**Ecologic Function**

**Coarse Scale Habitat – Forest Age Class**
**Target –Ecologic Function**

The purpose of setting a target related to this value is to ensure that the preferred scenario includes forest ecosystem types in a range of age classes to provide wildlife habitat and maintain ecosystem function.

Various age classes in a forest, from early succession to old growth, provide different habitat niches for a host of species.

**Datasets**
The following datasets were considered as potential sources with which to facilitate potential target development for this ecological objective:

1. NPCA NAI ELC Community Series Mapping
2. Old Growth Forest Survey of Niagara – Bert Miller Nature Club/ B. Kershner (2004)

Across the study area, 0.26% of the landscape has been identified as old growth; however this is not an exhaustive or current inventory. This equates to approx 1.4% of all current mature wooded or forest cover. Based on the Natural Areas Inventory ELC mapping, 2.26% of the landscape consists of Thicket dominated Communities (early successional communities) in the early stages of succeeding into mature wooded areas or forest stands.

**Discussion**
The discussion for this value dealt with not only old growth forests which are the focus of a study by the Bert Miller Nature Club of Fort Erie in 2004, but also the early successional communities that were delineated in the Natural Areas inventory.

The Scenario Development Team (SDT) decided that the age class, and in particular old growth attributes, relate more specifically to defined fine scale species habitat needs and are better accounted for under fine scale targets rather than under coarse scale and ecological function targets.

**Data Gap**
There is a lack of consistent and comprehensive information about both forest age classes in general and the location of old growth areas within the watershed.

**Decision**
Date: April 7, 2011

**No target was set for this value.**

**Representation in the Learning Scenarios**
Due to the fact that no target was set for this value, there is nothing to report in relation to their performance in the Learning Scenarios.

**Representation in the Final Scenarios**
Due to the fact that no target was set for this value, there is nothing to report in relation to their performance in the Final Scenarios.

**Recommendations**

Complete the inventory and mapping of old growth forests throughout the watershed.

More monitoring effort should be put towards understanding the local succession of vegetative communities. Consider additional quantitative field protocols to complement ELC.

Maintaining natural area base data is recommended so that temporal changes to natural cover on the landscape can be better understood.

Scanning and archiving historic aerial photography (1955, 1978 flights) could facilitate the capture of historic woodlot data that would help form an initial and better understanding of the age of those persisting in current inventories.