

Background Briefing

Outdoor education

December 2014

The GRCA operates an extensive outdoor education program to provide adults and children with a better understanding of the environment of the Grand River watershed.

At its core are hands-on, curriculum-based programs for elementary and secondary school students at five permanent nature centres and satellite sites.

In addition, there are numerous programs ranging from owl prowls and nature hikes to summer camps and Scout/Guide badge programs.

History

The outdoor education program was born in the "Lands for Learning" initiative of the provincial government in the 1970s. The province urged school boards and conservation authorities to work together to provide outdoor education on conservation authority land.

Since then, the GRCA has worked closely with school boards to develop curriculum-based programs at the ele-

mentary and secondary school levels.

Over the years, more than one million people have participated in nature centre programs.

In 2013 the nature centres had more than 50,000 visits including 40,000 for school programs, 5,500 for community programs and more than 1,000 day campers representing more than 5,000 day visits.

Nature centres

There are five permanent nature centres, located to serve school boards and communities throughout the watershed.

Apps' Mill, Brantford

- opened in 1981
- 8,000 visitors in 2013 for school programs, community programs and camps
- built with a grant from SC Johnson and Son Ltd.

Taquanyah, Cayuga

- originally opened in 1973; closed due to budget restrictions in 1996; re-opened in 2003
- operated as a seasonal site (fall and spring) by Apps' Mill staff
- 2,000 visitors in 2013 for school programs
- 2014 hosted the first annual Haldimand Childrens Water Festival

Guelph Lake, Guelph

- opened in a converted house in 1980
- 20,000 visitors in 2013 for school programs, community programs and camps
- plans are underway for a new centre to be located in Guelph Lake Conservation Area, with funds raised by the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

Laurel Creek, Waterloo

- opened in 1976. Owned by the GRCA and managed with the Waterloo District School Board, which operates its own program in the building
- 12,000 visitors in 2013 for school programs, community programs and camps



Shade's Mills, Cambridge

- opened in 2000
- 5,500 visitors in 2013 for school programs and community programs
- construction financed by Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada Inc.

Other locations

Satellite seasonal teaching sites are located at Pinehurst Lake, Rockwood Park, Laurel Creek Park, Brant Park and Belwood Lake

School board contracts

The GRCA has a mix of contract and fee-for-service arrangements with five school boards in the watershed. There are contracts with four boards which specify how many classes will visit a nature centre during the school year. In addition, individual schools or classes from any school board can book outdoor programs on a fee-for-service basis.

Contracts are in place with:

- Grand Erie District School board (Apps' Mill and Taquanyah)
- Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board (Apps' Mill and Taquanyah)
- Waterloo Catholic District School Board (Laurel Creek and Shade's Mills)
- Wellington Catholic District School Board (Guelph Lake)



Educational programs

Nature centre staff work with school boards to develop curriculum-based programs at all grade levels.

Elementary school programs

Elementary school programs include aquatic and forest studies, caving and geology, orienteering and even canoe instruction. Each program has a classroom component as well as a hands-on outdoor element where children investigate and explore the environment. Nature centre programs are experiential with the goal of having the children spend at least 60 per cent or more of their visit outdoors, regardless of the weather.

Secondary school programs

Nature centres also offer secondary school programs in science and geography. The Nature Centres have a number of programs to help secondary school students earn Specialist High Skills Major Certificates. These programs include geographic information systems (GIS), global positioning systems (GPS), map and compass reading, habitat restoration, watershed management, bird identification, tree identification and benthic invertebrate identification.

Community and other programs

Nature centres offer a range of programs to acquaint adults and children with nature. The programs include:

- evening and weekend public events such as nature
- hikes, snowshoeing, bird studies and owl prowls
- Christmas, spring break and summer day camps
- badge programs for Scouts and Guides
- programs for youth groups
- environmental birthday parties

Scout and Guide groups can take advantage of a subsidy provided by a donor to the GRCA.