

Conservation Update

August 2009



Scholarship Established in Memory of Mary Jo Arnold

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Mary Jo Arnold. On July 13, 2009 while driving to work, Mary Jo's car left the road and struck a tree. She was just two weeks shy of her 19th birthday. We had the good fortune of working with Mary Jo as she joined our summer staff after her first year at Memorial University in St. Johns Newfoundland. Like her father Steve who has served as a Chair of our Board, Mary Jo wanted to experience conservation first-hand.

In discussion with her father Steve, we are pleased to advise that the Mary Jo Arnold Conservation Scholarship has been established through our Conservation Foundation. Contributions, from friends and family of Mary Jo and the Arnold Family, will leave a lasting legacy to help other young women in their pursuit of a post secondary education in conservation. The fund will have a principle of \$10,000 with interest to provide an annual award.

Mary Jo was a spirited young woman who had passion for life. Along with you, we express our deepest

sympathy to the Arnold family and cherish the memory of Mary Jo. She will be missed.

Anyone wishing to donate to the Mary Jo Arnold Conservation Scholarship can contact Marlene at the Conservation Foundation at 519 245-3710.



Fish Population Improving in Strathroy Reservoir

Fish populations in the Strathroy Reservoir appear to be improving. "Our preliminary findings point to increasing fish numbers on the north side of the reservoir," Heather MacKenzie, Aquatic Biologist for the SCRCA said. Since the 2004 survey, there has been a significant increase in numbers of largemouth bass, white crappie, pumpkinseed sunfish, green sunfish, longear sunfish and bluntnose minnow. "This is an area where we have been planting native shrubs to provide shade and habitat along the shore," MacKenzie said. Other factors that could be contributing to the improved fish population are increased amounts of cool groundwater entering the reservoir due to the switch from well water to Lake Huron drinking water in 2006 and the cool wet weather this year.



Biologists look for fish in the Strathroy Reservoir. The method used to sample fish is called backpack electro-fishing. The backpack contains a battery that passes a current through the water, stunning the fish so that they float to the surface making it easy to scoop them up with a long handled net. The fish are slipped into a bucket where they begin to swim around almost immediately, unharmed. Before being returned to the reservoir, the fish are identified and their numbers are recorded. Above, is a longear sunfish, one of the species identified during the survey.

Building Turtle Habitat

A threatened species of native turtle, the Eastern Spiny Softshell, is getting a new nesting site in the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority watershed. "This is great news for this quirky species", said Heather MacKenzie, Aquatic Systems Biologist with the Conservation Authority. The Authority received funding from Ontario's Species at Risk Stewardship Fund and Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Fund for Species at Risk to build and maintain two gravel beds near the Sydenham River. "Once again, we are working with private landowners to create more turtle nesting sites", MacKenzie said.



Ten metres of new improved habitat for the eastern spiny softshell turtle was constructed this spring along a tributary of the Sydenham River.

Grants Awarded to Conservation Authority

The St. Clair Region Conservation Authority has been awarded three grants to continue its work in protecting Species at Risk. "This is great news", Brian McDougall, Director of Watershed Services said. "This allows us to provide grants for landowners to undertake conservation projects on their land as well as undertake valuable habitat improvement projects."

- \$144,000 has been granted to the Conservation Authority to continue its work on aquatic species at risk in the Sydenham River watershed. The grant from the federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk will be used to subsidize stewardship projects for local landowners such as fencing cattle from watercourses, tree planting and stream buffers. The grant will also be used to provide information to the public about Species at Risk in the Sydenham River watershed.
- \$40,000 grant from the Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Fund will be used to subsidize similar stewardship projects for local landowners.
- \$8,250 awarded by the Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Fund to undertake projects to enhance the habitat for reptiles including snakes and turtles in the Sydenham watershed. It is hoped these projects will help improve the populations of eastern foxsnake, Butler's garter snake and eastern spiny softshell turtle.

Cool Summer Not Hurting Conservation Areas

Other than cutting the grass more often, the cool weather has not impacted our three campgrounds this year. "Our 500 campsites have been near-full every weekend this summer," Kevan Baker, Director of Conservation Areas said. "I believe the active visitor services programs and our quality campgrounds keep people coming back," said Baker.

Staff have also been busy making improvements to the campgrounds including a new workshop at the A.W. Campbell Conservation Area and 19 new campsites at the Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area.

A new visitor guide produced this year has been a big hit with visitors to the Conservation Areas. Our sincere thanks to the many businesses that sponsored the guide.

Six Conservation Scholarships Awarded

The Conservation Scholarship program rewards graduating high school students continuing their post secondary studies in a conservation related field based on their academic achievement and their demonstrated interest and involvement with the environment. In total, \$2,800 was awarded across the St. Clair region this year.

Felicia Syer from Lambton Central Collegiate and Vocational Institute and Nicole Robbins from Northern Collegiate Institute and Vocational School were selected as the recipients of the 2009 A.W. Campbell Memorial Scholarship. These \$1,000 scholarships are presented to the top two candidates among the applicants for scholarships offered by the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority.

Four individuals received the Tony Stranak Conservation Scholarships this year: Joshua Deline, Lambton Kent Composite School; Sarah Campbell, Glencoe District High School; Brad Jennings, Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School; and Kevin McGregor, Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School. These students each received a \$200 award.

The scholarships are made possible through trust funds established by the St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation and its donors.

Next Conservation Authority Board Meeting

Thursday, September 17, 2009, 1:00 p.m.
Administration Office

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