

Conservation Update

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority

August 2015

Watershed Monitoring in High Gear

SCRCA continues with fish and mussel monitoring this summer thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The focus area is Lake Huron tributaries within the St. Clair Region including several watercourses in the Lambton Shores, Plympton-Wyoming and Sarnia.

So far, fish survey work has identified Rainbow Trout, Rainbow Darters and Northern Pike in watercourses without previous records. All three of these fish species are considered sensitive to habitat disturbance and/or pollution and therefore help to indicate a healthy aquatic system.

In the same study area, nine species of freshwater mussels have been located to-date. Previously there were no records of mussels in these creeks and rivers. Of the species found, Pink Heelsplitter, Paper Pondshell, Mucket and Mapleleaf Mussel are all sensitive to pollution, so finding them is another good sign.

Local youth are getting involved in this research. In mid-August, Stewardship Youth Rangers, employed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), helped out with mussel surveys. In the fall, students from Hillside Public School from the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation will have the chance to learn about aquatic resources (including fish) first hand.

St. Clair Conservation will also be working with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to complete additional fish and mussel monitoring throughout the St. Clair Region. As well, SCRCA staff are working with MNRF to update wetland mapping in the area - it is a busy field season.

Information collected will be published in Watershed Report Cards which summarize the current state of St. Clair Region's watersheds. The report cards track and report on the surface and groundwater quality and forest conditions in the watersheds.



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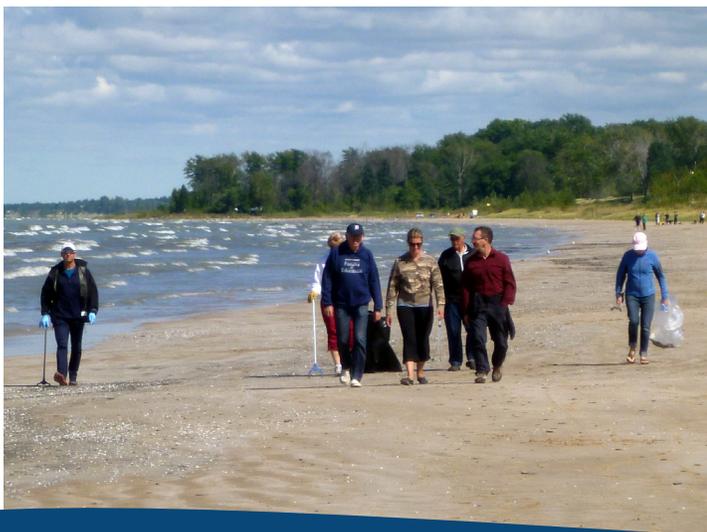
Healthy Lake Huron

While the beach at Ipperwash seems to have shrunk with the high water levels, efforts to connect with cottagers and visitors in Lambton Shores has grown. Staff walked the beach handing out the Healthy Lake Huron newsletters in August and spoke with nearly 200 beach visitors. Discussions popped up with numerous visitors and cottagers as we passed out the newsletters regarding why the beach is as small as it is this year and why the dunes are so big. We had the opportunity to hear many passionate stories of visitors' past visits to the beach as children. It's wonderful to hear so many people enjoying the beautiful beaches of Lake Huron and their happiness that community groups are working together to keep it that way!

Staff have also been working on materials to connect with inland landowners regarding conservation farming practices that will keep soil and nutrients on the land, not in local waterways. We are working with landowners currently who are upgrading their septic systems.

September will be a very busy month showcasing Healthy Lake Huron:

- We are planning a Shoreline Cleanup September 12 at 9 am at Centre Ipperwash Beach - feel free to come out and volunteer for the morning.
- The importance of water quality and conservation will be the focus at the Forest Agriculture in the Classroom Day with elementary school children September 18.
- We will also have a booth at the Forest Fall Fair September 25-27 (come by to see our display and say hello).
- On September 23, we will be co-hosting a cover crop bus tour with Lambton Soil and Crop, visiting local farms and talking with local farmers regarding their experiences with cover crops.



The Eastern Musk Turtle

Through funding from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, we continue monitoring for reptiles in the St. Clair Region Watershed. This year marked the first observation of the Eastern Musk Turtle in one of our Conservation Areas. The Eastern Musk Turtle, also known as the Stinkpot, named for its strong musky odour, is a small turtle measuring anywhere between 9 and 12 centimeters along the length of the shell. They are often found in shallow rivers, lakes and ponds with slow current and a soft bottom. Habitat loss and degradation resulting from wetland destruction and shoreline alteration have caused the Eastern Musk Turtle to decline or disappear from many areas where it once occurred, and ongoing habitat loss continues to threaten this species. Musk Turtles are often most active at night and can be found foraging along the bottom of a water body in search of food and shelter. One of the most unique traits of the Eastern Musk Turtle is its ability to climb. Some Musk Turtles have even been observed on tree limbs overhanging the water - talk about talent!



Eastern Musk Turtle - photo courtesy of Joe Crowley

Fish and Wildlife Management Plan

St. Clair Conservation staff are working with various partners to draft a Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for the St. Clair River Area of Concern (AOC). The Management Plan project will provide guidance and recommendations for habitat rehabilitation and conservation throughout the St. Clair River AOC. Of particular importance and priority are the wetlands of Walpole Island along with riparian buffers along St. Clair River tributaries and coastal wetlands in the Mitchell's Bay area of the AOC. A draft document is planned for early 2016.

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, \$3,000 was awarded across the St. Clair region this year. The scholarships are made possible through trust funds established by the St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation and its donors. Steve Arnold, Chair of the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority, presented the awards.



Katia Huszka from Ursuline College was the recipient of the Mary Jo Arnold Conservation Scholarship. Katia will be studying Environment and Resource Studies at the University of Waterloo.



Dylan Henry from St. Clair Secondary School was selected as one of the recipients of the 2015 A.W. Campbell Memorial Scholarships. Dylan will be studying Ecological Restoration at Fleming College.



Kyle Cornelissen from North Lambton Secondary School was selected as one of the recipients of the 2015 A.W. Campbell Memorial Scholarships. Kyle will be studying Applied Science in Agribusiness at the University of Guelph, Ridgetown Campus.

New Rain Gauge Installed

A new high-tech rain gauge was installed at the Warwick Conservation Area this summer. With the increasing need for data relating to climate change, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has provided precipitation monitoring equipment to Conservation Authority partners across the province. By locating equipment in strategic locations across our watershed, we are able to provide a more accurate assessment of localized rainfall events. The SCRCA provided resources for the site installation as well as supporting equipment including a Davis Weather station at the Warwick site. This site will now provide comprehensive weather data in an area of the watershed that has lacked detailed environmental data in the past.



Next Conservation Authority Board Meeting
Thursday, September 17, 10:00 a.m.

member of

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