

Conservation Update

April 2021

SCRCA Holds Virtual Annual General Meeting

The St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) held its first-ever virtual Annual General Meeting on February 25th. Authority Chair Joe Faas reflected on one of the most challenging and unprecedented years in the SCRCA's history. "In order to ensure the health and safety of our communities, families, staff, and Board of Directors during the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to significantly change the way we communicate, interact and conduct business," said Faas.

Chair Faas acknowledged the tremendous innovation and creativity exhibited by Authority staff to maintain services and connect with the watershed community. Despite all obstacles the SCRCA had a very successful 2020, which included:

- The issuance of 69 flood bulletins over the course of 31 different flood events.
- Operation of the W. Darcy McKeough Floodway twice to protect the Town of Wallaceburg from severe flooding.
- Planting over 50,000 trees throughout the watershed.
- The collection, identification, and release of over 8,000 fish and 1,600 freshwater mussels as part of the SCRCA's bio-monitoring program.
- The engagement of over 12,000 students, teachers, and parents through the creation of new conservation education programs in response to school closures and COVID-19 school restrictions.

Throughout the pandemic, traffic at the SCRCA's 15 Conservation Areas increased significantly, "which speaks to our need for safe outdoor spaces to enjoy," said Faas.

Conservation Award recipients (see page 2) were acknowledged by Authority Vice-Chair, Larry Gordon, who was able to personally thank the recipients for their contributions to the environmental health of the St. Clair Region and present them with their awards prior to the Annual General Meeting.

Joe Faas, representing the Regional Municipality of Chatham-Kent was re-elected Chair of the SCRCA, while Larry Gordon, who represents the Village of Point Edward was re-elected Vice-Chair.



The SCRCA Board of Directors met for their 2021 Annual General Meeting via Zoom on February 25, 2021.



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60 YEARS
**St. Clair
Conservation**

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"working together for a healthy environment"

SCRCA Recognizes 2021 Conservation Award Winners

Conservation Award – Walter and Mary Petryschuk

Walter and Mary Petryschuk are private landowners who were recognized for the protection and restoration of their 16-hectare (40 acre) property just outside of Forest, Ontario. Over 40 years, the Petryschuk's have planted 500 trees, created a trail system, and have established tallgrass prairie habitat. As members of the Carolinian Canada Coalition, they are committed to the maintenance of healthy landscapes and as a result, developed a Carolinian Habitat Action Plan that outlines how their property will be managed and protected in the future.

Conservation Award – Sandra Marshall

Sandra Marshall was recognized for her advocacy and commitment towards the eradication of the invasive species *Phragmites australis* in the Ipperwash Beach region. Sandra is a member of the Ipperwash Phrag Phighters community group who work to eradicate stands of *Phragmites* in their region and educate others on the environmental, social, and recreational impacts this invasive grass has on the local community and ecosystem. When she is not fighting *Phragmites*, Sandra walks along Ipperwash Beach, almost daily, picking up trash left by other users.



Larry Gordon, Vice-Chair of the SCRCA presents Conservation Awards to Walter and Mary Petryschuk (pictured left) and Sandra Marshall (pictured right) at their homes.

Shoreline Protection Work Progressing Well along the Lake Huron and St. Clair River Shorelines

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and high-water levels, shoreline protection work is progressing well along Lake Huron and the St. Clair River. Through funding provided by Infrastructure Canada's Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the City of Sarnia, and St. Clair Township, more than 700 metres of shoreline have been reinforced with armour stone revetments to reduce shoreline erosion and protect vulnerable development since January 2020.

Shoreline protection projects will continue in 2021 with the continued focus on the Brights Grove shoreline and new protection in Port Lambton.



A Big Year for Tree Orders!



SCRCA staff will be busy this spring handing out and helping to plant over 79,000 trees throughout the St. Clair Region watershed. Over the next few weeks, 83 landowners will plant more than 14,000 trees on their properties, and an additional 64,000 trees will be planted by Authority staff on 30 properties.

Large-stock trees were very popular compared to previous years with over 1,400 potted, balled, and burlapped trees requested. The majority of these trees were ordered by four of the SCRCA's member municipalities to distribute to their residents.

Through the Authority's Healthy Watershed Program, SCRCA staff secure funding to help offset the costs of eligible tree planting projects. For the 2021 season, more than \$193,000 in funding support has been provided by 11 separate funding sources. Landowners are contributing more than \$100,000 of their own money to support tree planting projects on their properties.

Students Install Tree Swallow Nesting Boxes at the Keith McLean Conservation Lands

On March 29th, ten students enrolled in the Students Within a College (SWAC) program at Pines High School headed out to the Keith McLean Conservation Lands to install tree swallow nesting boxes around the property.

In total, six boxes were constructed and installed by the students to promote nesting by tree swallows – a species currently experiencing a noticeable population decline throughout North America. Students had the opportunity to explore the McLean property, gain team-building skills, and learn more about the local habitat and how the boxes will benefit local bird species.

"We are very thankful for the hard work the students put into creating these nesting boxes," said Tim Payne, Manager of Forestry, "They certainly add to the Keith McLean Conservation Lands, and help us further improve the habitat of this important property."

The students were headed to the Erieau Rail Trail afterwards to install the remainder of their nesting boxes there.



Introducing Kirsten Van Goethem – SCRCA CO-OP Student

Kirsten Van Goethem is a student at the University of Waterloo who is pursuing an undergraduate degree in environmental sciences, with a specialization in ecology. In January 2021, Kirsten was hired by the SCRCA and the Regional Municipality of Chatham-Kent as a co-op student to write a literature review on the benefits and impacts of drain management practices. Read on to learn more about Kirsten, her research, and what she accomplished during her time at the SCRCA.

Hi Kirsten! Tell us a bit about your literature review? What did you research, what was the question, and can you share some key outcomes?

The goal of the literature review was to understand how current Drain Management Practices (DMPs) in Chatham-Kent affect water quality, and what innovative drain practices exist in Ontario and internationally that could be implemented to provide benefits to water quality in Chatham-Kent, and beyond.

With funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and EcoCanada, I was able to work and collaborate with a number of partners including the SCRCA Biology staff; Dr. Catherine Febria and her team from the Healthy Headwaters Lab at the University of Windsor; and, Kelly Johnson, Environmental Specialist and Brigan Barlow, Manager of Drainage Services at the Municipality of Chatham-Kent. Together, our research focused on specific DMPs conducted in the Chatham-Kent region.

Through our extensive search, we found that many research papers analysed the improvements and implications that DMPs (such as brushing, channelization, bottom cleanouts, and other main practices) had on local water quality. Our search also focused on Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as two-stage channels, riparian buffer strips, wetlands, and controlled drainage, that could be implemented in place of traditional DMPs. Our literature review found a significant number of papers regarding BMPs, and within our paper, we express the need for BMPs to be implemented to preserve water quality in agricultural drains.

How did the co-op term bring partners (SCRCA, Municipality of Chatham-Kent, and Healthy Headwater Lab) together?

The experience was beneficial to all organizations involved in that it created stronger relations across the region. SCRCA collaborated with the Municipality of Chatham-Kent and Healthy Headwaters Lab in Windsor to create my co-op position. All organizations were invested in making sure this literature review came to fruition, as it contained information useful to many drainage superintendents and contractors in Ontario.

Through working with the three different organizations, I was able to compile a vast amount of information on drainage practices, water quality and BMPs and incorporate it into the literature review. Although my co-op position is coming to an end, a platform has been created for future discussions among the three organizations. My colleagues and I are hoping to submit the final copy of the literature review to a peer-reviewed journal in Canada! This paper may even lead to future graduate student studies on drain management, which I think is amazing to see!



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What was it like working for/with three different organizations (a Conservation Authority, a university, and a municipality)?

Having the ability to go to drain sites with staff from Chatham-Kent and the SCRCA allowed me to meet local drainage superintendents, observe different drainage systems, and gain a better understanding of their importance, both environmentally and agriculturally. I was able to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for landowners and farmers who are impacted by drainage systems that do not function properly. Collaborating with the Healthy Headwaters Lab was a unique experience as well. Dr. Catherine Febria and Lauren Dampousse (a graduate student at the University of Windsor) provided me with encouragement, guidance, and support while preparing this literature review. I wouldn't have been able to do it without them.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings had to be well coordinated to ensure productive and effective collaboration and discussion. Communicating during a pandemic (through emails and virtual platforms) just isn't the same as in person! It was a challenge, but together we figured out how to move forward. We scheduled regular meetings and eventually landed on a research question that all organizations agreed upon. We held meetings every two weeks during the co-op to provide updates and allow each organization to voice any questions or concerns. These meetings were essential in keeping everyone on the same page and informed. Working with all three organizations has been a very rewarding experience and I could not have asked for a better co-op.

How do you think your co-op will help with your future career goals?

When I was twelve years old, I led a protest for the youth of Chatham-Kent in response to the extensive clear-cutting that was happening in the area. After that, I knew my future would involve the environment. I am currently in my second year at the University of Waterloo majoring in Environmental Sciences with a specialization in Ecology. I am often asked what I plan to do with my education when I graduate. I have always been unsure how to answer that question — the environmental sciences cover such a broad range of topics and there are many things I could do. My goal has always been to create change and make a difference in this world.

Agricultural drain management was not something that I ever thought of, but now that I have been immersed in it for the last four months, I have developed a significant interest. Could I see this as a future career? Yes, absolutely!



Bio-engineering Drainage Management Practices were installed by the Municipality of Chatham-Kent at a site experiencing severe river bank erosion. The project will benefit at-risk fish and involved native plantings and the strategic positioning of tree roots to hold soil in place.

SCRCA's Conservation Education Team Releases their 2021 Spring Strategy

The SCRCA's Conservation Education Team continues to develop new programming for both Elementary and Secondary school students and families, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This allows for the continued engagement of our watershed students in environmental topics despite restrictions on field trips and in-person learning.

The 2021 Spring Strategy offers a suite of curriculum-connected "Live-Stream with a Naturalist" program options for all grade levels. All live-streams combine learning and observing with interactive experiments and activities to keep students engaged. For more information on these programs and how to book, please visit www.scrca.on.ca/govirtual.



PC - Sharon Nethercott

Next Conservation Authority Board Meeting Annual General Meeting

Thursday, June 25, 2021 10:00 am
(Virtual Meeting)

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