



# YEAR END REPORT 2024/25

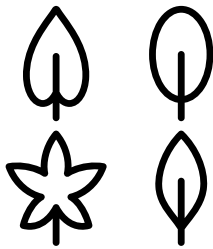
FOREST  
**Gene Conservation**  
ASSOCIATION

# ABOUT THE FGCA

**Vision** A genetically diverse, resilient forested landscape that supports life and a healthy economy

**Mission** To ensure that genetic diversity is maintained as the foundation of a resilient forested landscape in Ontario

The Forest Gene Conservation Association is guided by four key strategies.



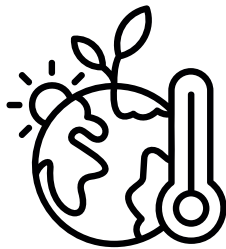
## Species Conservation

Effectively deliver on and champion recovery efforts through functional and conservation-based programming.



## Seed Management Expertise

Ensuring the supply and use of high quality, locally adapted woody plant seed.



## Climate Change Adaptation

Providing strategic forest management advice and facilitating assisted migration.



## Education and Advocacy

Increasing awareness and knowledge in seed expertise, forest genetic resource management principles and species conservation.

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# PRESIDENTS MESSAGE



This year was full of challenges and growth, with change continuing to drive everything that we do.

We are pleased to announce that FGCA has finalized a new Strategic including big goals that will guide our organization on our mission: 'to ensure that genetic diversity is maintained as the foundation of a resilient forested landscape in Ontario'. This strategy reaffirms our core values and clearly defines the key pillars that guide our work.

Our network of partners continues to expand, and so does our reputation as the go-to organization for the conservation of trees and woody plant species. Interest in high-quality seed continues to grow and our team's practical and technical knowledge is invaluable for helping our clients efforts to adapt to climate change. We're energized by the work ahead and look forward to what we will achieve together over the next five years. Thank you to everyone who contributed to developing this vision.

The FGCA is also excited to announce that we will serve as chair of the Canadian Forest Genetics Association for 2025. Originally rooted in tree improvement, this national, science-focused organization works to advance forest management policy and practice through science and technology advancement. FGCA is hosting 2025's annual conference in our nation's capital from August 11-15. We look forward to seeing you there!

Matt Mertins, R.P.F.  
President, Forest Gene Conservation Association



# CEO'S MESSAGE



It has been a year of new partnerships and collaborations as well as a year of significant reflection.

The board and team have a shared vision for the future with the new Strategic Direction set to begin April 2025. A clear vision with strong founding principles that have successfully carried us from 1997 to today. There is so much excellent and collaborative work to do ahead and we will be doing just that—working with our strong partnerships and venturing into new ones to broaden this important work and make an even greater impact in the years ahead.

As for this year, it has been an overwhelming success as well as being full of changes and challenges in response to changing government direction with the Species Conservation Action Agency, changing federal government and the challenges facing the forest industry in this province. There is no doubt however that FGCA maintains its supportive position for all of our partners here in Ontario and across Canada. Collaboration has been key over the last 12 months.

The FGCA faced one of its largest challenges to date, losing our dear friend Melissa Spearing— please read on to see our tribute to this incredible individual.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KMG'.

Kerry McLaven  
CEO, Forest Gene Conservation Association



# FGCA TEAM



## STAFF

- **Kerry McLaven**, CEO
- **Chelsea Stentiford**, Administrative Officer
- **Heather Zurbrigg**, Director of Species Conservation
- **Kristen Sandvall**, Seed and Climate Change Program Manager
- **Meghan Clay**, Seed and Climate Change Technician
- **Corey Gent**, Eastern Ontario Butternut Technician
- **Briana Heuvig**, Operations Coordinator
- **Madelaine Danby**, Central Ontario Butternut Technician
- **Becky Agnew**, Forest Technician
- **Nina Hunt**, Species Conservation Program Coordinator
- **Colin Cordell**, GIS and Database Technician
- **Adam Youngblut**, Central Ontario Field Technician
- **Stefan Weber**, Seed Program Coordinator
- **Jarmila Bečka Lee**, Project Manager, Seed & Climate Change

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Matt Mertins**, R.P.F.– President
- **Brent Forbes**, R.P.F.- Vice President
- **Nancy Young**, R.P.F.- Secretary
- **Aron Fazekas**, PhD- Treasurer
- **Barb Boysen**
- **Danijela Puric-Mladenovic**, PhD
- **Jeff Sharp**, R.P.F.
- **Margaret Scott**, R.P.F.
- **Mark McDermid**
- **Maureen Jacques**
- **Rob Davies**, Associate Member OPFA
- **Steve Smith**

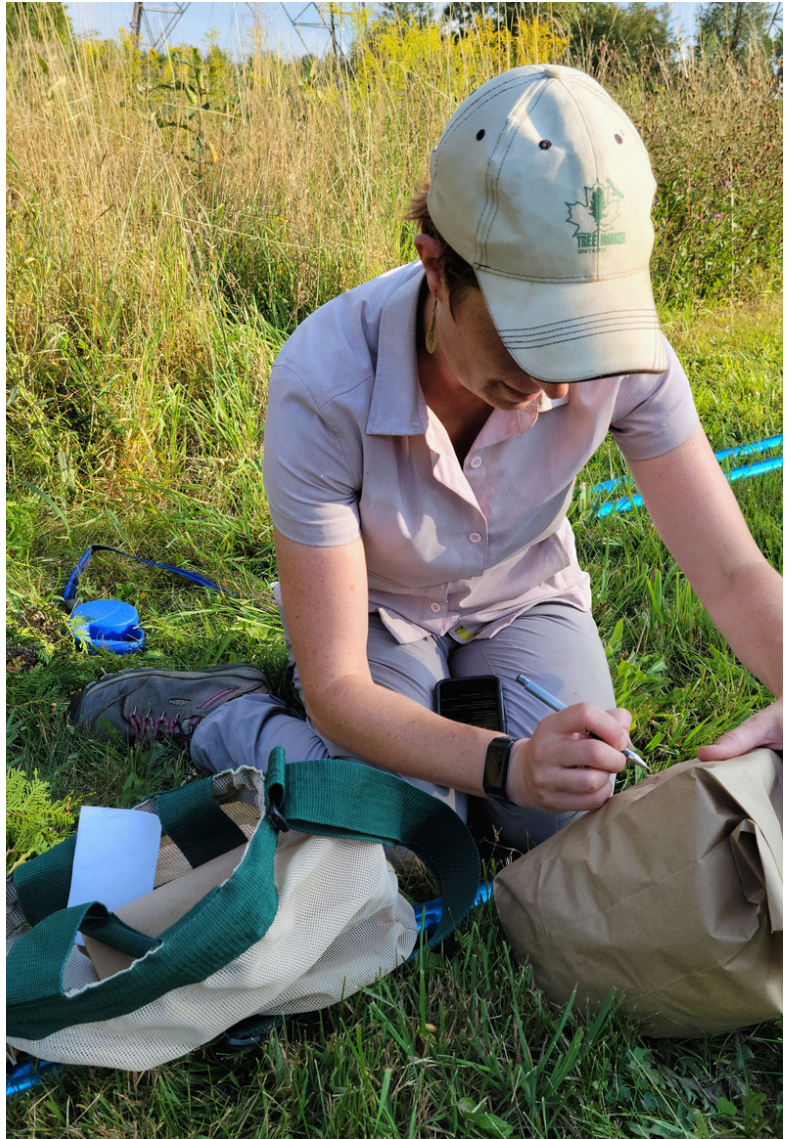
# A TRIBUTE TO MELISSA SPEARING

On August 19th the FGCA and the greater seed and forestry community lost one of our brightest shining lights, Melissa Spearing.

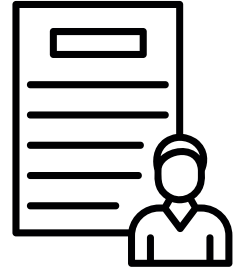
Melissa's work propelled the FGCA in the seed, climate change adaptation and gene conservation work for many years. Not only that, the friendships she made within and outside of the organization helped to establish an unbreakable foundation that will forever support forestry in Ontario, across Canada and even into the United States.

We are so thankful to have learned from, befriended, collected seed, toasted drinks and so much more with Melissa. Our organization and team will continue to honour her and carry forward her incredible legacy.

We miss you our seedy friend.



# ADMINISTRATION & HUMAN RESOURCES



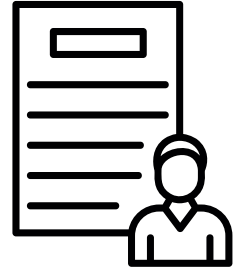
During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA) focused on strengthening governance, administrative systems, and staff capacity to support the organization’s long-term sustainability.

Planning was undertaken for the FGCA’s 30th Annual General Meeting (AGM); however, quorum was not achieved at the June 19, 2024, in-person meeting under the requirements of the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA). As a result, the Board initiated revisions to the FGCA by-laws to address quorum requirements. These revisions were approved at a Special Meeting of the Members held on September 11, 2024, which successfully achieved quorum through proxy submissions and Board participation.

A Board-led strategic session was also held in June to review progress under the 2020–2025 Strategic Direction and to inform priorities for the next five years. A draft five-year strategy is now in progress, with initial Board consultations completed.

Membership remained stable throughout the year, reaching a high of 62 members in June 2024, with 53 active members as of October 15, 2024, and continued modest growth into early 2025. Member engagement was supported through the launch of a brief newsletter and ongoing discussions led by the Education and Advocacy Committee.

# ADMINISTRATION & HUMAN RESOURCES



From an administrative perspective, the FGCA successfully completed its 2022/2023 financial audit and remained on track with all funder and grantor reporting. Significant invoicing and payment activity was managed across the year, with regular management oversight. A Reserve Fund target and policy were finalized, positioning the organization to explore investment options and improved financial tools.

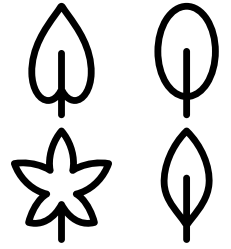
Human resources activity reflected both growth and transition. Several new staff joined the organization in 2024, strengthening capacity across program areas, while structured onboarding and training continued for newer team members. A comprehensive recruitment process resulted in the hiring of a Project Manager to support an upcoming maternity leave beginning in 2025. The Employee Handbook was updated, new employment contracts were drafted, and mental health and well-being resources were added to staff health and safety materials. Professional development and networking opportunities were encouraged to support staff growth.

The organization also marked the passing of valued colleague Melissa Spearing in August 2024, the FGCA has been focused on recognizing her contributions to the broader conservation community.

Overall, the year was marked by steady administrative performance, important governance improvements, and continued investment in staff and organizational resilience.



# SPECIES CONSERVATION



During the reporting year, the Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA) advanced its species conservation mandate through focused work on butternut recovery, black ash research and propagation, and continued engagement in broader forest health initiatives. These efforts combined applied fieldwork, research collaboration, and outreach to support the long-term conservation of genetic diversity.

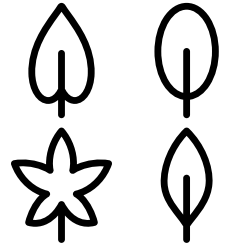
## **Butternut Conservation and Grafting**

Butternut grafting remained a cornerstone of FGCA's conservation program. The team successfully grafted 14 parent trees, producing 364 grafts, and increased representation for an additional 11 parent trees already in orchards. In May and June, 15 parent tree clones grafted in 2022 were shipped and planted across southern, central, and eastern Ontario archives. Staff conducted continuous monitoring and maintenance of 2023 and 2024 grafts at Kemptville, including weeding, watering, and survival data collection, which were entered into the database to inform ongoing management.

In November, grafts were moved into cold storage at Ferguson Tree Nursery (FTN), where staff continue to monitor temperatures, rodent activity, and pot moisture. Facility improvements included greenhouse and shade area floor repairs, poly tarp replacement, and preparation of walnut rootstock.

FGCA staff contributed to outreach and knowledge sharing through a CBC interview at FTN and participation in the Martell Forest Butternut Workshop, exchanging information with practitioners from across Canada and the United States.

# SPECIES CONSERVATION



## **Butternut Orchards, Seed, and Training**

Active orchard management included survival assessments, canker cleaning, walnut shoot moth and rose chafer mitigation, mowing, irrigation operation and shutdown, tree guard installation, and limited pruning. Over 360 grafts were planted across orchards in spring 2024. Seed forecasting was completed at multiple sites, with approximately 300 seeds from eastern Ontario orchards sent to Vineland Research Station in support of research initiatives. Staff participated in monthly U.S. Forest Service-led research calls and bi-weekly archive management meetings.

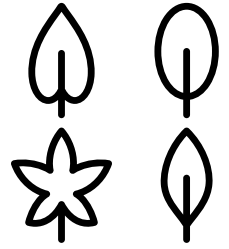
Planning began for 2025 Butternut Health Expert workshops in Ancaster and potential on-site training with the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation in late summer 2025. Despite challenges from predation and a poor seed year, two-year-old potted seedlings were distributed to clients, while five archivable butternut trees were identified and confirmed via DNA testing to support 2025 grafting efforts.

## **Black Ash Recovery Program**

The black ash program progressed through a two-year workplan and field implementation. Staff conducted surveys at 10 locations using the Vegetative Sampling Protocol (VSP), identifying new potential ash sites.

Propagation research included hot callus grafting and rooted cutting trials, with equipment established at FTN and partnerships with Somerville Seedlings and other agencies. Approximately 1.5 kg of black ash seed was collected and sent to

# SPECIES CONSERVATION

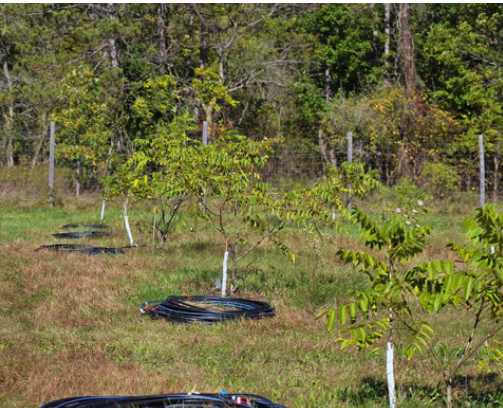


the Ontario Forest Research Institute for germination trials. Staff engaged with Indigenous communities and research partners across Canada and the United States, shared findings at professional forums, and contributed to the development of outreach materials and a seed collection quick reference guide to advance black ash recovery.

## **Broader Forest Health Initiatives**

FGCA continued to engage in related conservation work, including butternut population studies, American beech, chestnut recovery, and spruce grafting with the Superior Woods Tree Improvement Association. These efforts reinforce FGCA's role in applied forest genetics, species-at-risk conservation, and collaboration with a broad network of researchers, practitioners, and community partners.

Overall, the year was marked by significant applied conservation achievements, expanded research collaboration, and strengthened capacity to protect Ontario's at-risk tree species.



# SEED MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE



During the 2024–2025 reporting year, the Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA) advanced its expertise in seed management through training, orchard operations, seed sourcing, and capacity-building initiatives, strengthening its role as a leader in certified seed collection and forest genetic stewardship.

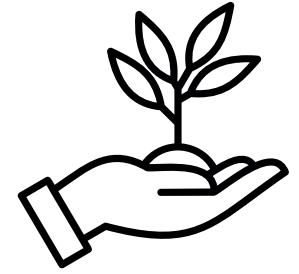
## **Certified Seed Collector (CSC) Program**

FGCA delivered comprehensive virtual and in-field CSC training. Two new staff, were trained as course trainers and participated in Basics and Advanced webinars. One-day in-field CSC sessions were held at Kemptville (27 participants) and Everett (30 participants). Additional training events included seed basics courses delivered to the Lower Ottawa Valley Woodlot Owner chapter (27 participants) and York Regional Forest staff (28 participants).

A new national certification mark was designed and submitted for registration, we anticipate to share more updates on that in 2026. A modified 2nd edition of the seed manual was produced in memory of Melissa Spearing, with family-approved layout and a new ISBN.

To advance our national Certified Seed Collector program, FGCA confirmed a virtual platform, and a videographer to capture seasonal content. Staff are developing course materials, filming schedules, and jurisdictional modules, while exam marking continues for FGCA and those who wish to challenge the certification following the National Tree Seed Centres training program.

# SEED MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE



## **Seed Sourcing and Quality**

US-based seed procurement for the Halton Food Forest project faced challenges and required a pivot to solid southern Ontario sources, however the final planting plan of 16 species was successful. Seed sourcing was completed with seed procured from southern Ontario orchards and US orchard suppliers. US-based seed outreach work has strengthened FGCA's seed contact database for future projects.

Discussions with the National Tree Seed Centre (NTSC) regarding Seed Quality Guidelines are ongoing, with base data requiring rework due to human resource challenges externally.

## **Seed Orchard and Genetic Installation Management**

White pine seed orchards and progeny trials received extensive operational attention. Tasks included road grading, mowing, irrigation, tree thinning, vegetation control, and re-labelling. Wildlife cameras were installed at Cayuga to monitor orchard conditions. FGCA made significant progress on white pine plus-tree and progeny trial database management, including data cleaning, and GIS integration. Orchard seed was distributed to FGCA partners. SPA maintenance plans and brush cutter acquisition supported ongoing operational needs.

## **Capacity Development and Partnerships**

FGCA engaged with northern Ontario partners and collectors regarding wild seed collection and operational planning for boreal regions. As part of the

# SEED MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE



2 Billion Tree Seed Capacity Fund project, FGCA contributed to a national survey of seed suppliers, aiding the creation of an interactive Tableau mapping [tool](#), including a French-accessible version.

## **Outcomes and Impact**

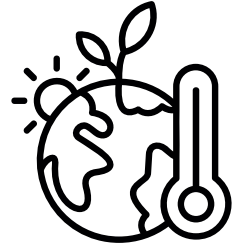
Through these initiatives, FGCA strengthened its capacity to deliver national seed certification for release in 2026, improve orchard management, and expand outreach and training.

Strategic seed sourcing, staff training, and the development of a virtual learning platform ensure continued delivery of high-quality resources for forest practitioners in the years ahead

These efforts reinforce FGCA's position as a leader in seed management expertise, providing a foundation for ongoing program growth and reliable information that is practical in nature.



# CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION



FGCA advanced multiple climate change adaptation initiatives focused on assisted migration trials, southern seed sourcing, and partnerships.

## **Assisted Migration Trials (AMTs)**

In collaboration with Natural Resources Canada and the Canadian Forest Service (CFS), FGCA prepared a thinning report for the Holst AMT site to support stand health and research objectives. Thinning was coordinated for late November and included the collection of tree “cookies” to compare growth and performance across provenances.

## **Other Climate Adaptation Projects**

The York Regional Forest (YRF) climate adaptation and conifer SPA project proposal was approved, with administrative steps completed to initiate work. A site visit was conducted at the Centennial Tract, and project information was transferred to support continuity during staff leave. Seed procurement planning and work was initiated and three white pine provenances were secured for the SPA, with planting planned for spring 2026. An additional US seed source was secured and was slated for plug production. A draft planting and thinning plan for the YRF site was developed and reviewed with York Regional Forest staff to guide implementation.

FGCA also supported national and interprovincial adaptation work. Red oak seed was collected from St. Clair Region Conservation Authority and shipped to the University of New Brunswick for the Trans-X project.



# EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY



FGCA advanced knowledge exchange through education, professional engagement, and digital outreach, strengthening capacity across forest genetics, seed management, and climate adaptation.

## **Education and Training**

FGCA shared expertise through panels, advisory committees, and course development. FGCA participated as a panelist in Seedark's Solving the Workforce Equation webinar and continued service on the Fleming College Forest Technician Advisory Committee. Development of the Forest Genetic Resource Management (FGRM) short course has been developed and launched on the FGCA website using LearnDash, with registration available online.

## **Presentations and Professional Engagement**

FGCA delivered presentations to diverse audiences, including the Northern Forest Genetics Associations, community forest managers and by-law officers, Algonquin College students, and conservation leaders. Staff attended and contributed to key sector events, including the Forestry Futures Trust related meetings, Canadian Pest Forum, Southern Ontario Seed Strategy meetings and strategy launch, MNR policy transfer sessions, and training at the National Tree Seed Centre in Fredericton. Media engagement supported broader outreach, including CBC coverage and a YouTube feature highlighting FGCA's butternut conservation work.

# EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY



## **SFL Engagement**

FGCA maintained active engagement with Sustainable Forest Licensees (SFLs) through tours, webinars, and coordinated meetings. Staff participated in silvicultural tours, USDA/USFS Tree Improvement 101 webinars, and delivered updates on the White Pine Renewal project, generating strong interest from SFL partners. A structured SFL meeting schedule and speaker plan was developed and implemented with positive reviews. Sessions focused on seed upgrading, seed supply, and stock availability, and drawing on expertise from Canadian and US partners.

## **Digital Outreach**

FGCA strengthened its online presence through consistent social media activity, blog posts, and newsletters. A Year in Review newsletter was distributed to members with positive feedback received. A communications plan has been developed for 2025/2026, including monthly blogs and quarterly newsletters. Social media engagement continues to grow steadily across platforms, reflecting increased reach and visibility for FGCA's programs and priorities.

