

**Assessments rolled back for forested estates**

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When property-tax assessments begin arriving in rural Ontario mailboxes in the next few weeks, they should hold a pleasant surprise for owners of country estates with forested land.

Landowners who have enrolled in the province's Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program will receive average assessment reductions in the 20- to 30-per-cent range, and some could be as high as 69 per cent, according to the Ontario Forestry Association.

The reductions are the result of the association's successful lobbying to overturn tax hikes imposed in 2002 by the province's Municipal Property Assessment Corp.

"We got what the OFA asked for: a return to being treated similarly to farmers under the property assessment program," the OFA's executive-director Carla Grant said this week.

"Farmers and foresters are both stewards of the land, but forest landowners have an additional challenge of longer crop rotation periods because most Ontario hardwood trees take 80 years to reach harvestable size."

There are 10,000 landowners enrolled in the tax incentive program in Ontario. They must own at least 10 acres of forested land to qualify, and they have to prepare a management plan and have it approved by a licensed agent and agree to stay in the program for 10 years.

The program was established in 1998 to encourage owners of private woodlots to conserve and make long-term investments in their forests.

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