



Background Briefing

Grand River Conservation Foundation

December 2014

The Grand River Conservation Foundation is a registered charity that raises money for GRCA projects that couldn't be done otherwise. The foundation was created in 1965 and has raised nearly \$11 million to educate kids about the outdoors, restore wetlands, improve habitat, promote water quality and develop trails and other recreational places. About 88 per cent of donated dollars go directly to projects.



Accomplishments

Over the years the foundation has engaged in several large "signature" projects as well as many other initiatives.

Among the signature projects were:

- \$1.5 million raised in the 1990s for development of 75 kilometres of rail-trails in the central and northern parts of the watershed.
- \$2 million raised in the 2000s for The Living Classroom Campaign to support curriculum-based outdoor education programs

Some notable projects in the last few years include:

- \$240,000 to support the future Parkhill Dam hydro project
- \$100,000 toward the development of a pollinator complex at Guelph Lake Conservation Area
- \$225,000 for restoration work at the Taquanyah Nature Centre

Structure

The GRCF board has 16 members consisting of 15 representatives from across the watershed plus the GRCA chair. Directors serve three-year renewable terms. The foundation board recommends GRCF members to the GRCA board. The GRCF board elects a chair and vice-chair for two-year terms.

Staff support is provided by a full-time executive director. GRCA staff also provides service and advice on financial, legal and other matters.

In addition to the board, a group of more than 50 foun-

dation supporters, known as the Grand Champions, assist with fundraising and other activities. Many of them are former board members or others with ties to the foundation or the GRCA.

Fundraising

The GRCF uses a wide variety of fundraising methods. They're designed to meet the needs of donors who may want to do anything from a \$10 on-line gift up to a multi-year commitment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

One of the most successful strategies has been face-to-face meetings between foundation supporters and potential donors. This has been particularly effective for major campaigns such as the Rail-Trail and Outdoor Education efforts where the bulk of the money raised came in a relatively small number of large donations.

Some fundraising efforts are tied to specific, one-time projects such as the Toyota Living Roof at the Laurel Creek Nature Centre. Others are multi-year projects that may involve a long-term relationship between the GRCF and a business or community group. For example, memorial forests have been developed in partnership with several funeral homes. Service clubs have made commitments to



The Cowan Foundation supported upgrades to the Cambridge-Paris Rail-Trail. Andria Jinkinson-Brown and Tracy Spark take a look at a new interpretive sign.

back tree-planting or restoration projects that span several years.

The foundation also takes the lead, or supports, submission of applications to other granting agencies (corporate or private foundations) for donations to projects or ongoing efforts such as the Rural Water Quality Program and GRCA tree planting initiatives.

The foundation has a planned giving program that allows donors to remember the GRCF in their will, or to make donations of life insurance policies.

The foundation maintains several different funds to meet the needs of donors who may want to donate to a specific program. For example, separate funds exist to support trail maintenance and outdoor education activities.

There are also undesignated funds, which can be used for projects at the direction of the board. There are also several endowment funds where the principle is invested and only the interest is spent.

The GRCF adheres to Imagine Canada's Ethical Fundraising and Accountability Code.

Current initiatives

The GRCF is currently in the midst of a major initiative to support construction of a new nature centre complex within Guelph Lake Conservation Area. The existing building, a converted house that is no longer adequate to meet the needs of the program, sits in an area adjacent to the conservation area.

The foundation has raised more than \$4 million since 2010, as part of a larger, comprehensive fundraising pro-



Since 2008 the foundation has worked with the Kitchener-Conestoga Rotary Club to raise funds for trail development and restoration work at Snyder's Flats.

gram to support a number of programs and projects of the GRCA including acquisition of lands for restoration, restoration of terrestrial and aquatic habits, maintenance of trails and natural areas and other efforts.

Grants and scholarships

Although the primary recipient of foundation funds is the GRCA, the foundation also has three other programs that put money directly in the hands of the community.

- **Community Conservation Grants:** Each year, foundation awards grants of up to \$1,000 to qualified groups (must be a registered charity), or up to \$500 for schools (elementary only) undertaking conservation activities. Eligible projects must be in the watershed and available for the use or benefit of the entire community. Community projects have included trail development and construction of a canoe launch. Schools have often used their money for schoolyard tree-planting and naturalization projects.
- **University and college scholarships:** For almost 15 years the GRCF has awarded the S. C. Johnson Scholarship, worth \$1,500, to a student in a conservation or environmental program at a watershed university (Laurier, Waterloo and Guelph) or college (Conestogo). The foundation has also developed a new scholarship, called the Murray McEwen Clean Water prize which has been handed out to one recipient annually since 2011.
- **High school awards:** The foundation provides each of the six watershed school boards with \$500 to be presented to graduating high school students.

Communications and reporting

The foundation has several ways it communicates and reports on its activities.

- A section of the GRCA website is dedicated to the foundation. It contains information on foundation officers and board members, current projects and past accomplishments. Information on how to donate, apply for a Community Conservation Grant or a scholarship is available here. The website can be found at www.grandriver.ca/grcf
- An annual report and audited financial statements are published each year at the GRCF annual meeting in June. These are available on the website.

The GRCF also reaches out to the community through traditional media and partners with the GRCA on social media initiatives.