

GRAND

ACTIONS

THE GRAND STRATEGY NEWSLETTER

Volume 14, Number 1 - Jan-Feb 2009



Grand River Conservation Authority



The Grand: A Canadian Heritage River

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Cover photo

A boy holds up a fish while ice fishing at the Shand Dam, the first in the series of reservoirs constructed to solve water problems. Photo by Derek Strub



GRCA celebrates 75 years

The Grand River Conservation Authority traces its roots back 75 years to a tangled mess of environmental problems and hard economic times.

In fact, the stage was set in 1929, the year of the stock market crash. It was also a year of severe flooding up and down the Grand River. In Galt, the flood damage estimate was \$250,000, a large sum in today's dollars. In Guelph, manufacturing plant loss from the flooding was believed to amount to "hundreds of thousands of dollars" and these were only two communities affected by flooding. There was severe flooding again in February 1932.

Summers on the Grand brought a different set of problems. Drought during some years meant the Grand River was described as an open sewer with little more than wastewater trickling through it. The Ontario Department of Health was concerned about the sewage in the river. A very dry year was 1936 when there were problems throughout the province. People, businesses and governments wanted to find solutions to these

problems, but they needed a plan, money and a mechanism to help them work together.

Kitchener engineer W. H Breithaupt had called for government action since 1905. He thought if dams were constructed in the upper watershed to create reservoirs, it would help solve these problems. The 1929 floods helped spur business leaders to form the Grand River Valley Boards of Trade which lobbied for a provincial investigation into solving the problems of the watershed.

"One municipality cannot get the ear of the (provincial) government. A group, however, can more easily get the ear of the government," said Alderman J. P. Jaffray of Galt. Sixteen municipalities voluntarily contributed \$25 to \$500. This added up to \$2,425 and allowed the Boards of Trade to hire engineer James Mackintosh of the





Severe spring flooding in 1929 helped provide impetus for business leaders to lobby the province to form an organization to solve water problems. Photo on the left shows the Main Street bridge in Galt during the flood that submerged the lower level of the stone building behind. Photo on the right was taken from the bridge facing the opposite direction after the flood waters had receded. It shows that the water came up so high that it damaged the bridge where people had been walking.

Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission to study “municipal water supply, sewage disposal, flood control, power development possibilities and afforestation”.

The report was issued Feb. 11, 1932 and recommended four multi-purpose reservoirs to regulate water supply and ensure a minimum water flow through Kitchener, Waterloo, Galt and Brantford. These reservoirs and an artificial lake at Luther Marsh would also provide enough waste dilution for 25 years. This was the plan.

Board of trade chair Gordon Cockshutt of Brantford suggested forming a commission to carry out these recommendations. The Grand River Conservation Commission Act was passed by the province in 1932. The first meeting was held on May 30, 1934 with Brantford, Kitchener, Galt, Fergus and Caledonia joining to form it. Other municipalities soon joined the partnership. This was the first time local municipalities had banded together to address water management on a watershed scale.

Getting money in hard times

Money was the next problem. It was still the Great Depression and some people in rural areas had abandoned their land. This left fewer people to pay local taxes. A dam would be too costly for the municipalities to manage on their own.

At the beginning of the Great Depression, the federal and provincial governments were more interested in helping people by providing government relief. But the tides were starting to turn. They were thinking about large-scale public works projects that would provide jobs and help the economy. The federal government’s National Employment Commission decided to support a proposal for a dam across the Grand River. By April 1938, the province and federal government had each agreed to contribute 37.5 per cent of the project. This left the municipalities to contribute the remaining 25 per cent, an amount that they could manage. This was divided among the municipalities differently based on tax assessment and benefits such as water supply, flood protection and sewage disposal.

A second Grand River Conservation Commission Act was passed by the province in 1938 to broaden the commission’s responsibilities so it could manage the construction projects.

The commission was now ready to undertake the first large-scale multi-purpose water control dam ever constructed in Canada. Construction of the Shand Dam at Belwood Lake started in 1938 and was completed four years later.

As a fledgling organization, the commission captured the attention of conservationists and water managers across the

province, the country and even around the world. It inspired the conservation movement as people and governments struggled to find a path to manage water into the future.

Two founding organizations

The GRCC undertook many building projects. It also planted more than five million trees in some of the province’s first large-scale reforestation projects.

It was the model upon which Ontario based the conservation authorities set up across the province in the 1940s. In fact, the commission supported the Grand Valley Conservation Authority in 1948 and the two organizations — the GVCA and GRCC had the same chair, William Philip of Galt.

They amalgamated in 1966 to form the present day GRCA and are the two founding organizations of the Grand River Conservation Authority.

This is the first in a series of articles about the history of the GRCA and its many programs. These will be featured in Grand Actions during 2009 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the GRCA’s founding organization. This article is based on Bruce Mitchell and Dan Shrubsole’s 1992 book, Ontario Conservation Authorities: Myth and Reality and research from the GRCA archives at the University of Waterloo library.

Apathy the chief enemy

This article was written by Hugh Templin, editor of the Fergus News-Record and also a founding member of the Grand River Conservation Commission. This article was part of a special section published in 1942 to commemorate opening the Shand Dam.

The long struggle to arouse interest in the minds of people along the Grand, and, having accomplished that, to persuade the Governments of Ontario and Canada to pay a share of the cost,



Hugh Templin

cannot be told here because it covered many years and during the last ten years before work on the dam started, many people used their time and influence. It is hard to get people to put up their money for a great public work. They leave such things to their governments. In this case, it seems necessary to have the local municipalities show some interest before approaching the governments.

The flood damage was spectacular but usually soon forgotten. Places like Galt might have \$100,000 damage in one flood, but that meant little to other people along the valley. Brantford had suffered extensively in the past but had spent well on to half a million building dikes and felt secure behind its earth walls — a sort of “Magenot Line complex.” When one mayor and council became interested at last, some other mayor and council would go into office.

The same thing happened with the Ontario Government. When Hon. George S. Henry was premier, he and Hon. William Finlayson became interested, but did not wish to become too deeply involved financially. The legislation passed at that time did nothing more than allow surveys to be made. Then the Henry Government went out.

10 years of success for Waterloo Region farmers

By Tracey Ryan
Supervisor of Conservation Services

Take care of the land, and the land will take care of the water.

That’s a pretty simple prescription for protecting our drinking water, and it’s one that farmers of Waterloo Region have been following for years.

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the Rural Water Quality Program, which has provided farmers with the financial incentives to keep water clean on their land before it soaks into the ground to recharge aquifers or flows into the Grand River — the two places where all residents of Waterloo Region get their drinking water.

During the program’s first decade, more than 500 farmers completed 834 projects that contributed to the environmental health of Waterloo Region and beyond. The farmers have been given grants of more than \$3 million, most of which came from the Region of Waterloo government. The landowners have put even more of their own money, materials and effort into the projects, investing a total of \$11 million.



MILESTONES

What has all that money done?

- ♦ built fences along 38 kilometres of river and stream banks to keep over 3,000 head of livestock from polluting the water and damaging fish habitat;
- ♦ planted 121 hectares of trees to filter water, reduce erosion and sedimentation, improve crop yield, enhance habitat and sequester carbon;
- ♦ developed nutrient management plans for more than 10,000 hectares of land to protect surface and groundwater;
- ♦ planted 10 kilometres of wind-breaks to reduce erosion and provide wildlife habitat;
- ♦ plugged 65 unused wells to prevent pollutants from traveling from the surface down to the vital groundwater aquifers below the surface;
- ♦ built 130 manure storage tanks to contain contaminants and keep them from running off into streams and rivers;
- ♦ taken 130 hectares of fragile



Students from a parochial school plant trees on a farm in Waterloo Region.

land out of production to return it to a more natural state.

All of these activities are critical to keeping water clean. They have other benefits as well. When the program was created 10 years ago, few people were thinking about climate change, biodiversity and sustainability. Projects undertaken through the Rural Water Quality Program help in all of these areas, by making the landscape more resilient in the face of climate change, by creating new wildlife habitats and by sequestering carbon.

The program recognizes that these actions by farmers have benefits that extend far beyond the farm gate. In recent years, farm organizations have argued that it is important to recognize the “environmental goods and services” farmers provide to society. The Rural Water Quality Program acknowledges the truth in that argument, particularly through its policy of paying farmers to take fragile land out of production. For example, farmers who retire land can receive payments of \$250 per acre per year, for three years. Since 1998, more than 125 farmers have received \$177,000 as payment; much of the land, located along streams and rivers, has been naturalized and planted with trees and bushes.

These buffer strips “are one of the most effective ways to improve water quality and stream health,” said Eric Hodgins, chair of the Waterloo Rural Water Quality Program committee and also manager of water resource protection for the Region of Waterloo.

The region decided to create the program as part of its Water Resources Protection Strategy, in large part because of its dependence on groundwater as a source of drinking water. It is the largest community in Canada relying on groundwater as its principle source of water.

Farmers had the will to take action but cost was a problem. As valuable as these projects are, they don’t help the farmer’s bottom line. That’s why the regional government decided to have the



Tracey Ryan and her staff have been working with landowners to improve water quality in rural areas.

beneficiaries of the program – water users – help pay part of the cost.

The regional government contributes \$300,000 each year to a fund administered by the GRCA. Staff from the authority meet with farmers, discuss their needs and work out a plan to implement the projects. The projects are then reviewed by a committee representing farmers and the region to ensure that the project is feasible and useful.

The development and delivery of the program has been a collaborative process involving more than 20 local and provincial farm organizations. Ten years ago it was revolutionary to involve farmers in the design of a program such as this. Now it’s the standard for agricultural program development across Ontario.

The Waterloo Region program is an example for other communities in the Grand River watershed. The City of Guelph, County of Wellington, County of Brant and City of Brantford have joined forces to provide similar programs for farmers in their communities. At the same time, GRCA staff work to find grant money from other sources, such as federal and provincial programs, for farmers in the remaining parts of the watershed that don’t participate in the Rural Water Quality Program.

Across the Grand River watershed, more than 2,200 projects have been undertaken with more than \$7 million provided to landowners.

A lot of lessons have been learned in the process pioneered by the Region of

Waterloo in 1998. The need to involve all stakeholders has been critical. Another important lesson learned was the value of taking time to develop a common understanding of issues so everyone could speak the same language.

The program has succeeded because it had champions who developed support not only in the farm community, but also among municipal staff and politicians.

Consistency and continuity have also been keys to success. Farmers had to develop trust in the process and required time to properly plan their investments. They needed to know the program would still be there when they had the time and money to begin their work.

The program has shown how municipalities and conservation groups can work with farmers to develop farmer-driven solutions for environmental issues.

In the ten-year history of the Rural Water Quality Program, the farmers of Waterloo Region have proven they care about water quality and the environment. More significantly, the work they have done has helped make Waterloo Region a cleaner, healthier place to live – not just for today’s residents, but also for tomorrow’s.

For more information, visit www.grandriver.ca or contact Anne Loeffler at 519- 621-2763, Ext. 2242 or aloeffler@grandriver.ca.



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Designated historic tree in Cambridge

By Margaret Hitchcock
Cambridge Sculpture Garden

Over the centuries, oak trees have symbolized stalwart endurance.

The mighty 130-year-old Grand Oak standing in the Cambridge Sculpture Garden (CSG) on Grand Avenue South is no exception. It won a Heritage Tree

designation in the fall of 2008 from the City of Cambridge. It was the first tree to be designated in the city under the Ontario Heritage Act and is one of only 10 designated trees in the province.

To receive heritage designation, the Grand Oak had to meet the criteria of both the Ontario Heritage Tree Alliance and the Ontario Urban Forest Council. It passed those tests with flying colours. It is on GRCA-owned land and designation was approved by the GRCA. Cambridge council unanimously declared it a heritage tree.

The Grand Oak is on the Trans Canada Trail system and close to the Grand River. It has survived many years of flooding.

Its biggest challenge occurred in 1976, when eight workers' cottages were demolished to make way for dykes that raised the ground level five feet higher. To save the tree, John Kingswood, the City of Cambridge forester at the time, constructed a wooden well 5 feet high and 10 feet wide with drainage pipes radiating out from the base of the tree grade. He then raised the soil level around the tree by five feet. Kingswood's heroic measures saved the

oak which is now marveled at by horticulturalists and foresters.

The custodian of the Grand Oak and the nearby land is the Cambridge Sculpture Garden committee, a volunteer group advocating for the arts and the environment. It received a Grand River Watershed Award from the GRCA in 2004.

Since the committee's inception in 2000, it has created a drought-tolerant half-acre garden contoured and planted with a multitude of native plants, ornamental grasses and shrubs. Over the years, several permanent sculptures and numerous temporary sculptures have been installed for the public's cultural enjoyment.

Many free children's events and workshops are presented under the welcoming shade of the Grand Oak. The tree, which has stood as a sentinel for 130 years, can now continue its reign, providing shade and delight to those who come to the garden.

The CSG committee invites everyone to visit the Grand Oak beside the Grand River near the Ferguson Cottage one-acre perennial gardens on Grand Avenue South in Cambridge.

Cullis-Suzuki to speak at Guelph gala March 24

Internationally-known environmentalist Severn Cullis-Suzuki is coming to Guelph in March to lend her support to efforts to improve the environment in the Grand River watershed.

She will speak at the 2009 President's Gala of the Grand River Conservation Foundation at the River Run Centre in Guelph, 6:30 p.m. on March 24. Proceeds will be used to support the environmental work of the Grand River Conservation Authority.

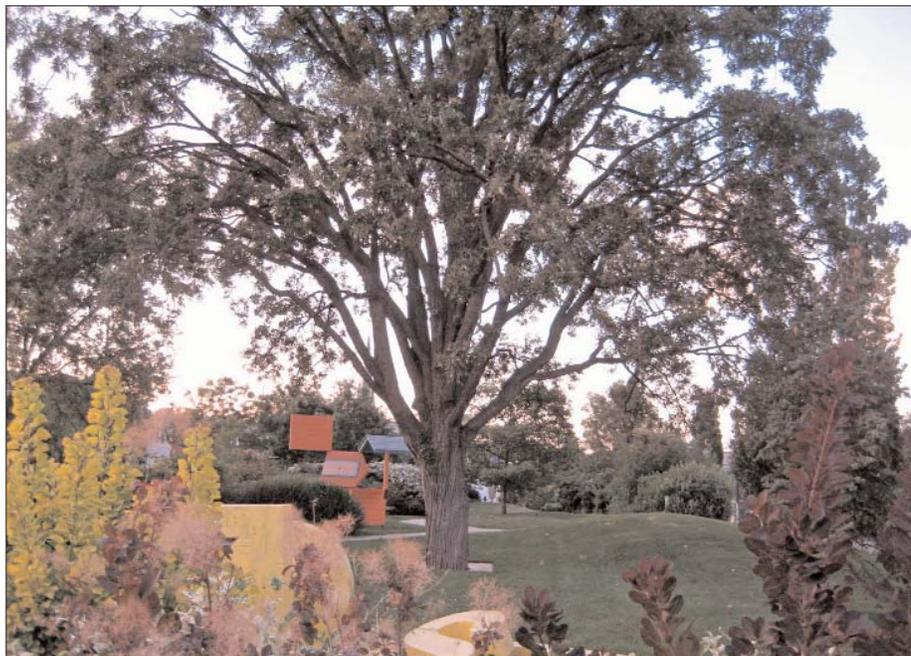
Tickets for the event, entitled "A Celebration of Youth and Conservation," are now available by calling the foundation at (877) 294-7263 or e-mailing dhartley@grandriver.ca. Tickets are \$150 each and an income tax receipt will be issued for part of the price.

The evening, which is presented by the Nicholas Lambden Children's Foundation and Terra View Homes of Guelph, will offer a gala evening of refreshments and Cullis-Suzuki's perspective on the future of water conservation, within the Grand River watershed and on the national scene.

"We are extremely excited that Cullis-Suzuki has chosen to join us. Her vitality is infectious; in only a short time she has seen and done so much for our environment by causing people to think about sustainable living. In turn, the money raised will help the GRCA to protect our lands and waters for the long-term," said Sara Wilbur, executive director of the GRCF.

An environmental activist, speaker, television host and author, Cullis-Suzuki is one of the world's most remarkable young environmentalists, encouraging people to define their values, act with the future in mind, and take individual responsibility for the planet.

She has been active in environmental and social justice work since she was in kindergarten. When she was just 12 she was honoured with the United Nations



Cambridge's Grand Oak tree is the first tree to be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in Cambridge and the 10th tree to receive this designation in the province. It is in the Cambridge Sculpture Garden on Grand Avenue.



Severn Cullis-Suzuki

Environment Program's Global 500 Award at a ceremony in Beijing, China.

At age nine, after witnessing clear-cutting in the Brazilian Amazon, she started the Environmental Children's Organization, which consisted of a group of children committed to learning and teaching other kids about environmental issues. They were successful in raising enough money to appear at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and the 12-year-old Cullis-Suzuki delivered a powerful speech that gained worldwide attention, resulting in the presentation of the UN award.

In 2002, as a member of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Special Advisory Panel, she introduced a pledge called the Recognition of Responsibility to the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. The trip was the subject of a documentary film that aired on CBC's long-running documentary series *The Nature of Things*.

She hosted a children's TV series called *Suzuki's Naturequest*, and co-edited the book *Notes from Canada's Young Activists*. She currently sits on B.C.'s Citizen's Conservation Council on Climate Change, and the board of the David Suzuki Foundation.

She co-founded the Skyfish Project an internet-based think tank that encourages youth to speak out for their future and adopt a sustainable lifestyle.

She has completed a bachelor of science degree in ecology and evolutionary biology from Yale University and a masters degree in Ethnobotany from the University of Victoria in B.C.

A year on the Grand

Two photojournalists from The Waterloo Region Record have undertaken a unique challenge that will bring them to the Grand River throughout 2009.

David Bebee and Mathew McCarthy are taking photographs with the Grand River featured in each shot.

"I hope that our blog will help bring awareness to the fact that the Grand is a wonderful, natural resource that needs to be protected for future generations," Bebee said. He also hopes the images will inspire people to take their first canoe trip or walk along the Grand.

This special project is an idea they came up with on their own, but it is especially appropriate this year, when the GRCA is celebrating its 75th anniversary and the 15th anniversary of its designation as a Canadian Heritage River. There is a link from the GRCA's website, www.grandriver.ca to their photos.

Bebee and McCarthy would welcome stories and photo ideas related to the Grand River.

"We hope to introduce viewers to areas of the river they might not have seen," Bebee said.



David Bebee and Mathew McCarthy are photographing the river regularly.

If you have any spots you think should be photographed or any stories you want told, write to mmccarthy@therecord.com or dbebee@therecord.com.

Feb 16 Heritage Day Workshop focuses on rural history

People throughout the Grand River watershed can learn more about the history and heritage of Waterloo Region's rural townships at the 12th Annual Heritage Day Workshop and Celebration on Monday Feb. 16, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Wilmot Recreation Complex, Baden.

"Our 'rural routes/roots' shaped the history and development of the Grand River watershed. They are often overlooked as the watershed becomes increasingly urbanized and less connected to the landscape," says Barb Veale, the Grand River Conservation Authority's coordinator of policy, planning and partnerships. This workshop highlights the special history of three townships in Waterloo Region — Wilmot, Woolwich and Wellesley.

Keynote speakers include Waterloo regional chair Ken Seiling and Geoff Hayes, history professor at the University of Waterloo. In celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Canadian Heritage River designation for the Grand River and its major tributaries, the Heritage River Inventory accessible through the GRCA's website at www.grandriver.ca will be launched.

The workshop will feature special guests and performers highlighting the unique rural heritage of each of the three townships. James Timlin, Chief Administrative Officer and Bill Mates, Director of Economic Development will illustrate how the Town of Ingersoll has used its heritage assets to strengthen its economy. A reception at Castle Kilbride National Historic Site in Baden will feature local foods and tours of the museum — the "jewel" of Wilmot Township.

Over 200 participants are expected to attend the workshop which is free, although donations are welcome. Space is limited so it is necessary to register in advance. Contact Pat Mighton by e-mail at dpmighton8@golden.net or fax 519-696-3416, or call the township of Wilmot at (519) 634-8444 for more information.

“The workshop provides a rare opportunity to catch a glimpse of how our rural routes/roots shaped the social, environmental and economic fabric of Waterloo Region and the Grand River watershed as they exist today,” Veale says.

The Heritage Day Workshop is held in a different part of the watershed each year with a focus on a different aspect of the Grand River’s heritage. It is hosted by the Heritage Working Group of the Grand Strategy. The 2009 workshop is sponsored by the three townships, Waterloo Region and the GRCA.

2008 WATERSHED AWARDS

Woolwich Clean Waterways receives 2008 award

Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

The Woolwich Clean Waterways Group is an outstanding example of a group that is dedicated to the environment and works closely with other organizations.

Since the early 1990s, they have been undertaking projects to clean waterways throughout Woolwich Township. Their first project was in Bolender Park in Elmira, where they stabilized the river banks and saved a big old tree that would have been lost to erosion long ago.

The volunteer group is not made up of experts, but they are learning and



Stefan Cherry and Barb Taylor are two members of Woolwich Clean Waterways, an environmental citizen’s group and recent Watershed Award recipient.

passing on their knowledge as they go along.

“Sometimes not being an expert makes the job a little harder, but on the other hand it necessitates networking and finding other ways and other people to make things happen. This is what gets the ball rolling,” says Barb Taylor, who co-chairs the group with Chris Chhatwal.

They’ve found funds to fence waterways so that livestock can’t go in the streams, to undertake other creek rehabilitation projects and plant native trees and shrubs. All of these projects along the upper Canagagigue Creek reduce erosion and prevent pollutants from entering the waterways, thereby improving water quality for this creek that joins up with the Grand River.

“Each year we do a project. We plant all native species, not less than 250 trees and shrubs in any one location,” Taylor says. They partner with service clubs, school and youth groups who provide the labour and also come back regularly for the first years to water the trees. Trees are a big investment and it is important to ensure their survival.

Taylor was a Girl Guide leader who worked on international water issues and then decided to work locally with this group when it was being formed.

Over the years the group, which is part of Woolwich Healthy Communities, has developed solid working relationships with farmers. At first they needed to do a bit of a sales pitch to get local farmers interested in having rehabilitation on their properties, but that is no longer the case. Now they have a solid track record and the Walkerton contaminated water problem in 2001 helped educate people about these important issues.

They have worked with 10 farmers and planted more than 5,000 trees in 15 projects.

“Our ripples are getting bigger in the Grand Stream of things. We are not waves yet but let’s not stop now. We need to keep the momentum going,” Taylor said when she thanked the GRCA for the award and spoke on behalf of other award recipients.

“We, like anyone appreciate being recognized for the work we are doing, it gives us renewed energy to keep going forward. Recognition also more importantly means awareness. The more people that become aware of what individuals and groups are doing to help the environment. the better the chance of getting them involved in some way. That is what we need — more volunteers to get on board,” she said.

A big thanks to our newsletter readers

This issue of Grand Actions is dedicated to all the readers who responded to the questionnaire we sent out by mail with the last issue.

We especially thank the many donors who returned forms to us along with a donation. Through this annual campaign, we collected \$2,350 in donations. Thank you!

This will help cover the printing and mailing costs for a 2009 issue of the publication.

Your kind contributions are a great inspiration for the newsletter team.

About Grand Actions

This newsletter is produced bi-monthly by the Grand River Conservation Authority on behalf of the partners in *The Grand Strategy*. Current and back issues are available online at: www.grandriver.ca.

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Deadlines for submissions are the 15th of February, April, June, August, October and December. Submissions may be edited for length or style.

Tax deductible donations and sponsorships toward the cost of producing this newsletter are always welcome.

This publication is printed on Rolland Enviro100, an FSC certified, environmentally-friendly paper. The paper is manufactured using 100% post-consumer fibre and is processed chlorine-free using biogas energy.



The Grand River flowing through Cambridge was well contained during the December flood thanks to work carried out over the past 75 years that include reservoirs to the north and dykes.



The Grand Strategy Calendar

12th Annual Heritage Day Workshop and Celebration, Wilmot Recreation Complex, Baden, Monday, Feb. 16, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The theme of the workshop is Rural Routes ~ Rural Roots: A Heritage View of the Countryside. More information is in the page 6 story.

Fisheries Management Plan Open House, Dunnville District Hunters and Anglers Clubhouse, Dunnville, Monday Feb. 16, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Highlights of some projects that have been completed over the last 10 years will be presented. Ideas for future projects will be sought.

Deadline to order trees from the GRCA is March 1, 2009. Landowners who want to plant trees on their property have until March 1 to order them from the GRCA. The minimum order is 200 seedlings or 20 saplings. For more information, check the "Forestry" section of www.grandriver.ca, e-mail tryan@grandriver.ca or call 519-621-2763, Ext. 2269.

Ponds, Creeks, Wetlands Workshop, Mount Forest Royal Canadian Legion, Saturday, March 7, 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. This workshop is hosted by the Headwaters Healthy Wetland program and is about water on your land. Interested landowners must pre-register for the event as lunch will be provided. Resource professionals will discuss the benefits, techniques, and regulations around managing the water resources on your land. The various technical and financial programs and services available to landowners to protect and enhance water features on their lands will be presented. Contact Robert Messier, Project Coordinator at 519-621-2763 Ext. 2310 or r_messier@ducks.ca

Fisheries Management Plan Open House, Six Nations Tourism Building, 2498 Chiefswood Rd., Ohsweken, Wednesday, March 18, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Highlights of some projects that have been completed over the last 10 years will be presented. Ideas for future projects will be sought.

2009 President's Gala of the Grand River Conservation Foundation, River Run Centre, Guelph, Tuesday, March 24, 6:30 p.m. Tickets for the event, entitled "A Celebration of Youth and Conservation," are now available by calling the foundation at 877-294-7263 or e-mailing dhartley@grandriver.ca. Tickets are \$150 each and an income tax receipt will be issued for part of the price. Proceeds will be used to support the environmental work of the GRCA.

Note: Events at the GRCA's conservation areas and nature centres are listed in the calendar at www.grandriver.ca.