Vastis' court-ordered replanting nears completion

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

A Burlington man convicted of destroying 23 acres of environmentally-sensitive woodlands on his Milton property has "fully co-operated" with Halton Region and is close to completing a court-ordered massive tree restoration plan.

According to a Region staff report, George Vastis — 65 at the time of his sentencing in September, 2006 — completed a massive tree replanting program this past May that was included in the $122,000 restoration plan.

The plan included the planting of 2,500 seedlings per hectare along with shrubs and conifers, and the use of tree guards and mulch pads. Vastis also watered the stock throughout the summer.

A monitoring report prepared in August determined a 90 per cent success rate of the planting activities, according to the Regional report. A replanting will take place this month to replace the 10 per cent of dead nursery stock with new seedlings.

Following a final assessment after the replanting, "Vastis will have fulfilled all his obligations under the court ordered restoration plan," states the report.

However, though Vastis' responsibilities would be complete, the Region estimates it will have to spend up to five years monitoring and tending to the replanted forest — with Vastis' permission, which it expects to receive — to ensure a minimum 80 per cent survival of the young trees.

The annual cost of $5,000 to $7,000 would be met through the Region's forestry management budget. Without such tending, which includes control of competing vegetation and replanting of dead trees, 50 to 80 per cent of the replanted trees could die.

Vastis and his numbered company were convicted in April, 2006 of cutting trees in a woodlot and in an environmentally sensitive area, the Sixteen Mile Creek Valley, in April and July of 2003, contrary to the Ontario Forestry Act and Halton's tree bylaw.

The judge concluded the clearings were to build a golf course, which Vastis repeatedly denied, saying it was for agricultural purposes.

Vastis was fined $33,000 and ordered to complete the restoration plan.

The property is in Milton near the Oakville border and lies south of Britannia Road and north of Hwy. 407, between Regional Road 25 and Trafalgar Road.

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— with files from Stephanie Hounsell

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