

PINE PLANTATION REHABILITATION PILOT PROJECT BY PARK SUPERINTENDENT JEREMY PAWSON

In the spring of 2016, Killarney Provincial Park began the Pine Plantation Rehabilitation Pilot Project in three small areas located along the Granite Ridge Trail.

The basis for this project stems from an Ontario Parks best practices guide for managing plantations in protected areas, particularly in wilderness-class parks like Killarney, to promote ecological integrity. The intent is to remove small plots of trees and create gaps in the Plantation's canopy to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor.

You may ask yourself "How is cutting down trees healthy for the ecological integrity of the park?" While I will never say that planting a tree is a bad thing, there is a right and wrong way to do so when the primary objective is to create a healthy ecosystem.

The next time you take a walk through a park or trail near your home, take a look around. You may notice a number of tree species, some undergrowth or new growth on the forest floor, some birds flying around or (if it's the right time of year) some flowers blooming. These are all signs of a healthy forest where natural processes have been able to take place without interference.

The same cannot be said for the types of plantations in Killarney Provincial Park because about 30 years ago, with the best of intentions, a planting project took place to fill in some gaps around the George Lake area. This resulted in a very dense forest with no light penetration, only one species of tree and very little wildlife activity. Natural processes were not able to take place creating a monoculture (single crop) forest.

Our hope is that by creating gaps in the canopy, other tree species will spread. Believe it or not, some shade-tolerant species such as maple may lay dormant in the soil for very long periods of time and will begin to grow once they have access to sunlight. We will also be monitoring for certain indicator species such as Salamanders to use as a benchmark for success.

So, if you have an opportunity to take a hike on the Granite Ridge Trail and compare these plots to other areas of the plantation, I think you will be pleasantly surprised. Nature has a funny way of working things out when we decide not to "speed up the process". It may not be as pretty as a mature maple or hemlock stand, however, it is exactly what it is supposed to be. The beauty is in the eye of the beholder!

Thank you to the Friends of Killarney Park for your support of this very important project.

