



Conservancy NEWS

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

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

NOVEMBER 2006

The Art of Stewardship

When someone donates a piece of natural land to the Conservancy, what happens then? After the ceremonies are over, and the donors are thanked for their generosity, the process of stewardship – of caring for the land – begins.

Property stewardship is a responsibility we take very seriously – it wouldn't be right for us to accept lands if we didn't have the ability to safeguard them for future generations. With our rapid growth in recent years, we now own 12 reserves and manage over 7,000 acres in total, including wetlands, forests, alvars and grasslands.

At the core of our stewardship program are volunteer property teams who regularly visit our reserves to watch for abuses such as garbage dumping or tree cutting. Sometimes teams take on special projects, such as installing Osprey nest platforms or removing invasive species. This year, we were able to bring Kyra Howes on staff as our Stewardship Coordinator. Another huge step forward has been qualifying for a provincial program to exempt most Conservancy lands from annual property taxes.

What all does stewardship involve?

Here's a sampling of recent activities:

- A team of volunteers from the Orillia and Carden Naturalists Clubs, led by Margo Holt and Nancy Ironside, spent many days in the field this spring and summer to document the ecology of the Prairie Smoke property, just east of Lake Dalrymple. They found rare species such as young Blanding's Turtles, as well as damage in some sections by ATVs.
- Kyra recently supervised the removal of a derelict barn on the Severn Woodlands property in former Matchedash Township. With the help of volunteer



A stewardship visit to the Tushingam Property with Ontario Heritage Trust staff.

John Jenkins, she also improvised a covered nest platform to provide shelter for the Turkey Vultures that had been nesting in the barn.

- Volunteers Michael Sullivan and his daughter Jackie are leading a new volunteer team for the Elliott Woods property on the Oro Moraine. Together with team members Ingrid Vandermarel, Winston Blogg, Bill Wood and Pat Pautsh, they will be removing patches of Garlic Mustard and Periwinkle (both invasive species in hardwood forest) and starting a detailed property inventory.

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Stewardship *cont. from cover*

- Murray Cleland of Orillia is a new team leader for the Wilson Point Wetland. He has started a fall cleanup, and will soon be installing a new sign to discourage dumping of yard wastes there.
- With the help of Jack Kyle, an expert with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Kyra has developed an interim grazing-management plan for Cameron Ranch to provide the best habitat possible for endangered Loggerhead Shrikes. New fencing and proper watering facilities to keep cattle out of the streams are also underway.

Another important initiative is the development of broad-ranging stewardship policies by a special task-force led by Board members Bob Sullivan and Nathalie Rockhill. Defining policies to guide future property management is not as simple as it may first appear. It is easy to say that ATVs won't be allowed, but what about the ranchers who use them to repair fences? Leaving forests to natural forces usually seems appropriate, but what about pine-plantation areas, which need aggressive thinning to return them to natural stands?

One topic that will almost certainly be contentious is hunting. While hunting is not appropriate on most of our properties, the donor of Prairie Smoke Alvar had asked the Nature Conservancy of Canada and The Couchiching Conservancy to continue her practice of allowing a limited deer hunt by a local family. For this year, we have honoured that request. This decision did not sit well with some of our members who believe that hunting is never appropriate on any Conservancy property. The management-planning taskforce will be considering the views of Conservancy members and other interested parties on this and all other management issues so we can arrive at the best policies possible. ∞



Part of the joy of experiencing Elliott Woods is just playing in the mud.

Elliott Woods Dedicated to Nature

The weather may have been cool and wet, but the sentiments were warm as a crowd of family, friends and volunteers gathered at the gate of the Elliott Woods property to unveil a sign dedicating it to nature. Conservancy Vice-President Jane Ball noted how well this gift illustrated the philosophy that “we don't inherit land from our ancestors; rather we borrow it from our grandchildren.” Speaking for the donor's family, Heather Elliott touched the hearts of everyone present by relating how much this legacy meant to her husband, Don, who sat with his own grandchildren nearby.



Sadly, only a few days later Don passed away. We hope that his family is able to take some comfort in the knowledge that his beloved woods will be protected and appreciated by many for generations to come. ∞

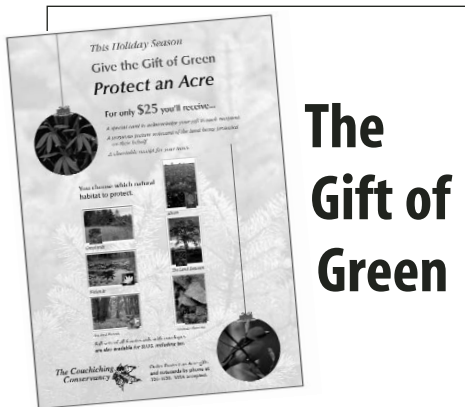
The Couchiching Conservancy Board

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The Gift of Green

With the holiday season rapidly approaching, many of us are looking for that perfect gift. For those who want their gifts to have meaning, the perfect solution may be the Conservancy's **Protect an Acre** program, with all funds raised going to support property stewardship. This year, you have a choice – as the enclosed flyer shows, you can pick from six habitat types – and you will receive a stunning illustration of the habitat of your choice along with a special gift card. Habitat note cards are also available in sets of six, with envelopes, so you can keep in touch with friends and family and support the Conservancy at the same time. ☺

Volunteer Voices

Volunteers are the heart and soul of Conservancy programs. Consider just a few of the recent activities they have supported:

- The **Saving the Planet** art show and readings, sponsored by the **Orillia Fine Arts Association** this fall, have been a great success, with a packed house at the opening reception and over 40 artists submitting works. Half of the proceeds benefit the Conservancy.
- Marchmont artist **Dave Beckett** also donated a portion of his Thanksgiving weekend proceeds, bringing \$700 to Conservancy coffers.
- Three Georgian College design students – **Kate Plantz, Agnus Li, and Kathleen Walker** – are creating an innovative design package for a guide to Conservancy properties, that we can update easily as we continue to grow.
- Volunteer Coordinator **Mary E. Mick** has been busy making phone calls to retirement residences and long-term-care facilities to offer presentations and information where requested.
- Conservancy Treasurer **Paul Russell** and local lawyer **Christine Manners** hosted an evening information session on planned giving for Conservancy members.
- A volunteer team of **Mary-Diane Shook, Pat Bromley, Judy Munro, Ron Hancock, Adam Thomson, Jane Ball, Pearl Bennett** and **Gwen Drew** has made follow-up calls to schools in Simcoe County.
- **Ken Thomson** and **John Jenkins** recently installed another memorial bench on the trails in Grant's Woods, sponsored by **Mark and Kim Hatch**.

Thinking Spring? We are planning already for volunteer teams for **Mother Earth Day II** on **Saturday May 12th**. Call Rosalie at 326-1620 if you want to be involved. ☺



Ron Reid with Susan Lang, Director of the Orillia and District Chamber of Council, a new Level III corporate member.

Orillia Business Has Never Been Greener!

On the afternoon of October 27, business leaders from Orillia and area gathered at Grant's Woods to recognize their colleagues who had become Conservancy corporate members for 2006. A total of 69 local businesses have signed on as members at several levels, nearly double the number in 2005. The financial and in-kind support provided by these corporate members adds enormously to our capacity to protect nature in this region. Equally important, every membership sends the message that businesses understand protecting nature is vital to the future of this region.

While we value every corporate member, we were especially pleased this year to welcome the Orillia and District Chamber of Commerce as a Level III member.

(We are the envy of every land trust across Ontario for that sign of community support!) Another Level III membership arrived just a few days after the recognition ceremony, from Smith's Aerospace Components – Orillia. We welcome them and look forward to an ongoing relationship with this important local manufacturer. ☺

UPCOMING Events

Monday, November 20, 8 p.m.

Author **Mike Nickerson** is at the Orillia Opera House to present a discussion on “**Present Illusions and a Sustainable Future.**” Sponsored by the Green Party of North Simcoe.

Saturday, January 27, 2 p.m.

The **Couchiching Conservancy Annual General Meeting** is at the Mariposa Inn (on Memorial Avenue, Orillia). Special guest speakers Larry Kirtley and David Homer will present Larry’s amazing photos of birds and other wildlife of the Carden Alvar.



Photo: Larry Kirtley

Winter Workshops at Grant's Woods Co-sponsored by the Orillia Naturalists Club. Call 326-1620 to register.

DATE	TIME	SUBJECT	COST
Wednesday, JAN 17	7 – 9 pm	Grasses <i>Natural, wild, and low-maintenance</i>	\$15
Wednesday, JAN 24	7 – 9 pm	Property Stewardship Information Session <i>You wanted to know – “What do I look for?”</i>	No charge
Tuesday, FEB 6	7 – 9 pm	Night Skies – Astronomy for Lovers <i>Dress warmly – you’ll be outside part of the time</i>	\$15
Tuesday, FEB 20	7 – 9 pm	Shoreline Restoration <i>Simple tips...lasting benefits</i>	\$15
Thursday, MAR 8	7 – 9 pm	Wildflower Gardening <i>Explosions of colour every season</i>	\$15
Thursday, MAR 22	7 – 9 pm	1001 Garden Secrets – Gardening <i>Natural herbicides, pesticides in your cupboard!</i>	\$15

