

Conservation Update

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority

March 2013

Taking the EEK! Out of Snakes

The Conservation Authority hosted an Eastern Foxsnake nesting box workshop on February 9 in Wallaceburg. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage local landowners to enhance the nesting habitat of foxsnakes on their property by creating artificial nesting boxes. The boxes are created from corn crib wire fencing and t-bar posts and are filled with straw, mulch and compost material to allow snakes to dig into the material to lay their eggs.

Brett Groves, Species at Risk Biologist from MNR, discussed the successes of artificial nesting boxes in Essex County and Megan Lawrence from Salthaven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Centre explained the physiography of snakes and how the Eastern Milksnake is often mistaken for a foxsnake.

This workshop was funded by the Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Stewardship Fund under the Reptiles at Risk Project.



OMAF Supports Research and Education

The SCRCA received a \$52,800 grant for phosphorus reduction from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food. The goal is to increase the information available to landowners about soil erosion control and nutrient best management practices (BMPs) by implementing and demonstrating these BMPs, providing a workshop on cover crops and soil nutrients and making available knowledge through publications and a public website. This Project will help the Ministry meet its commitment under the Canada-Ontario Agreement to Protect the Great Lakes Ecosystem (COA) to work with the agricultural sector to implement beneficial land and water management practices and reduce phosphorus levels in the Great Lakes Watersheds.

Ontario Trillium Foundation Supports Healthy Watersheds

Through a partnership project with the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority, Middlesex Stewardship, and the St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation, a grant for \$173,400 was awarded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation to cover a 3-year project for landowner engagement, headwater wetland construction, and other Best Management Practices to benefit wildlife habitats in the Sydenham headwaters watershed.



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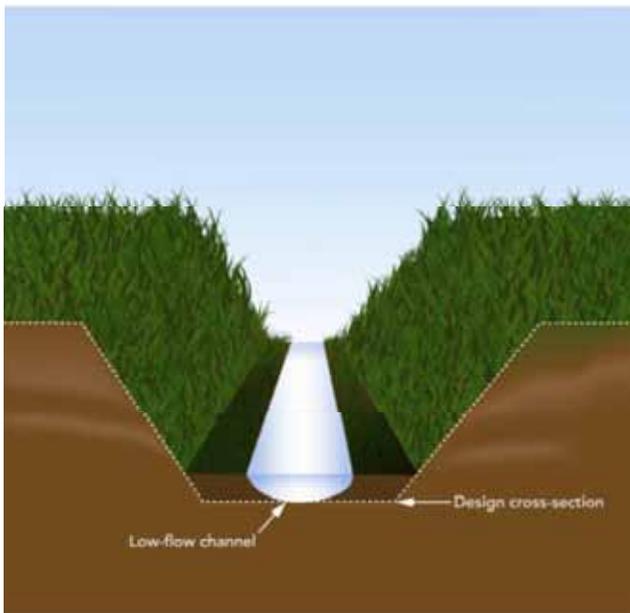
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"working together for a better environment"

A Better Drain

In Chatham-Kent (specifically Dover), the drainage superintendent, Eric Westerberg has been leading the way in incorporating two-stage ditches (including vegetated benches) into many of the Municipal Drain maintenance projects in our area. "One of our most recent projects is the Fraser Drain," Westerberg said. "This practice is a good thing for farmers and fishes." Two-stage ditches are channels with vegetated benches on either side that act as flood plains during high water events. By letting the high water move over the vegetated benches the water slows down making it less likely to top the stream banks.

This process is also great for fish and mussel communities as it minimizes bottom disturbances during a drain clean out and diminishes the amount of maintenance the drain will require in the future. "The presence of vegetation along the benches maximizes the stability of the drain banks thereby reducing sediment entering the waterway producing cleaner water and reducing nutrient loading," Westerberg said. The Townline Drain is another municipal drain maintenance project incorporating a two-stage ditch approach. Other mitigations currently being used on sensitive drainage projects with species at risk present include vegetated buffer strips and fish refuge pools.



St. Clair River Contaminated Sediment Open Houses Held

Five public open houses were held to engage the community on the options for managing remaining contaminated sediments on the Canadian side of the St. Clair River as part of the Remedial Action Plan. The three priority areas are located along a nine-kilometre stretch of the St. Clair River, between the south end of Sarnia and north of Stag Island. In total, the three areas cover an area of approximately 68,000 square metres and have a volume of approximately 25,000 cubic metres. That's roughly equivalent to an area covering 8 ½ Canadian football fields and a volume of 2,500 dump truck loads. The open houses were well attended. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for April 10, 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm at the Clearwater Arena in Sarnia to report back on what we heard from the community and allow additional questions and comments.



Erosion Work Continues at Cathcart Park and Brights Grove

The second phase of protection at Cathcart Park is near completion. An additional 70 metres of armour stone protection was constructed on the island. St. Clair Township provided \$120,000 toward the total project of \$238,000. Grants to enhance the project by providing improved shoreline habitat were received from the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (\$93,000) and from the Ministry of the Environment through COA funding (\$25,000).

Additional erosion protection work was also undertaken in Brights Grove east of Pine Avenue. Approximately 20 metres of the armour stone revetment were repaired and an armour stone groyne was constructed to provide additional protection. Total cost for the project was \$275,000 with \$200,000 supplied by the City of Sarnia and \$75,000 from the provincial Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure Program.

Maple Syrup Festival

Over 1,000 people visited the A.W. Campbell Conservation Area to experience demonstrations of syrup production from times past. Tours included a story of how maple syrup was discovered by our First Nations people who later taught pioneers the wonders of this important staple. The festival was held March 16 - 17. The Alvinston Firemen's Association provided the traditional pancake and sausage meals at the Alvinston Community Centre.



Canoe Race - April 21

The Sydenham River Canoe Race is fast approaching. Each year, about 70 canoes and kayaks compete in one of several classes. There are classes ranging from the 12-mile competitive races to the 5-mile recreation race. Funds raised from the canoe race go toward conservation education. Conservation Authority board members and municipal councillors are invited to join the VIP class for some friendly inter-municipal competition. To find out more, visit our website at www.scrca.on.ca and click on Events or call Sharon at 519 882-2399.



Rural Stormwater Management Model

The SCRCA is participating in a multi-watershed modelling project to create a Rural Stormwater Management Model. This collaborative project is funded through the Showcasing Water Innovation grant. The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority is the lead on this project with support from the St. Clair Region, Maitland Valley, and Saugeen Valley Conservation Authorities and the Pine River Watershed Initiative Network. Through the project, water quality information is collected in five priority watersheds along the Lake Huron shoreline. The purpose of the model is to better understand how agricultural and rural drainage function in a rural landscape so that we can better manage rural stormwater and reduce the amount of nutrients entering Lake Huron. Once the model has been created based on the information gathered from the priority watersheds, the goal is to apply it to other rural watersheds across Ontario.

To collect the necessary water quality information, the SCRCA installed a permanent water and weather monitoring station on Shashawandah Creek in Lambton Shores in summer 2012. Monitoring equipment at the station records water level and precipitation. When the water level rises to a certain point, which typically occurs during a major rain or snow melt event, the monitoring equipment triggers an automatic water sampler inside the station that is connected by hoses to the creek. This sampler will automatically collect water samples every 2 hours for the next 48 hours. Once 24 samples are collected, we remove the samples from the sampler and have them analyzed for a number of parameters, including phosphorus and nitrogen, two nutrients that have the potential to contribute to algal growth in the lake. The automatic sampler allows us to gain a real sense of nutrient movement on a major tributary in Lambton Shores and gather information of when and how much runoff is entering the watercourse in extreme weather.

Next Conservation Authority Board Meeting

Thursday, April 18, 10:00 a.m.
Administration Office

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