Sustainability
Canadian Horticultural
Peat Industry
POSITION PAPER
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Background

The following is the Canadian horticultural peat industry commitment to a Sustainability program.

It provides our Statement, the approach we are taking to achieve Environmental Responsibility, Economic Viability and Social Accountability.

It also outlines our intent to communicate in a transparent and traceable manner our achievements in meeting the sustainability measures important to the industry and stakeholders.

Canadian Horticultural Peat Industry Sustainability Statement

“The Canadian horticultural peat industry contributes to society’s well being through its products and activities from peatlands to consumers. The members are committed to a sustainable management and development approach that provides: environmental responsibility, economic viability, social accountability.”

The following presentation sets out how the horticultural peat industry proposes to account for each of these core elements.

A) Environmental Responsibility

Peatlands: A natural resource

Peatlands defined as: An area with or without vegetation with a naturally accumulated peat layer at the surface.

Peatlands are biological resources created as a result of natural science and processes, i.e. a natural resource with ecosystem functions. It is not a resource created as a result of geological sciences and processes, i.e. a non-renewable resource resulting from geological and physical processes (heat, pressure).
Responsible Peatland Management:

Responsible peatland management: The stewardship and use of peat and peatlands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic, and social functions at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems (the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Helsinki, 1993). Note: criteria for responsible management of peatlands include (a) conservation of biological diversity, (b) maintenance of productive capacity of peatland ecosystems, (c) maintenance of peatland ecosystem health and vitality, (d) conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources, (e) maintenance of peatlands contributions to global carbon cycles, (f) maintenance and enhancement of long term multiple socio economic benefits to meet the needs of societies, and (g) a legal, institutional, and economic framework for peatland conservation and responsible management (Montreal Process 1993). (Note: This definition was modified from the definition of forest management set out in the Dictionary of Forestry, published by The Society of American Foresters, ISBN 0-939970-73-2)

In keeping with this definition the CSPMA and its members endorse:

Protection/Conservation

Canadian peatlands need to be set aside under management for protection and conservation. Currently there are large tracks of Canada’s peatlands under some form of national or provincial legislation that protects or conserves their existing ecosystem values from development. It is estimated that 89,910,000 hectares or 81% of Canada’s peatlands remain undisturbed. These peatlands support fish and wildlife, conservation values, biodiversity and other ecosystem values. We would encourage further areas be established for protection or conservation following integrated management planning processes.

Economic Value

There are tracks of peatlands that are being used in support of their economic value. Peatlands are being developed throughout the nation for a full range of development interests. Nationally, it is estimated that 19% of the peatlands are under some form of development. Peat moss production accounts for approximately 17,000 hectares or 0.016% of Canada’s peatland resource. Continued responsible management to ensure sustained horticultural harvesting opportunities are strongly supported by the Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association (CSPMA).
Future Generations

A key measure of responsible peatland management relates to future generations of Canadians and their ability to use peatlands in the future. Based on the figures provided it is reasonable to assert that nationally the amount of peatlands available outside of the protected landscapes and not under existing development will be able to provide multi future generations with opportunities to either develop or conserve these peatlands.

Rate of Use

As it relates to the horticultural industry, the amount being consumed on an ongoing basis is not greater than the amount that is being produced under normal ecosystem productivity. Evidence based on the document, Canadian Peat Harvesting and the Environment, Second Edition, Issue Paper No. 2001-1, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, identifies that over 70 million tonnes of peat accumulate each year in Canada. Of this only 1.3 million tonnes of peat on average is harvested each year (Statistics Canada, 2000 (http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=26-202-X&CHROPG=1).

This rate of use is a reflection of the national values. It is understood that there are regions within Canada that have a concentration of the development interests of our industry. In these areas we strongly endorse the restoration of all peatlands following completion of harvest activities. It is our view that through this commitment to restore the peatlands back to fully functioning peatland ecosystems the environmental values of the peatlands can be responsibly maintained.

Undiminished Ecosystem Values – Future

Clearly the rate of natural ecosystem productivity far exceeds the amount harvested under horticultural development on a yearly basis. This is an important indication of the management of the peatland values and one which provides assurance that the productive yield of the peatland ecosystem is maintained undiminished.

There are regional and local areas where the future use of the peatlands under existing management practices for horticultural use will be restricted (E.g. New Brunswick and portions of Québec). Not all peatlands within these areas will be developed for horticultural purposes. For production sites where harvest operations have been completed, peatlands will continue to exist, their environmental values fully functional, and only their economic potential (i.e. future horticultural use) impaired for future generations. The future environmental values (biodiversity, water storage, and water quality and carbon sequestration) are safeguarded in the restoration and or reclamation management practices in place today.
Horticultural peat biomass will not be available within a 100 year timeframe, (established by international science based agreement as the measurement time frame for natural resource sustainability recovery) to the depth and quality that existed prior to development.

Further, carbon sequestration and the ability of the peatlands to function as either a sink or source of carbon is currently an important measure of management. Evidence indicates that following restoration or reclamation harvested peatlands begin to sequester carbon. However, the rate of sequestration compared to emissions may take many years post harvest to reach a net sink status (depending on the starting point of when restoration occurred).

In these two issues (peat biomass accumulation and carbon net sink balance) the peatlands harvested today may not be able to meet the “undiminished” reference in the definition of sustainability.

Regulations

Nowhere in Canada are peatlands permitted to be used for horticultural purposes without thorough environmental evaluations and rigorous regulatory approval.

We would encourage greater harmony and consistency in the regulatory and administrative processes for the allocation and development of the commercial horticultural peat resources throughout the nation.

Peatlands: A Renewable Resource

Peatlands are renewable both from a natural disturbance response and an anthropogenic (peat harvesting) impact. The rate of recovery and the degree of biodiversity may differ but the renewal of the peatlands is not in dispute.

The peat industry’s commitment to restoration or reclamation emulates to a degree the renewal patterns of peatlands following a natural disturbance such as wildfires. The work of the Industrial Research Chair in Peatland Management has provided the industry with the science and methods to begin the renewal of peatlands following the completion of harvesting activities. The evidence from this research demonstrates that the restoration efforts of the industry can return a peatland that has been harvested for horticultural use to a functioning ecosystem within a period of 7-10 years.

Carbon sequestration and sink/source relationships within peatlands can vary between peatlands disturbed by natural occurrences and peatlands harvested for horticultural use. In both cases sequestration begins shortly after restoration has been completed, the source/sink balance however, can take longer for harvested peatlands.
It is fully recognized that during a human lifetime the rate of peat accumulation in a restored peatland will not replace the volume of peat that existed prior to the commencement of harvesting activities. It is however our commitment to reestablish the natural ecosystem’s processes, which over an extended period of time can be expected to regenerate the peat biomass that previously existed in the peatland. We believe that it is the success or failure of these efforts to reestablish the natural ecosystems processes that should be used to measure the results of the industry’s restoration and rehabilitation activities.

In summary, peatlands are absolutely a renewable resource. Peat biomass, on the other hand, is a slowly renewable resource. While peat biomass continues to accumulate beneath restored peatlands, the rate of accumulation is a multi-generational process and, therefore, not renewable as that term is commonly understood.

B) Economic Viability

The second pillar of the industry’s sustainability strategy is economic viability. It is our belief that by maintaining an economically strong industry we can meet the expectations of major stakeholders, including customers, lenders, and investors. Financially viable companies are best able to provide a basis for sustainable development and continual improvement. An economically viable industry produces a greater degree of benefit for society. The single most important component of economic viability is being competitive on an international scale and retaining a strong customer focus. Through this it is our intention to deliver quality products and services to meet present and future market requirements.

C) Social Accountability

The final pillar is social accountability by the industry.

Conducting our business with integrity and reflecting changing societal values in our performance will provide assurances to not only the market but communities and employees of the industry.

Economic opportunities and a safe and productive work environment for our employees and clients are social benefits that will strengthen our overall sustainability performance.

We will engage our stakeholders in a proactive and transparent manner and be respectful of their interests. In this manner our communities and those affected directly or indirectly in our business will be recognized.

The industry will contribute to the economic and social well-being in communities where we operate, as well as regionally and nationally.
Communicating the status, action plans and outcomes of steps taken by the industry as part of its Sustainability Program for all three pillars is an essential step. Awareness of our initiatives must be communicated to all of our stakeholders in a transparent and traceable way. Accountability for delivering this messaging is shared collectively through the respective Associations as well as by each of the corporate members. The following reporting obligations are committed to by the industry.

**Industrial Sustainability Reporting**

This applies to the industry as represented by their respective Associations (CSPMA, Quebec Peat Producers Association [APTHQ], and New Brunswick Peat Producers Association [NBPPA]). All associations will produce an **Industrial Sustainability Report (ISR)** outlining the sustainability accounting for their respective jurisdictions.

The Report is to be based on Environmental, Social and Economic benchmarks that measure the respective national or provincial values of the horticultural peat industry.

It is proposed that the Report should be issued every three years showing the changes in the industry’s sustainability indicators. The results of changes are to be based on the Action Plans of the industry in response to the improvements identified from the benchmarks.

The use of an Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) or other similar documents may be an interim measure to identify publically the industry’s environmental accounting of its product. It is not however a replacement for the production of a full Industrial Sustainability Report (ISR).

**Corporate Sustainability Reporting**

Each horticultural peat company is committed to producing their own Corporate Sustainability Report (CSR) that:

- Positions the company where it is at present regarding its environmental/economic/social accounting.
- Sets out its Action Steps to be taken to improve its outcomes for these sustainability measures.
- Reports on the changes over time that occur in achieving the improvements.

The report is to be published every three to five years and be based on common measurements of sustainability applicable to all industry members.
This will require the industry and companies to agree upon a set of common measures and prepare responses to the questions raised in the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) (Environmental / Social / Economic) benchmarking studies.

At present the LCA (Environmental) identifies the environmental account for peat harvesting and the “hot spots” that need improvement. It does not provide the full measure of the accountability that is needed by the companies for a full CSR.

Taking action on the key hot spots within each company, then reporting on these changes over time will give an environmental score card for the companies’ CSR.

Conclusion

The commercial horticultural peat industry is committed to the identification and reporting of its sustainability. It is fully recognized that the environmental responsibility, social accountability and economic viability must be managed in balance.

Environmentally we are engaged in the scientific research necessary to understand the ecosystems relationships and environmental functions of these peatland natural resources. It is our policy and practice where appropriate, to return the harvested peatlands to functioning peatland ecosystems.

It is our intent to promote continued improvement in the understanding of what is required for truly responsible peatland management. Our harvest practices, restoration, rehabilitation and where needed reclamation activities will be carried out in full cooperation with the agencies whose responsibility it is to govern the use and management of these peatlands.

The CSPMA embraces the need for third party certification of its peatland management practices. Members support the certification system developed by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) of California. The VeriFlora® Certified Peatland Products for Responsible Peatland Management is the only peatland management certification system in the world. The achievement of certification under this standard is considered an important component of the industry’s commitment to its sustainability accounting.

We continued to improve our understanding of the social as well as economic value of these peatland complexes and our industry. Without the understanding and integration of all three elements (environmental, social and economic) into the management of our industry, sustainability cannot be achieved.

A Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Industry Sustainability Model brings together our industry’s approach to sustainability. It is provided to assist in visualizing our commitment to advancing our Sustainability program.

Sustainability Model attached on next page.
Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Industry Sustainability Model

CSPMA – Sustainability Statement

“The Canadian horticultural peat industry contributes to society’s well being through its products and activities from peatlands to consumers. The members are committed to a sustainable management and development approach that provides: environmental responsibility, economic viability, social accountability.”

Environmental Responsibility
- Peatland Management:
  - Responsible Management
  - Peatlands a Renewable Resource
- Certification: VeriFlora Certification for Responsible Peatland Management

Economic Viability
- Financial Viability
- Competitive Viability
- Quality Products
- Quality Services

Social Accountability
- Economic Opportunity
- Safe Productive Workspace
- Engaged Stakeholders
- Community Well-being

Sustainability Reporting

Industrial Sustainability Reporting (ISR)
Authors: CSPMA / APTHQ / NBPPA
Timing: Every three years

Corporate Sustainability Reporting (CSR)
Authors: Companies
Timing: Every three to five years
Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association
2011

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