



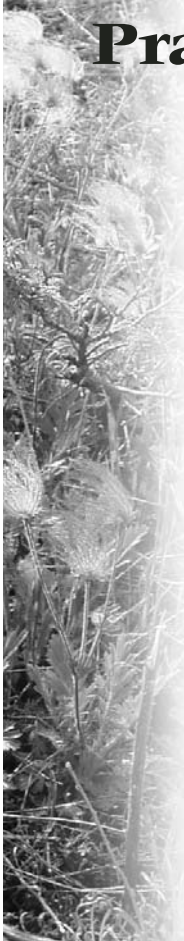
Conservancy NEWS

Protecting the special natural features of the Couchiching region for future generations.

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

March 2006

Prairie Smoke Alvar: The Inside Story



Karen Popp had always known that her Carden lands were special, even before a botanist from The Couchiching Conservancy told her a decade ago that she owned a fine stretch of alvar. Beyond a roadside hayfield, her 700-acre property rises through a band of forest and then opens into a flat plateau of rocky grasslands, wildflower meadows, and spruce woods.

That mix of open meadows, interlaced with strips of conifer forest, has one very distinctive feature – a base of solid limestone bedrock just below the surface. In May and June, these alvar habitats bloom with a symphony of uncommon wildflowers.

The purplish plumes of Prairie Smoke – a member of the Avens family with seed heads like elongated dandelions – sway delicately in the breeze. The scarlet blossoms of Indian Paintbrush and the rich yellow of Balsam Ragwort add accents of colour. Down low, barely two inches above the limestone, the white tubed flowers of Bluets signal another alvar specialist.

Later in the summer, as the alvar becomes so baked by the sun that its thin soils crunch beneath your feet, the native grasses become more dominant. Tufted Hairgrass and Little Bluestem – grasses more at home in the Prairies – form large patches. Wild Bergamot and Flat-topped Aster add their summer fragrance.

For Karen, this place has a spiritual element. When she began talking to the Conservancy about its future, her respect for its role as part of the natural world was clear: “I have always felt that my task was to safeguard that land, and to pass it on to others who would guard its values, too.”

continued page 2

Grant's Woods Trails Open Year-round

Late winter can be a marvellous time to visit the woods, and the walking trails and parking area at Grant's Woods are free for your use any time during daylight hours. Watch for tiny dark specks on the snow that seem to move – these are small insects known as “snow fleas” that emerge on warm winter days to find their mates. The trails are well packed and trail guides are available. And if you are not yet a Conservancy member, brochures are available at the trailhead so you can show your appreciation with a membership!





New Information on Planned Giving

While the impulse to give to a charity such as The Couchiching Conservancy is usually simple and pure, the act of making an effective gift can sometimes be complicated. This is especially so for major gifts of land or money. A new Conservancy brochure is enclosed to introduce you to “planned giving,” and we are building relationships with local financial and tax advisors and creating fact sheets to assist donors.

If you would like your legacy to include protected green space, we can help you find the best way to suit your situation. For example, did you know that donating a piece of ecologically significant property or a conservation easement gives you a better income-tax break than donating cash? Or that stocks or other securities can be donated outright with favourable tax treatment? That payments on an insurance policy with the Conservancy as the beneficiary are classed as charitable donations?

Through planned giving, ordinary people can leave extraordinary legacies for future generations. If you would like to find out how, call Ron at 326-1620, and we will work with you and your advisors to design a strategy that fits your circumstances. ∞

Prairie Smoke Alvar *continued from cover*

But like most rural landowners, Karen faced a dilemma. Her land was not only a source of joy, but also a financial asset that would support her retirement years. Already the quarry companies had come calling, but there was no peace of mind in that solution.

Fortunately, The Couchiching Conservancy was able to provide another option. In this case, we enlisted the support of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and, through them, the Greenlands Fund administered by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Although the Fund would not cover the entire purchase cost, we were reluctant to mount another public fundraising campaign before the Windmill Ranch deal was completed. After Karen looked at several alternatives with her accountant, she decided she could donate 20 per cent of the land value, and that donation became the key to the whole deal.

As our part of the arrangement, we paid for an independent appraisal of the property’s market value and filed all the paperwork necessary to qualify the donation as an Ecogift and improve the income-tax benefits for Karen. On February 16, ownership of Prairie Smoke Alvar transferred to the Nature Conservancy of Canada, with The Couchiching Conservancy and the Carden Field Naturalists playing the lead role in its future management.

Partnerships among several organizations to secure alvar lands have been used before in the Carden area, most notably for the Cameron Ranch and Windmill Ranch purchases, which are next-door to Karen’s lands. But this partnership has several new features. For the first time, a Carden landowner took advantage of recent changes to federal tax rules, which now allow you to donate part of a property’s value and sell the rest as a combined package.

Another new aspect is the land-management arrangements, which will provide the flexibility to incorporate local uses such as the existing snowmobile trail. Since there are no cattle on Prairie Smoke Alvar, walkers will be welcome, but ATVs and off-road vehicles will be prohibited.

The most important partnership of all is common to almost all Conservancy projects – a landowner searching for a way to protect a cherished piece of natural landscape, and a landtrust organization dedicated to helping them find a solution that works. The result, as in Karen Popp’s case, is a natural legacy that will last for generations to come. ∞



Karen Popp made use of new tax rules to donate part of the cost of her alvar property.

Annual Meeting Welcomes New Faces

The house was full and the conversations spirited as the Conservancy hosted its 12th annual members' meeting on a beautiful "spring" afternoon in late January. President Nathalie Rockhill, who was re-elected for a second one-year term, thanked retiring Directors Rob Cutler and Earl Dertinger, and welcomed two new Board members:

Paul Russell

Paul is a financial planner with the Orillia office of Edward Jones. In the past, he has been a business owner in his native New Zealand, and has travelled extensively. He is an active member of the Rotary Club of Orillia. Paul has been a bird-bander, and once was a drummer in a jazz group. Now, he frequently enjoys outdoor activities with his two children.

Jane Sloley

Jane is a high school teacher and librarian at ODVCI as the Leader of the Canadian and World Studies department. As well as coaching students in a variety of sports, she has trained the Gig Rowing Crew for Discovery Harbour in Penetanguishene. Jane's original training was in geomorphology and biophysical environmental specialty,

but she has more recently taken courses in visual arts and tried her hand at pottery. She lives in Washago, where she can pursue her pastimes of canoeing and gardening.

Executive Director Ron Reid

reported on the year's events, including the successful closing just two days earlier of the Windmill Ranch purchase. The Conservancy was able to contribute \$125,000 towards this achievement, which was more than we'd promised. He also noted the approval of a 10-year acquisition plan for the Carden Alvar, which will make this the largest protected area of alvar in the world.

Treasurer Rob Cutler reported a small surplus for the year, as well as initial deposits to the President's Reserve, which was established to

help sustain future core operations. Further details on Conservancy activities and finances can be found in our 2005 Annual Report and financial statements, both available on request.

New Volunteer Coordinator Takes the Reins

After four years, the Conservancy's retiring Volunteer Coordinator Gwen Drew was recognized for her dedication with a special pin and flowers. Mary E. Mick, herself an active volunteer for many years, has agreed to take on the coordinating task. This winter, we will be reviewing our volunteer teams for each property, and organizing a great host of volunteers for Mother Earth Day. If you would like to be involved, you can call Mary at 325-3618. ☺

Corporate Support Continues to Grow

We are especially pleased to welcome two new Level III corporate members: TD Canada Trust and the Orillia District Chamber of Commerce. Both of these groups are demonstrating their commitment to a green and healthy landscape as part of the future economy of this region. ☺



Orillia TD Canada Trust Branch Managers Cathy Stephenson and Tony LeBlanc join Couchiching Conservancy Executive Director Ron Reid to welcome TD Canada Trust as a corporate member.



Conservancy Director Joan Rosebush joins Orillia District Chamber of Commerce President Mike Davenport to celebrate the Chamber's corporate membership.

UPCOMING Conservancy Events

Spring is coming, and the Conservancy has organized a series of workshops and events to help get you ready to welcome the warmth. Evening workshops at Grant's Woods have been popular, and the next several months bring you:

Natural Landscaping with Glenda Bosley on **March 8**;

Restoration and Naturalization of Shorelines with Sandy Agnew on **March 29**;

Setting Down Roots: Choosing and Planting the Right Tree with Earl Dertinger on **April 6**;

Natural Health: The Art of Foot Reflexology with Rosalie Pratt on **April 27**.

All workshops are \$15, except for Natural Health at \$20; Conservancy members receive a \$5 discount on workshops. **To register, call Rose at 326-1620.**

If you visit **Orillia Square Mall during March Break**, plan on stopping at our booth featuring Sciensational Snakes on Friday, March 17. Kids, and even the braver adults, can have their photo taken holding a live snake for only \$5.

Plans are well underway for **Mother Earth Day at Grant's Woods on Saturday, May 13** from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Last year's Earth Day event was so cold and soggy that we decided instead to honour Mother Earth on Mother's Day weekend, when the wildflowers are at their peak and the sun always shines. Come and join us for a family event featuring guided trail walks, cedar and sumac tea, bannock cooked over an open fire, birdhouses and whirly-gigs you build yourself, plus tree seedlings, native wildflowers and other nature supplies for sale, live entertainment by ALEX, and lots more. Parking is at ODAS Park with a shuttle bus to the site. Admission is \$5 per person, but free for those under 5 or who work as a volunteer.

You can also plan ahead to join us at two other happenings – the **Orillia Doors Open** event on **May 27 and 28** and our **Volunteer Appreciation bus trip** to properties on the Carden Alvar on **June 10** – or to sponsor a team in the **Carden Challenge** on **June 17**. Call Rose at 326-1620 for details and registration information. ☺

Orillia Power Corporation's President John Mattinson and Conservancy Director Joan Rosebush flag the beginning of OPC's Conservancy membership.



The Couchiching Conservancy Board

- Nathalie Rockhill, President438-1301
- Bob Sullivan, Past-President325-8775
- Paul Russell, Treasurer329-2331
- Isabelle Thiess, Secretary326-5547
- Jane Ball835-2674
- Julie Cayley725-7164
- Lou Probst438-1324
- Joan Rosebush329-1448
- Jane Sloley689-1252

- Ron Reid, Executive Director326-1620
- Rosalie Pratt, Outreach Coordinator
- Ben Porchuk, The Land Between Project Manager

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