted.

Carried out under the Region's sponsorship and administration, the program has provided short term employment opportunities for over 3,500 students and unemployed individuals. Program costs exceed 17 million dollars with funding primarily obtained through a wide variety of government grant programs and private sector contributions.

Community Involvement...A Success

In 1992, the Regional Municipality of Sudbury was recognized and received the United Nations - Local Government Honours Award. This is but one of many prestigious awards the Program has received through out the years to recognize the Programs accomplishments and the transformation of the Sudbury landscape. These awards, and the success of the Program would not be possible, if it wasn't for the hundreds of people involved.

The Regional Municipality of Sudbury's Land Reclamation Program is truly a "Community Partnership". This partnership extends to many levels. Community involvement starts with the planning and administration of the program and continues to the actual implementation.

Community participation in the program includes:

Planning

- Development of 5 year Plans
- Site Selection and planting locations
- Program Marketing and promotion
- Technical information
- Program direction and strategic planning
- Public awareness
- research and monitoring
- funding for program operation
- long term funding strategies

Program Operation

- tree planting
- application of lime, fertilizer and seed

Vegetation Technical Advisory Committee (VETAC)

Most of the community involvement for the Planning activities are generated through an established committee. In 1972, the newly formed Regional Municipality of Sudbury created a “Technical Tree Planting Committee”. In 1974, the Committee funded a survey to assess vegetation damage along main roads and railways. Joint work between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Laurentian University (Sudbury) showed that manual application of limestone, fertilizer and seed led to the establishment of grassed plots. In 1975 and 1977, semi-operational 0.5 ha plots were successfully grassed by schoolchildren. In 1978, in response to an economic downturn, the “Technical Tree Plant Committee” proposed a land reclamation program. The Committee’s name changed to the Vegetation Enhancement Technical Advisory Committee (VETAC) in 1978, to better reflect its broadened mandate.

VETAC meets monthly and has the status of an Advisory Committee to The Regional Municipality of Sudbury Regional Council. Currently there are 26 members on VETAC. Each member sits on the main Committee as well as volunteering time to a sub-committee. The sub-committees are the working committees where ideas are explored and developed. These sub-committees include:

Program Operation:

This committee looks at the programming of the program, including timing, locations to be planted and areas to be “treated” and “greened”. In addition this sub-committee researches and explores technical aspects of the Program including application rates and plant specie selection.

Research and Monitoring:

This committee oversees the monitoring and research aspects of the Program. This includes exploring success rates of the living plant materials. In addition this committee develops test sites to explore various application techniques to determine if our practices and procedures can be improved.

Education/Communication

This sub-committee develops and outlines promotional and educational aspects for the Program. Some of these initiatives include production of brochures, data sheets, display boards and signage. This committee is currently developing a video and web site on the Program.

Finance

This sub-committee is working to provide funding for the initiatives of the other sub-committees. These finances are not used for the yearly operation of the Program. Various fundraising strategies are developed and implemented by this committee.

Each sub-committee works on their own projects according to their own schedules and time commitments. All of the sub-committee's work is presented to VETAC for comment and approval. All VETAC activities are ultimately sanctioned by the Regional Government.

The Vegetation Enhancement Technical Advisory Committee (VETAC) is made up of volunteers and interested individuals from the community. These individuals bring a wide range of knowledge and expertise to the table. Members on the committee represent government, business, industry, academia, or are individuals who have a genuine interest in the Land Reclamation Program.

Government Partners

Government participation in the program varies from year to year. Government funding is generally for labour and provides opportunities for unemployed or underemployed individuals. In addition several government agencies provide technical expertise as well as materials and equipment.

Mining Companies

INCO and Falconbridge Limited provide financial assistance, materials and equipment as well as technical expertise.

Clubs and Organizations

Various clubs and organizations assist by planting trees and/or by adopting a parcel of land. Many groups adopt an area for several years, liming the soil, applying fertilizer and seed followed by tree planting.

Schools

School groups both elementary and secondary assist the program by liming and tree planting. The program also involves students from other parts of the Province, who are visiting the City on class excursions. These students plant trees and learn about Sudbury's Program and the history of the Sudbury region as a part of their class trip.

Private Companies

Several private businesses have provided financial contributions, material, equipment and/or labour.

Interested citizens

Many citizens of the Region of Sudbury volunteer their time to plant trees. Individuals are usually asked to join an organized group on a planting day.

Academic

Laurentian University, Cambrian College and College Boreal assist the program by providing the Committee, technical expertise and support. As well, ongoing monitoring of the program and use of equipment /facilities have been provided as required.

Why the community is involved?

By far, the most important reason why individuals volunteer their time to the Land Reclamation Program is that they feel a sense of accomplishment in the work and believe in the program. Many people who volunteer their time to the Program grew up in the region and have noticed an improvement in the local environment. These volunteers remember the “black rocks” and have witnessed the transformation of the environment. For them being part of this change is rewarding and meaningful.

Since the program has been operational for over 15 years, the efforts of past work are now showing. The trees that were planted over 10 years ago on treated lands, are now reaching heights of over 15'. These trees are a continual reminder to the community that the Program works. Realizing that the program is successful, the community supports the programs continuance and yearly activity. A sense of pride is illustrated as volunteers discuss their past tree planting efforts and how they can see how the trees have grown.

The communities interest in the environment does not stop with the Land Reclamation Program. An “environmental awareness” attitude has surfaced in the community. This attitude has lead to, an increase in environmental groups and organizations, an increase in landscaping on both business and residential properties and an environmental focus for new developments. This awareness has recently seen the creation of a “Community Enhancement Award” program, recognizing landscaped developments and environmental initiatives.

How do we encourage community participation?

Each year an annual “Tree Giveaway” is held. The purpose of this event is to communicate to the community the efforts of the program. In addition to giving away trees, displays illustrate the effects of the Program, and brochures and information are provided on the Program. By illustrating “before” and “after” photos, the community is reminded of “what once was”. This event draws many people who wish to volunteer their time and/or donate to the Program.

Efforts to show appreciation to the many volunteers are also important. Appreciation Ceremonies, recognition plaques, barbecues, and thank you letters are all used to express thanks to the many who volunteer their time to the Land Reclamation Program.

Tools you need for community participation

The fact that the program operation has remained “flexible”, has allowed us to take advantage of several opportunities. Given the fact that we are prepared to accommodate either large or small groups, we are able to work with many groups. We also strive to meet the requirements of the group wishing to assist with the program. This means being available to meet their time schedule, providing them with the equipment and material they need, and providing them with direction and supervision.

In addition to being flexible, we have also found that being prepared is a key to be able to capitalize on available opportunities. We encourage the development of a Plan or Proposal for a particular aspect of the Program, even if we do not currently have the finances to make that project a reality. By having the project well thought out and developed, it is easier to try to gain funding and/or take advantage of a financial opportunity as it arises. This also encourages many of our volunteer committee members, to remain open and interested in developing and working on projects. As projects become a reality, those volunteering their time to develop the idea, feel a sense of accomplishment, and are encouraged to continue to work with the Program to see other results.

Challenges

Working with the community is very rewarding and satisfying. The efforts and results are shared, and become more meaningful and complete. However, working with volunteers creates its own set of “challenges”. One of the biggest issues is the time factor. Meeting others' schedules and including them into the decision making process all takes time. Often the commitment by volunteers is sincere, but cannot be honoured. A group may only be able to rally half of the individuals they thought they originally could get, or may not be able to show up at all. All of this may occur as a last moments notice, or even not at all.

Another issue, is the quality of work completed. Some of this work may be completed very well and other volunteer work may not be very successful. We know with our tree planting, for example, that the survival rate for our trees is less than when planted by our paid workers. The survival rate appears to decrease with the age of the volunteers. For example, elementary school children often plant several trees in one hole.

Overall, the benefits of working with the community far out way the many challenges. The more people educated and involved in the program mean we have more advocates and supporters of the Program. Community involvement in environmental programs creates a sense of pride in individuals and this pride translates into an ongoing environmental consciousness . With financial burdens facing all of us, community involvement is one method to ensure projects are completed.

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Reclamation and Restoration of Settled Landscapes

September 27th – 30th, 1998
Markham, Ontario

PROCEEDINGS

Hosted by the

SOCIETY FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION
Ontario Chapter

and the

CANADIAN LAND RECLAMATION ASSOCIATION

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