

Northumberland Land Trust

Ontario, Canada

Preserving Northumberland County - one acre at a time

The Preserver, May 2015

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Meetings - Love 'em or hate 'em?

John Geale

I might as well admit it - I do not like meetings. It always seems that too much time is spent TALKING about things, and I can't help feeling that I'd rather be outside DOING things: counting frogs, checking nest boxes, clearing trails, cutting down Scots pines ... anything outdoors and active.

But at the end of March I attended a meeting that was different. It was a gathering of all the organizations involved with land securement and protection in Northumberland County. Mark Stabb, of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, had originally suggested such a meeting, and he led the discussion. Also present were folks from two Conservation Authorities (Ganaraska and Lower Trent), the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, the Ontario Heritage Trust, Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Northumberland County, and Orland Conservation (a private environmental consulting firm). Who knew that there are so many groups with an interest in protecting natural spaces here in our County?

I'm proud to say that NLT was well represented - fully half of our Board of Directors were able to spend most of the day discussing our activities. And the difference at this meeting was that it was

all about collaboration, cooperation and mutual support. I couldn't help but wonder how different our world would be if our politicians would work this way! We looked for ways to avoid duplication of effort. We discussed how various organizations could work together to acquire or steward a property. Our assorted organizations all have different strengths when it comes to finances, environmental assessment capabilities, legal understanding, and a knowledge of sources for grant funding, and they're all willing to share their expertise.

I think everyone came away feeling that if any of us needed financial advice, support for anything relating to land securement, or



A new McEwen nest box

help with a project that required boots on the ground and hands in the soil we all had friends

we could turn to. Thanks to

groups (and meetings!) like this, our grandchildren's grandchildren can reasonably expect to have some wonderful natural spaces to enjoy. We are grateful to all our members who continue to support our work to achieve this goal.

DATES FOR YOUR CALENDAR - PLEASE JOIN US!

June 15 - our Annual General Meeting. This is your official notice of the AGM. It will again take place at Palisade Gardens, 240 Chapel Street, Cobourg. Refreshments will be available at 7:00 p.m., and the meeting will start at 7:30. Our guest speaker will be Northumberland County Forest Management Officer Ben Walters, who will bring us up to date on all the enhancements to the County Forest. We will then have usual short business meeting, including financial, governance and stewardship reports, and any necessary elections to the Board.

May 30 - a public hike in conjunction with the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative, at the McEwen Nature Reserve. We will be able to see the grassland that was burned last spring as well as the area burned just a few weeks ago. Ecologist Val Deziel of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and bird guide David Geale will be on hand to point out and interpret what we are seeing.

June 13 - a public hike to the Pelton Property. We will check on the tree seedlings we planted three years ago, and adventurous souls can have a look at the Provincially Significant Wetland in the valley.

Scots pine removal - **May 9** at the Leckey Property and **May 13** at the McEwen Reserve.

For more information on any of these events, see our web site (<http://www.northumberlandlandtrust.ca/>), or phone (905-342-3851) or e-mail (president@northumberlandlandtrust.ca) John Geale.

MAY IS WALLACE BIRDATHON MONTH



The Wallace Birdathon is one of the Northumberland Land Trust's most important fund-raisers, and we are delighted that Roger Frost has again agreed to be our celebrity birder. In one 24-hour period in May he will attempt to beat his record of 158 species found within Northumberland County. We hope you will sponsor him, either for a flat amount or for a certain amount per species. You can make your pledge by contacting John Geale (905-342-3851 or president@northumberlandlandtrust.ca). Or you can visit the NLT web page and click on the blue "Donate Now" button then select "Wallace Birdathon 2015" from the drop-down menu under "Select the fund...". See <http://www.northumberlandlandtrust.ca/>. Your donation will help us protect species at risk, preserve natural spaces, and improve Northumberland County's biodiversity. You will receive a full report on Roger's day and a tax receipt for any donation of \$20 or more. Many thanks!

SALAMANDER PROJECT AT THE LLOEC

by Mark Rupke

The Laurie Lawson Outdoor Education Centre is owned by the Northumberland Land Trust and operated by the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. It is a wonderfully diverse forest close to Cobourg and Port Hope that is readily visited. When I first came to work at the site as an Outdoor Education Naturalist I was very pleased to see an array of vernal pool habitats alive with frogs.

When I studied these ponds and this forest in more detail, however, it was clear that something was wrong. I sampled ponds and rolled over logs, but was unable to locate salamanders. This was really strange, since salamanders are noted for their association with vernal pools, and the many pools on the property should be a fabulous home for them.

Another thing that amazed me was the abundance of mosquitoes in the late spring. I am used to mosquitoes as a natural part of vernal pool ecology. However, the sheer abundance of them here is a curious, annoying feature. When I mentioned this to naturalist friends their comment was, "It is easier to damage an ecosystem than to repair it." No salamander larva in the ponds to eat the mosquitoes resulted in a lack of natural controls.

What happened to the salamanders that would have been here historically? A look at a 1954 aerial photograph makes it pretty clear. It shows a cow pasture, with very sparse vegetation and cultivated fields surrounding it. The original forest had been removed, cows had trampled through the ponds, and the salamander's habitat had been destroyed. They could not return, since there was no natural corridor they could expand through.

So why not just bring in new salamanders? To ensure success, we need to be sure the ponds last long enough for the larvae to mature. Is there sufficient forest habitat for a population to live in, feed and overwinter? Which of the ponds would be best to introduce them into? Currently, I have students from Sir Sandford Fleming College in Lindsay mapping the ponds accurately with GPS, so we will be able to number and monitor each pond more readily. By noting the time the pond thaws and when the basin dries out, we will be able to ensure the salamander larvae would have enough time to mature.



Yellow Spotted Salamander

Photo courtesy of Andy Avram

The species I believe would do well here are the Yellow Spotted Salamander, the Blue Spotted Salamander, and the Red-backed Salamander. I would love to hear about it if you know of a population of any of these species that may be in harm's way, perhaps due to construction or clearing of forest habitat for other purposes. Thanks.

We're on Facebook! See <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Northumberland-Land-Trust/236996673137316>

A SECOND PRESCRIBED BURN AT THE McEWEN RESERVE

On April 18, a highly successful and controlled prescribed burn was completed at the McEwen Nature Reserve. The burn was conducted by Lands and Forests Consulting and observed by Val Deziel from the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) along with our President, John Geale and our Stewardship Chair, Bill Newell. The burn crew arrived about 9:00 am to prepare the site, the burn was completed by 1:30 pm, and the crew departed about 2 hours later after ensuring that the fire was completely extinguished.



The fire works its way across the field

Prescribed burns are essential to restore and revitalize globally rare tallgrass prairie and savannah habitat in Northumberland County. As Mark Stabb, NCC's Central Ontario Program Director, says, **"Tallgrass prairie and savannah plant species depend upon fire to live. As natural fires have long been suppressed in most areas of North America, conservation scientists across the continent use professionally-managed prescribed burns to bring new life to these wildlife habitats."** Fires clear scrub and brush, allowing sunlight to reach the soil where native grassland seeds lie. Native prairie species flourish following a fire, restoring the native grassland habitat of the area. Fire can also help to remove invasive species. Burning only occurs under specific weather conditions that will allow a safe and controlled fire.

This is the second prescribed burn at the McEwen Nature Reserve in as many years. Last year the burn was completed on the southern portion of the reserve while this year the northern section of the property received the benefit of a prescribed burn. Preparations for this year's burn began last October, when our volunteers assisted the Lands and Forests Consulting team in establishing the firebreak. A detailed and technical burn plan was then prepared, and a fire permit and insurance were obtained. This burn was part of ongoing habitat restoration efforts by the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative, of which we are a member. Prescribed burns are also planned for this year on various Oak Ridges Moraine sites by the Alderville First Nation, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (four sites), Northumberland County and Ontario Parks.



Setting the firebreak

The crew at our burn was very efficient, careful and professional, and clearly had complete control over the fire despite a wind that varied from almost none to quite strong and gusty. It was a beautiful sunny day, but the whole area looked like a barren, blackened wasteland after the burn, although on closer observation some green plants apparently unaffected by the fire could be seen. It will be interesting to see how quickly green vegetation returns and the burn area becomes a lush, productive field.



Landscape after the fire; it will return to green very quickly

... continued ...

NLT would like to thank Jane Zednik for supplying the weather data required to determine a suitable day for the burn. Thanks also to the neighbouring landowners for their cooperation and interest in this project: Andrew Case and Danielle Boughen of Campbellcroft, Gordon Mazanek of Millbrook, the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority, and NLT members Tony and Moira Cohen of Toronto and James Pearson of Omemee. The assistance of the Port Hope fire department and Fire Chief Jim Wheeler, as well as Trent Gervais, manager of the Peterborough airport, was also much appreciated.

This burn would not have been possible without the ongoing support of our members, and we thank you all. We hope you can join us on May 30 (see page 2) for a public hike on the Reserve.

SPEAKER SERIES

This season's winter speaker series focused on three major natural features of Northumberland County: the Rice Lake Plains, the Oak Ridges Moraine, and the pollinators that keep the vegetation vibrant and productive. We thank Bill Crowley and his committee (Mary Bedford-Jones and Whitney Lake) for their working in planning and organizing three informative events; thanks also to Marlyne Warling for supplying snacks to begin the evenings. Bill notes that one more person on his committee would be very welcome. It would not involve a great deal of time or work, and Bill would be pleased to speak with you about it; please e-mail him (fisheye@eagle.ca) or call him (905-885-2123) if you would be willing to lend a hand.

SPECIES AT RISK PROJECT - WITH THANKS TO OLTA AND MNR

The Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) is an umbrella organization supporting most land trusts in the province. They have two years of funding from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to assist members with projects involving species at risk, and NLT is taking full advantage of this opportunity. Under this program Alison Howson, OLTA's species-at-risk specialist, and John Urquhart, a herpetile expert, have visited our McEwen and Pelton properties several times. The initial goals are to identify any at-risk species on our properties and to assess the habitats they find for the likely occurrence of species not yet documented there. Follow-up may include developing management and recovery plans for these species, which will allow NLT to improve our stewardship of our properties and give us better access to both provincial and federal grants.

Some of the at-risk species under consideration at our properties are Hog-nosed and Ribbon Snakes, Western Chorus Frog, Canada and Golden-winged Warblers, and Whip-poor-will. We have also been alerted to the presence of Yellow-spotted Salamanders at the McEwen Reserve; this is not considered a species at risk, but it is not an easy species to find in our area. We look forward to further work on this project with OLTA and both levels of government.



Canada Warbler

A NEW PROPERTY!

We are delighted to announce the acquisition of a fifth property: a 17 acre wooded wetland just south of Grafton. A recent visit showed that in spring there are many vernal pools in the woods, and it sounded as if a large percentage of them had wood frogs present. In the wet conditions, white cedar, yellow birch and red maple dominate the forest, and although a small amount of dog-strangling vine can be found along the roadside edges, the interior of the woods seems to be free of this scourge. We wish to thank Rick Roberts, Scott



One of the many vernal pools at our new Chubb Point property

MacDonald and Bill Coombs for their generous donation of this property. We will be working on a management plan to guide us in our care of this delightful woodland, and we look forward to a celebratory event at the property later in the year - stay tuned!

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2015 MEMBERSHIPS ARE NOW DUE.

You may now submit your membership and make donations by using Canada Helps: please go to <http://www.northumberlandlandtrust.ca/index.htm> and click on the blue "Donate Now through Canada Helps" button; this will allow you to use your credit card. Otherwise:

Please fill out the form below. Make cheques payable to
"Northumberland Land Trust", and mail to:
Northumberland Land Trust, P. O. Box 1153, Cobourg, ON, K9A 5A4

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