

## **Backgrounder – Apple Tree Identification Project (ATIP), Haliburton County, 2023**

Haliburton County is a rural Ontario County of approximately 4,000 km<sup>2</sup>, situated to the immediate north of Peterborough County on the Canadian Shield. It has a rich and varied history, which includes settlement in the 1800's by early pioneers, many of whom were farmers. Many families moving to the area brought with them varieties of apple trees, which they planted on their lands, using the apples to supplement their diet in many ways.

Historically, about 16,000 apple varieties grew on the North American landscape. (There are currently about 30,000 varieties of apples world-wide and many of these, including varieties that no longer exist, were brought to the continent by immigrants from around the world). There are currently only about 40 commercial apple varieties grown in Canada and about 20 in Ontario. Only 7 or so varieties can be typically found in the local grocery store.

The purpose of this project – the Apple Tree Identification Project – is to evaluate the living apple resource of Haliburton County with an aim to ultimately establishing a permanent small-scale industry based on this resource.

Initially, the project will concentrate on collecting current information on Haliburton County apple orchards old and new, the varieties they contain, their condition and their location. It may also be possible to identify general areas with similar site characteristics that may be suitable for additional apple orchards. Some historical information is locally available, and some documentation of the apple resource currently exists (e.g. Buck, T. and A. Ramelo. 2015. Inventory of Fruit Trees in Haliburton County. Senior Undergraduate Project Summary, Trent University in collaboration with U-Links and Environment Haliburton). The project hopes to marry historical information with up-to-date observations on apple-growing in Haliburton County.

Currently, the Haliburton County Master Gardeners, in collaboration with the University of Guelph, have identified almost 20 possible heritage varieties (8 confirmed and/or probable, and 7 possible matches). ATIP hopes to work in sync with the Master Gardeners to bring additional information on the apple resource forward, so that it may be identified and catalogued.

Although the current emphasis of ATIP is on identification (Phase 1: location, etc.), the long-term aim of ATIP is to establish a viable apple industry in the County. It aims to do this by slowly and methodically executing an additional 3 ATIP phases. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase, the catalogued apple resource of the County will be evaluated as to its historical and current significance and decisions made with respect to which varieties might be suitable for propagation. This phase will require additional resources, including land upon which an experimental orchard might be established and individuals with experience in propagation and breeding. Phase 3 will evaluate the results of these common plantings, make recommendations about cultivars suitable to Haliburton County site conditions, and encourage the local population to plant appropriate varieties on their property.

Assuming significant apple production will result from outplantings, phase 4 (the preliminary workings of which can begin in earnest at any time), will embrace working in concert with HCDC, and other relevant County agencies, to lay the foundation (including economic and risk analyses, etc.) for the fledgling industry. This phase would also evaluate the potential for attracting physical resources

to the County (e.g. apple press, etc.) and/or working with local breweries if interested to produce cider from locally-grown apples.

ATIP phase 1 is now registered as an official project with U-Links Centre for Community Research and Carmen Galea, a 4<sup>th</sup> year student at Toronto Metropolitan University (advised by Prof. S. Melles) will complete a senior research project on this topic. We are also fortunate to have Wesley Ford, a senior Trent University business student (advised by Prof. R. Yip Choy) embark upon a U-Links brokered project addressing a cost-benefit analysis of individual apple production in the County. U-Links recognizes that the development of a fledgling apple industry in the County is a long-term effort, possibly in excess of 10-15 years, and that a vast number of additional resources are needed as each phase is rolled out. U-Links also believes that there is no better time to start than now.

Climate change is a reality, and it will come to impact resources in Haliburton County in many ways. Most of these will likely be negative, although warming temperatures may have a positive effect on apple survival and success.

To date, ATIP Haliburton has identified over 170 apple tree locations in Haliburton County, including 10 orchards, of which one has ~ 200 apple trees. ATIP has obtained the support of Haliburton County Council and the lower-tier municipalities of Highlands East, Dysart et al., Minden Hills and Algonquin Highlands. The ATIP program has also been well received at local Farmer's Markets by residents and visitors.

The current project can benefit Haliburton County in several ways, by, for example, increasing resident awareness of existing old apple trees and highlighting the need for care and maintenance of existing trees. In addition, it may ultimately renew an existing food resource, increase the availability of locally grown and produced products and hence, food security. Many other spin-off effects will also be realized: e.g. an increased apple supply for the SIRCH Apple Sauce project and additional tourism opportunities within the framework of an Apple Blossom Tour.

ATIP will continue to promote the project and its components through local media and will work with interested County partners and organizations and government agencies as opportunities present themselves. U-Links will work with ATIP to provide student resources in a community-based research setting, as appropriate research topics are identified.

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