

Conservation Update

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority

May 2013

Using River Critters to Understand Aquatic Health

Benthic sampling is underway for the 2013 field season. Benthic sampling involves the collection and study of organisms such as insects, worms and crustaceans that live on the bottom of a watercourse. Benthic samples are being collected this spring in each of our 14 subwatersheds. Benthic Macroinvertebrates are excellent indicators of the health and water quality of a watershed. Some species can live in watercourses with poor water quality while others are pollution intolerant – which means they cannot survive in degraded aquatic habitats. By determining the types and diversity of the species present, we can get a good measure of the health of the watercourse. We can also use this information to see if the results change over time to determine how effective habitat enhancement projects and best management practices are in the watershed. The results of the benthic sampling form an important part of our reporting through our Watershed Report Cards. The 2013 Report Cards will be completed this summer.

Paddle Day on May 25

The fourth annual Paddle Day is being held in partnership with local scouts and Canoe Water Adventuring. The event runs from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. at Centennial Park in Strathroy (near the skateboard park). People may bring their own canoe or kayak but a number of canoes and life jackets will be available to use.

Denning Memorial Forest Dedication

The dedication of 120 trees for the Denning Bros. Memorial Forest Program will be held on Sunday, May 26 at 2:00 p.m. at Centennial Park, Strathroy.

Sydenham River Canoe Race

Fifty-seven canoes and kayaks braved high water to participate in the Sydenham River Canoe and Kayak Race on April 21. Over \$2,500 was raised for Conservation Education. The Award for the most money raised went to Steve Arnold and Corinne Lemieux and the fastest time for the 12 mile competitive race was won by Dean Brown and Rene Boogemons at 1 hour 21 minutes and 2 seconds. Thanks to the fast current, this was almost 9 minutes faster than the fastest time last year. Our sincere thanks to all who participated.



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"working together for a better environment"

Visit Us at Sarnia Artwalk

Visit the Conservation Authority tent at Artwalk. Artwalk is a weekend long festival celebrating the development of Sarnia's arts and culture district. Boasting over 20,000 participants and including hundreds of artists and vendors, two live music stages, a children's village and environmental festival, Artwalk has grown to become one of Sarnia's premier events. From its inception, Sarnia Artwalk was designed to celebrate the arts, champion ecology and provide a free event for people of all ages to enjoy. Artwalk will take place in Sarnia on June 1-2, 2013 on Christina St. N. between George St. & Wellington St.

Spring Tree Planting Underway

For Conservation Authorities, spring time means tree time. This year we received 76,000 trees the first week of May and work continues to get all of these into the ground. This year's start up for planting is about one week behind normal planting season and nearly one month behind last year's abnormally early spring tree planting season. Two machine planting crews are working to put in the lion's share of the trees and one crew is planting trees by hand in places where the tree planter cannot be used. Approximately 40 landowners will be planting 11,000 trees on their own.

A number of trees are being planted on property owned by Enbridge and Lambton County as part of multi-year projects. \$160,000 has been secured through 9 separate funding sources this year to offset planting costs for most landowners taking part in the program.



Campgrounds Full for the Long Weekend

For the first big weekend of the summer, we are hoping for warm sunny weather. The campgrounds are already booked full and visitors to the Conservation Areas can look forward to a great long weekend. Thanks to the assistance of our volunteer camper associations a number of events will be held at the campgrounds including crafts and games for kids, adult bingo and hayrides.

Reducing Phosphorus Good for the Great Lakes

"Agriculture is one of the sources of phosphorus for Lake Erie. Overall, total phosphorus levels have declined in Lake Erie since the 1960s, improving water quality in the lake. Recently, however, there has been an increase in dissolved phosphorus, which contributes to total phosphorus. High levels of dissolved phosphorus correlate with toxic blue-green algae blooms," Jessica Van Zwol, Healthy Watershed Specialist explains.

Farmers want to apply enough phosphorus for a good yield without having nutrients run off into the drains and creeks. The SCRCA recently acquired funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food to help manage nutrient application on individual farms and reduce the potential for excess nutrients, particularly phosphorus, from entering watercourses. Soil test results help optimize crop yield, influence fertilizer decisions, and identify problem areas in the soil, all of which can help the farmer's income and the watershed.

The SCRCA is offering agricultural growers two free soil tests analyzed by an accredited lab as an incentive for growers to test their fields. Individuals interested in the free soil tests are asked to contact Jessica Van Zwol (519-245-3710, jvanzwol@scrca.on.ca) for a lab submission form and soil kit.

Initial interest in the program has been strong. Over 70 kits have been distributed to landowners all over the watershed.



Healthy Hikes runs until October 31st and will highlight the many ways our environment boosts human health and how Ontarians can energize their body and mind simply by spending more time in nature. Ontarians are encouraged to take the Healthy Hikes challenge by registering online and then recording their time spent hiking in the more than 270 Conservation Areas owned and operated by Conservation Authorities across Ontario for a chance to win great prizes.

“An increasing body of evidence suggests that spending time outdoors can provide many health benefits including increased energy and immunity, increased weight loss and fitness, increased Vitamin D production, reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression, and a reduced risk of diabetes, heart attacks, and cancer,” says Kim Gavine, General Manager of Conservation Ontario, the organization that represents Ontario’s 36 Conservation Authorities. “Some doctors have even started prescribing hikes in local green spaces for their patients suffering from a variety of preventable illnesses”.

Conservation Authorities collectively own over 2500 km of trails, and the Conservation Areas that they operate help protect ecologic features such as wetlands, forests, rivers and streams, and great lakes shoreline, all of which contribute in invaluable ways to our overall health and wellbeing. The air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink are impacted by the health of the natural environment.

Other organizations partnering with Conservation Ontario and the Conservation Authorities include the Canadian Mental Health Association, Trees Ontario, York Region, the Ontario Trails Council, Ducks Unlimited Canada, The Bruce Trail Conservancy, and the David Suzuki Foundation.

“We have had amazing partners come on board,” says Gavine. “They are hosting or partnering with Conservation Authorities on events, promoting activities, and providing some great online resources related to the health benefits of spending time in nature.”

By participating in the various events, challenge participants receive 200 bonus points for attending. There are already close to 60 events in the calendar, and many more are anticipated throughout the campaign. From ‘brain boost’ hikes, healthy lifestyle days, geocaching events, various guided hikes, and a Mother’s Day yoga event – there is something suitable for every age and fitness level! On May 26, the Strathroy Water Trail Paddle Day is one of the challenge events that you can earn bonus points.

There are \$2500 worth of great prizes up for grabs for Challenge participants, and the grand prize, a \$1200 Merrell gift card, was very generously donated by Merrell themselves.

For more information on Healthy Hikes, the available prizes, challenge rules and regulations, events, and how to participate, visit www.healthyhikes.ca. Happy Hiking!

Next Conservation Authority Board Meeting

Thursday, June 27, 1:00 p.m.
The Old Czech Hall, Dresden

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority

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