



WATERSHED NEWS

AUSABLE BAYFIELD CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

ABCA, 71108 Morrison Line, RR 3 Exeter, ON N0M 1S5 • abca.on.ca • 519-235-2610 • 1-888-286-2610

Trail Mobile provides nature experience for more people

The South Huron Trail Mobile is a one-of-a-kind experience for people with limited mobility to experience nature.

The Trail Mobile was created in the memory of conservationist Gord Strang thanks to a donation from his family. The battery-operated vehicle, which seats five passengers and a volunteer driver, allows those people who can't easily walk the trail to connect with nature.

"I think it's a marvelous opportunity to get out," said Ann Northey, one of the passengers. "Every time there's an empty seat I like to go – I love the flowers and the wildlife we see."

Hundreds of people with limited mobility have been able to experience nature first-hand since the South Huron Trail Mobile was created in 2006.

Tom Prout, General Manager and Secretary Treasurer of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA), said "it is fitting that Gord's love of nature can be shared with those who might not otherwise be able to experience the beautiful South Huron



Shown at the 2008 official season launch of the unique South Huron Trail Mobile are (left to right): Suzanne Northey, Harold Hamather, Isobelle Rescorl, Ann Northey, volunteer driver Herman Steffens, Lloyd Bowman and volunteer driver Jerry Mathers.

Trail."

Eligible individuals can book a time for a ride on the trail by calling ABCA Administration Centre office 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday. Contact will

then be made with a volunteer driver. If you or someone you know is an eligible passenger call the ABCA at 519-235-2610 or toll-free 1-888-286-2610 to book a ride and experience nature.

Management plan created for unique Old Ausable Channel

A management plan for the unique Old Ausable Channel ecosystem was unveiled to the public at a meeting held in Grand Bend in April to showcase the document which has been two years in the making.

The Old Ausable Channel (OAC), which runs north from Grand Bend through Pinery Provincial Park, is one of the most unique ecological features in southwestern Ontario. The OAC is home to three species at risk fishes, and the oak savanna forest on its shores is internationally significant.

See *Planning for Channel*, page three

Inside

- New events for active seniors **Page Two**
- Zurich Drain landowners take action **Page Two**
- Landowners improve forest conditions **Page Three**
- Tree seed collecting is rewarding hobby **Page Three**
- Three-year wetlands project begins **Page Four**

ABCA launches new programme for active seniors

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) introduced an exciting new series of environmental events for active local seniors in 2008.

The outdoor nature and education events include 'walk-and-talk' activities.

"When we started the Walk-and-Talk series this year we were impressed by the attendance and the interest of those who came out to find out about their natural environment," said Julie Hicks, ABCA Conservation Education Specialist.

The first event was held in January at Morrison Dam Conservation Area near Exeter. This was followed by a special event in May at Rock Glen Conservation Area (RGCA) near Arkona, site of the gorgeous Rock Glen Falls and the world-renowned Arkona Lions Museum and Information Centre.

During the May event participants walked the trail, learned about the natural habitat and searched for signs of spring. The two-hour interpretive walk-and-talk focused on local birds and wildflowers.

"We know there are a lot of active seniors in our community with an interest in their watershed," said Hicks. "We like to give them a chance to learn about the plants, birds and wildlife in their area and to enjoy a walk through beautiful natural surroundings."

Those taking part learned about local winter birds such as downy woodpeckers, cardinals, chickadees and white-breasted



Active seniors in the Ausable Bayfield watershed have been enjoying nature and education experiences through the Walk and Talk series of conservation events introduced this year.

nuthatches, through a meet-and-greet, a multimedia presentation and outdoor walk.

"This was a great way for active seniors to come out to learn about spring birds and wildflowers in a natural setting," she said.

The next Seniors' Event is set to take place **Thursday, August 21**, at Rock Glen Conservation Area, with the theme of *Fossils and Local History*.

Rock Glen Conservation Area is located at 8680 Rock Glen Road, Arkona, Ontario, just two kilometres northeast of

the village of Arkona (40 minutes west of London and east of Sarnia).

"Rock Glen is a beautiful Conservation Area found in the Carolinian life zone, an area boasting high in species diversity within the ABCA watershed," according to Hicks.

Participants are encouraged to dress for the weather conditions. For more information on the Environmental Activities for Seniors series phone Julie or Denise at 519-235-2610 or toll-free 1-888-286-2610, e-mail: jhicks@abca.on.ca or dbiega@abca.on.ca or visit the ABCA online at abca.on.ca

Zurich Drain landowners taking positive on-the-ground action

Four landowners within the Zurich Drain watershed will be receiving EcoAction funds to undertake beneficial management practices (BMPs) on their properties to help improve local water quality, it was announced in May.

Environment Canada's EcoAction Community Funding Program provides financial support to community groups that have positive impacts on the environment. An application to the program was submitted last fall as part of the continued efforts of the Zurich Drain Water Quality Enhancement Project. The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) was notified of approval of the application in April.

The Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association (BSRA) has also contributed to these on-the-ground projects.

Five proposed BMP projects are slated to proceed this spring and summer as a result of the funding.

"These projects would not be possible without EcoAction and without the dedicated commitment of the participating landowners, and the BSRA, to the overall goal of protecting and improving water quality within the Zurich Drain watershed," said Hope Brock, ABCA Healthy Watersheds Technician.

The five BMPs include a tree planting project which saw 100 trees planted along the drain, a well upgrade project which will help protect groundwater resources, two eavestrough projects which will see the diversion of clean water away from manure and exercise yards, and a water filtration project. This latter

project aims to filter contaminated water before it reaches the drain using a wood-chip trench. The wood chips will filter out sediments, while nutrients will be biodegraded on the wood-chip surfaces.

Other in-kind donations to the project were received from the Huron Clean Water Project, the ABCA and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE). The MOE funds will be directed towards water quality monitoring within the drain, which will continue for the third consecutive year.

For more information about the EcoAction projects or Zurich Drain Water Quality Enhancement Project, contact Brynn Upsdell at the ABCA at 519-235-2610 or toll-free 1-888-286-2610 or by e-mail at bupsdell@abca.on.ca.

Private landowners improving forest conditions by planting

Private landowners have been helping to improve forest conditions in the Ausable Bayfield watersheds by planting tens of thousands of trees.

Full-time staff of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) worked alongside seasonal tree planting crew members to implement the tree planting projects of watershed landowners.

ABCA staff planted almost 56,000 trees on private lands this past spring, according to Ian Jean, ABCA Forestry and Land Stewardship Specialist. Landowners themselves planted an additional 20,000 trees, he said.

The ABCA's Watershed Report Card (2007) gave an overall 'D' grade last year to forest conditions and a 'C' grade to water quality conditions in the watershed. That makes the tree planting

work of private landowners so important, Jean said. "Planning and preparation are the keys to planting success," according to Jean.

One of the landowners who has been taking part in tree planting this year is Adrian deBruyn, who lives near the village of Adelaide. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the ABCA.

"When grants are available that helps landowners undertake beneficial projects," he said. The RR 5 Strathroy man has undertaken a project that includes planting trees on either side of his creek as a buffer which will keep cattle out and reduce erosion. There



ABCA tree crews help turn landowner tree planting plans into reality.

was a time when many landowners were focused on cutting down trees and not planting them but deBruyn said he sees lots of landowners now seeing the value of windbreaks and other tree planting projects. "I would certainly encourage landowners to initiate tree planting projects and ask about grant programs that might be available."

The deadline for spring tree orders has expired, but Jean said now may be the best time to phone the ABCA to secure cost-share funding and prepare your planting site for the 2009 tree planting program. For information phone 519-235-2610 or toll-free 1-888-286-2610.

Tree seed collection can be rewarding hobby for enthusiasts

More than 20 landowners from the Ausable Bayfield watershed attended a workshop in June provided by Trees Ontario to learn about forecasting tree seed crops in order to collect seed for growing on their own properties for marketing to nursery growers.

"Locally sourced seed is important for matching tree genetics to local climate and soil conditions," said Ian Jean, Forestry and Land Stewardship Specialist with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA). "Our trees are grown from source-identified seed and as much as possible we select seedlings from trees within or nearest to our watershed."

Trees Ontario is proactively helping to ensure future supply challenges are met by conducting tree seed crop

forecasting workshops intended to improve seed collection efficiencies and restore tree seed inventories. The free workshop in the Ausable Bayfield watershed was sponsored by Trees Ontario and hosted by the Huron-Perth Chapter of the Ontario Woodlot Association, the Huron Stewardship Council and the ABCA.

The workshop helped participants improve their ability to identify cone and seed development for major reforestation species and estimate crop quantities. The Ontario Tree Seed Plant and the Forest Gene Conservation Association have identified increasing shortages of zone-appropriate tree seed due to lack of coordinated collection and poor seed years, according to organizers.

"There is an urgent need to replenish seed inventories to ensure restoration and conservation plantings continue with appropriate stock," Jean said. "This workshop helped local people join the effort to ensure stable supplies of native species to maintain momentum as we improve forest conditions in our watershed and in the province."

Collecting tree seed not only helps environmental efforts but it can also make money for those who do it seriously. "Collecting and planting tree seed is a hobby for many people but serious collectors can earn money selling seed to nursery growers," Jean said. "Forecasting tree seed crops is the first step to becoming a proficient seed collector." For more information on the Trees Ontario workshops call 1-877-646-1193 or visit treesontario.on.ca

Planning for channel ecosystem moving into implementation

Continued from front page

"The Old Ausable Channel long-term management plan was completed in early 2008 thanks to the assistance and dedication of a steering committee made up of Grand Bend and area residents as well as several agencies," said Kari Killins, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Aquatic Biologist and Coordinator of the OAC Plan.

The Grand Bend Community Foundation is contributing \$15,000 for implementation of the plan in 2008. Implementation actions will include the education of residents and neighbours of the channel, anglers and visitors regarding beneficial practices near the ecosystem. Projects will include a wetland enhancement study at the north end of the channel

and the creation of a landowner native plant guide, among many other recommendations to be completed.

The creation of the Old Ausable Channel Management Plan, and its implementation, has been made possible by a stakeholder steering committee with broad community representation and by several funding partners: Grand Bend Community Foundation, Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority.

Anyone interested in information can contact Kari at Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority at 519-235-2610 or toll-free 1-888-286-2610 or e-mail kkillins@abca.on.ca. The plan is posted at abca.on.ca and oldausablechannel.ca

Wetlands to be enhanced over next three years, thanks to funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation

Conservation partners in Middlesex and Huron Counties will be able to protect and enhance wetlands through a new, three-year project, thanks to a \$225,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF).

Funding will be used to protect and enhance wetlands within Middlesex and Huron counties, focusing in the Ausable River watershed, through the partnership Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative.

Maria Van Bommel, MPP for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, joined OTF representative Joe Van Overberghe as they held a public announcement in May in Ailsa Craig to congratulate the collaborative partners.

“We all have a responsibility to protect these special lands so they can continue to be a gathering place for aquatic wildlife and a healthy environment for plants,” said MPP Van Bommel.

Carol Mitchell, MPP for Huron – Bruce, said “this grant exemplifies the Ontario Trillium Foundation commitment to investing in the health of our environment and local communities.”

The Middlesex Stewardship Council, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation, Huron Stewardship Council and Ducks Unlimited Canada have collaborated to form the Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative, which will provide an opportunity for landowners to protect, restore and enhance wetlands. The OTF grant will help to create six hectares each year in addition to public awareness and engagement of community volunteers.

“The generous commitment of the Ontario Trillium Foundation will allow this initiative to support the great work of landowners to enhance and protect wetlands that are so vital to our well-being,” said Cale Selby, Stewardship Coordinator, Middlesex Stewardship Council. “These wetlands will not only improve water quality and quantity eventually flowing into our Great Lakes, but will provide valuable wildlife habitat as well.”

Wetlands are one of the most diverse and productive ecosystems in Ontario. They provide habitat for waterfowl and



ABCA Water Resources Technologist Ross Wilson surveys at one of the Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative sites near Ailsa Craig in May at an on-site demonstration following the announcement of funding for the project.

more than 600 species of plants, animals and insects, some of which are species at risk. Wetlands also offer numerous recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, canoeing or nature photography.

Wetlands are important groundwater recharge areas. As wetlands store water, they allow seepage back into the ground to replenish groundwater supplies. Wetlands also help reduce flooding and erosion by providing water storage, which slows down heavy surface flows, leading to less soil erosion.

Angela Baitz, Program Coordinator for the initiative, said “thanks to the funding commitment, staff working on the project

will be able to provide technical and financial support to landowners to create and enhance wetlands in floodplain and riparian areas.”

The Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative will help protect wetlands through the enhancement of floodplain habitat; creation of wetlands through small impoundments (areas created by restricting water flowing out of shallow, low-lying areas); livestock exclusion fencing; excavated wetlands (removal of earth to create a water retention area); and the creation of conservation buffers (small areas of permanent vegetation, designed to control pollutants and manage other environmental concerns).



The Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative in Middlesex and Huron Counties announced \$225,000 in funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the new three-year wetlands initiative. Shown at the announcement ceremony in Ailsa Craig were (left to right) Joe Van Overberghe, Grant Review Team, Thames Valley, Ontario Trillium Foundation; Ian Koetsier, Vice Chair, Huron Stewardship Council; Angela Baitz, Coordinator, Healthy Headwaters Wetlands Initiative; Norm MacPherson, Chair, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation; Darrell Randell, Conservation Projects Specialist, Ducks Unlimited Canada; Maria Van Bommel, MPP, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex; Joe Hogan, Grant Review Team, Huron-Bruce-Perth-Grey, Ontario Trillium Foundation; Cale Selby, Middlesex Stewardship Council Coordinator; Don Fairbairn, Chair, Middlesex Stewardship Council.