



Conservancy NEWS

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

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

November 2004

Conservancy signs another easement



Sandy Agnew and Isabelle Thies, Secretary of the Board, sign the conservation easement as Ron Reid looks on.

Another 40 acres of wetland are protected forever, thanks to the generosity and far-sightedness of one of our members. Late in October, the Conservancy signed a conservation easement with Sandy Agnew, covering most of his rural property near the western boundary of Oro-Medonte.

The easement protects part of a provincially significant wetland near the headwaters of Hog Creek together with some adjacent meadow and woodland. The property provides ideal habitat for beaver and other wetland wildlife, as well as several species of orchids. The conservation easement prevents any future owners from subdividing, filling, dredging or otherwise damaging the wetland.

Like most easements, this one has been tailored to fit the property and the owner's circumstances. The area surrounding Sandy's house and gardens has been excluded from the easement, which meant we had to go through an approval process by the Township. Sandy retains the right to create several shallow ponds to

propagate native plants for his ecological restoration business, Eco-Medic. He can also maintain footpaths and two unserviced campsites.

This mix of permitted and restricted uses is typical of conservation easements, with the Conservancy having the long-term responsibility of monitoring those uses and, if necessary, enforcing them. Because the easement reduces the overall market value of the property somewhat, we will be issuing a charitable donation receipt to Sandy as soon as a professional appraisal has been completed.

We extend our gratitude to Sandy for his commitment to protect the future of natural areas in this region. ∞

Windmill Ranch project needs your support

Who would have thought a simple hand-drawn map could be an effective fund-raiser? In fact, nearly everyone who looks at our map of protected areas and quarries in the former Carden Township immediately grasps the importance of the Windmill Ranch to its future.

On both the eastern and western parts of the township, large areas of red show lands in quarry ownership, with large sections already licensed for future extraction. In the heart of this limestone plain is the Cameron Ranch alvar, a 3,000-acre nature reserve purchased with tremendous public support in 2003. Immediately to the east, stretching along Wylie Road, the 1,600-acre Windmill Ranch provides a strategic opportunity to create a large block of protected lands in the most valuable natural areas of the Carden Plain.

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Windmill Ranch

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The significance of this property is more than simply its size and location. It contains extensive areas of globally threatened alvar habitats, with an amazing mix of native wildflowers and grasses. It has one of the best-known nesting sites for the endangered Loggerhead Shrike, and a broad band of significant wetland. And it is a mecca for bird-watchers, with good populations of grassland and shrubland birds including Upland Sandpipers, Grasshopper Sparrows, Rufous-sided Towhees and many others.

The purchase of Windmill Ranch is following the same successful model we used for Cameron Ranch – a cooperative approach with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Parks and other conservation groups to jointly raise the funds needed. The Couchiching Conservancy has promised to raise \$110,000 by next spring toward the project, and our members and supporters have so far been very generous, with about \$55,000 now received.

We will continue to seek donations for this vital project over the next six months to make sure this exciting opportunity won't be missed. If you would like to find out more, or to make a year-end donation, call Ron Reid at 326-1620. All contributions are fully tax-deductible. ☺

A Word from the President

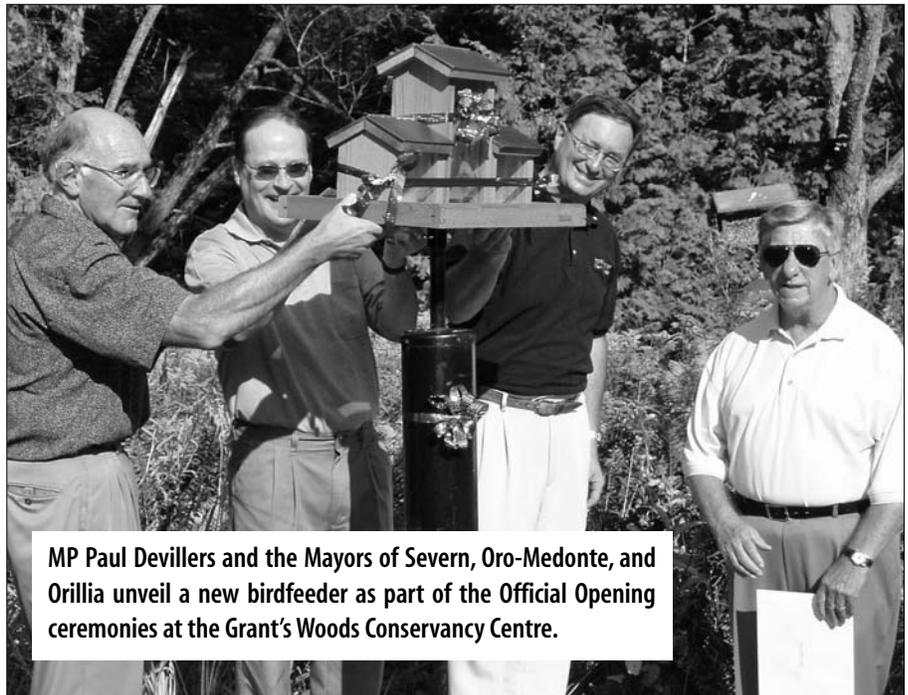
There is a quiet evolution of land trusts going on across most of Canada, and we believe The Couchiching Conservancy is on its leading edge. The recent Ontario Land Trust Alliance conference attended by Ron and two of our Board members (Isabelle and Joan) was sold out. Interest in the concept of protecting environmentally significant land for future generations is growing dramatically.

The Board is very interested in pursuing activities with other similar organizations. Currently, we are working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada on joint projects. Funding proposals are in the works with two other groups for programs that would promote linkages over larger landscapes and public education.

Our membership has almost doubled over the past year and our new office is now open, giving the Conservancy a great base for the future. The five-year plan the Board approved in 2003 is the driving force for our ongoing agenda. In the future we hope to acquire more land and maintain the high quality of the stewardship of our properties.

On November 15, the Board will be working on plans and activities for 2005. The respect we gain by growing both our membership and the acres protected goes a long way toward building a solid future for the Conservancy. For us, the future is now!

– Bob Sullivan, President



MP Paul Devillers and the Mayors of Severn, Oro-Medonte, and Orillia unveil a new birdfeeder as part of the Official Opening ceremonies at the Grant's Woods Conservancy Centre.

**Mark your
2005
calendar**

Each January, we welcome our members to our annual general meeting to inform you about our activities, elect our new Board and President, and hear a special guest speaker. This year's date will be the afternoon of **Saturday, January 29**. We will send you details early in the new year, and hope you will join us for an interesting afternoon.

UPDATES

from the Conservation Front

Creating a personal legacy

We have been approached by several of our members about how to leave a contribution or a property to the Conservancy in their will. We greatly appreciate their thoughtfulness and their commitment to ensuring that future generations will also be able to enjoy the natural beauty of this region. If you are considering a similar donation, we would be pleased to discuss your options in confidence.



Orillia Home Depot staff put the finishing touches on a new Eco-Gazebo just behind the Conservancy Centre at Grant's Woods.

Look See Paint comes to Grant's Woods

We strive to save wild natural areas because we know they are essential for the functioning of the ecosystem. But as local artist Jeff Miller notes, there is also an emotional motivation: "We call them beautiful places – beauty is a human need, not just a luxury. Art is the way for the human heart to express itself, to experience our senses, and to celebrate our appreciation of nature."

Jeff has created a program called *Look See Paint* that teaches a diverse group of participants, from school kids to seniors, how to get past their inhibitions about painting and let their creativity flow in shapes and colours. The Grant's Woods Conservancy Centre is an ideal setting for such a program, and on a rainy October afternoon 11 gutsy members rallied around Jeff to paint the beauty of nature.

Encouraged by Jeff and the participation of your humble Executive Director, we dabbled and splashed our watercolours onto a supply of small watercolour papers. We all surprised ourselves with our "lovely, casual, elegant and effortless" (Jeff's words) results that looked even better in field mattes. Most of us came from deep doubt to surprising success, and connected with nature in a special contemplative way, which is the main point of *Look See Paint*.

Ann Luker, one of the participants, voiced her pleasure by saying, "I had no idea that I could do colour; now I have that confidence."

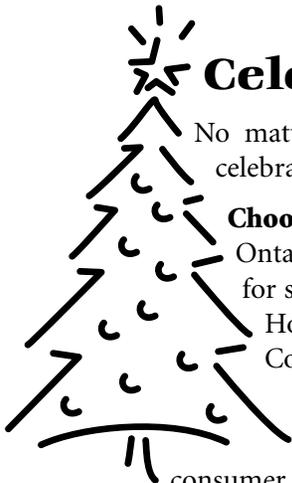
We hope to host more of these painting get-togethers at Grant's Woods in future, including sessions for beginning, intermediate and advanced painters. If you would like to know more, contact the Orillia District Arts Council at 329-2333, or Jeff Miller at 329-1844.

Welcome aboard to Rosalie Pratt

When you call the Conservancy office, you will hear a new voice on the phone. Rosalie Pratt from Waubaushene has joined us for the next year, thanks to a Job Creation Partnership with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Rosalie brings a broad range of experience in local businesses and teaching, and will help us develop stronger outreach programs to our members, volunteers and the business community.

A successful membership campaign

Because our members are so essential to our success, in 2004 we put a special priority on building our membership. As a result, we have welcomed over 100 new members this year. Many of those came through referrals from our existing members, and we promised special prizes for those referrals. Congratulations to Mary Hunter, Ingrid VanderMarel, and Jane Valk as prize winners, and special thanks to the Bird House Nature Company, Grover's Family Restaurant, and Highland Farms for their donation of prizes. We are still seeking new members, so please tell your friends and colleagues about the Conservancy and encourage them to join. ☺



Celebrate a "Green" Christmas!

No matter how deep the snow, you can make your Christmas celebrations environmentally friendly. Here are a few suggestions:

Choose Christmas cards with a nature theme – we have Ontario Nature cards with a Robert Bateman painting of a lynx for sale this year, or you can pick up the same cards at the Bird House Nature Company, with all proceeds going to the Conservancy. \$8.25 for each pack of 10 cards.

Make a "Protect an Acre" donation of \$25 or more to the Conservancy's Stewardship Fund rather than give consumer goods. We provide an attractive card to your gift recipient, and you receive a charitable-donation receipt.

As an alternative this year, you could choose to make a contribution to the Windmill Ranch campaign in honour of someone you love. You have the satisfaction of helping to protect an amazing piece of nature as well as getting a tax receipt, and we will provide an acknowledgement card for your gift recipient.

Please make cheques payable to *The Couchiching Conservancy*. We also take VISA, and can even process contributions over the phone if you wish. ∞

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