GRAND ACTIONS

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Grand River Conservation Authority

The Grand: A Canadian Heritage River

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The July 11, 1939, sod turning ceremony for construction of Shand Dam, with Minister of Public Works Colin Campbell at the shovel.

Shand Dam a first for Canada

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Before the Shand Dam and the other major reservoirs on the Grand River opened, the river was sometimes a raging, uncontrolled torrent that menaced property owners all along its banks, and at other times it was a smelly trickle of sewer water.

The first Grand River dam, the Shand Dam, started to change all that. It came about after years of struggle to find a reservoir plan, a political structure and funding. The first big step taken by the Grand River Conservation Commission (formed in 1934) was to hire H. G. Acres & Co. of Niagara Falls during the summer of 1938 to come up with a reservoir plan and then supervise construction of the new dam.

Soliciting government funds was another big problem that solved itself as the Great Depression lingered. Money flowed to the project thanks to the lean years and what today's government would call infrastructure spending as part of an economic stimulus package.

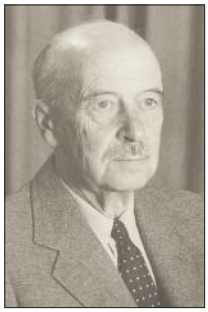
The federal and provincial governments each kicked in 37.5 per cent of the $2-million cost of the dam, while the eight local municipalities that made up the GRCC (Brantford, Galt, Fergus, Elora, Paris, Kitchener, Waterloo and Preston) paid 25 per cent. In return, the municipalities got the dam and jobs for some of the unemployed people in their communities, helping to lighten their welfare rolls.

Municipalities contributed different amounts based on a formula that had been developed a few years earlier. The overall project cost included acquiring 2,000 acres of land. Half of Belwood, along with most of its businesses, were

affected by the construction.

The project got underway in 1939. At the peak, an on-site construction camp included a dozen buildings to house 200 men. Most of the unskilled labourers were from the towns and cities in the Grand River and they lived on the worksite. While machines were used, there was also lots of manual work.

When WW II began in September 1939, the provincial and federal governments decided the project was too far along to be put on hold for the war.



William Philip

Instead, once the high spring waters subsided in April 1940, there was big push to complete the dam quickly.

By Nov. 14, 1940, all Canadian records were broken when 256,000 cubic metres of clay had been put in place and compacted in just five weeks. The dam's steel gates were installed and the dam was complete by the end of January 1942. The "last spike" on a railway that had to be moved due to the dam construction was driven in by Grand River Conservation Commission chair William Philip on March 9, and then the first train crossed over the dam.

Opened to great fanfare

It opened with great fanfare on Aug. 7, 1942, with 3,500 people on hand. There is still some film footage of the opening. A street dance and food for 5,000 people were provided by Raynor Construction, the firm hired to build the dam. It was the largest party ever held in Fergus. The post office even issued a special cancellation stamp on mail from Elora and Fergus that day.

At first, the new dam was called the Grand Valley Dam, but tourists searching for it ended up at Grand Valley, 18 km upstream. As a result, it was renamed the Shand Dam after a local pioneer family.

The Shand Dam garnered national and international attention. The Financial Post ran a front page story a year after the dam opened, with a headline that proclaimed "Grand Valley masters its river." The article began: "Post-war projects that will pay for themselves, prevent serious annual losses and permanent injury to otherwise productive land offer attractions impossible to ignore." It described the value of large engineering projects that would also provide post-war jobs for returning soldiers.

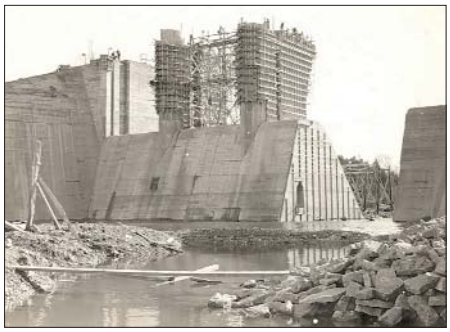
The Shand Dam was the first large-scale multi-purpose dam in Canada, and it formed a 12-km long lake — water that is held back to prevent flooding and then let out during the dry summer months to supply fresh water to communities downstream.

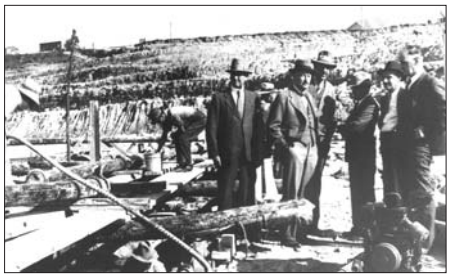
Damage costs averted

That value was proven after Hurricane Hazel in 1954. The Toronto area suffered tremendous loss of life and property, but no one died in the Grand River watershed as a result of the hurricane. The Toronto Star gave high praise to the Shand Dam for protecting people and property in a lead editorial with the headline "Big Dam Saved Cities."

The reservoir system in the Grand River watershed has made the lives of watershed residents much less susceptible to the problems of flooding. They have paid for themselves many times over. They reduced flood damage significantly twice this winter — once in the thaw in late December and a second time in mid-February.

Today we know that large engineering projects such as this minimize the impact of flooding and drought, but don't eliminate these problems. Instead, dams are one of several measures that help to keep people and property safe from flooding by counterbalancing the impact of climate change and development that removes water storage from the land.





Photos from top: sod turning ceremony for the Shand Dam; construction in October 1940; a visit to the worksite; logs on GRCC truck; mayors from the three communities that benefited from the dam were William Pelz of Preston, Joe Meinzinger of Kitchener and J. P. Ryan of Brantford.

‘No river needs two authorities’

Commissioner Hugh Templin

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Through a quirk of history, two organizations sprung up at different times to manage the unpredictable Grand River, which could be tame and docile or wild and wicked.

Both were partnerships of municipalities and they were legislated by provincial acts that outlined their role and gave them similar mandates.

The Grand River Conservation Commission (GRCC) was the first and it was formed in 1934. The commission got to work building dams and planting trees on conservation lands. It was a bold and innovative organization for its time — a true leader in the conservation movement. The commission built three dams starting with the Shand Dam, Canada’s first large multi-purpose dam in 1942.

Concern about environmental degradation in the province led to the Guelph Conference on Conservation in 1941, where dire predictions about the future were made:

“All renewable natural resources of the province are in an unhealthy state. None of these natural resources will restore themselves under present conditions and the need for far-reaching measures of restoration and conservation is acute. Without them, conditions will get progressively worse.”

This conference helped pave the way for the Conservation Authorities Act of Ontario, which led to a network of conservation authorities modelled in part on the GRCC. The legislation was delayed until after WW II and was passed in 1946. This system of local watershed management agencies that protect and manage water and other natural resources remains unique in Canada.

The first conservation authorities under the new act were Etobicoke, Ausable and Ganaraska. The Grand Valley Conservation Authority (GVCA) was the 10th in the province.

At the first meeting about forming it, GRCC Chair William Philip spoke about the need for a development master plan for the Grand River watershed that the authority could undertake. At that time, the conservationists saw a division of responsibility — the commission would focus on building dams and infrastructure as well as planting trees, while the authority’s role was to develop a master plan and acquire sensitive lands. Ontario’s first Planning and Development Minister, Dana Porter, had reservations about having two conservation organizations within one watershed. Porter agreed, expecting they would merge.

The commission had eight municipal members, while the authority covered a bigger area and had 71 municipal members at the beginning.

In the 1950s the GRCC focused on building Luther Dam, Conestogo Dam and planting five million trees on its three dam sites. The GVCA acquired wetlands, forests and natural areas, as well as parkland. Many of today’s popular conservation areas, including Elora

Dams on the Grand

The GRCA operates 32 dams, including eight major dams that were constructed by the GRCA or the GRCC. Their storage capacity is listed in cubic metres:

1942-Shand Dam, 63.9 million
1952-Luther dam, 28 million
1958- Conestogo Dam, 59.5 million
1968- Laurel Dam, 2.4 million
1973- Shade’s Mills Dam, 3.2 million
1974-Woolwich Dam, 5.5 million
1976- Guelph Lake Dam, 22.4 million
1978- Damascus Dam, 1.5 million

The GRCC at the Brantford Golf andCountry Club for the 45th anniversary May 30, 1979. Standing (left to right) Richard Beckett, Brantford; Vernon Bauman, Waterloo; Reg Cooper, Brantford; Ilmar Kao (secretary-treasurer) Cambridge; Mel Sharp, Paris; Lloyd Hogarth, Brantford; Robert Pequegnat, Kitchener. Seated, P.A. Ballachey, Brantford; Norman Drimmie, Elora; Marcel Pequegnat, Kitchener; Jim Bauer, Waterloo; Bruce Weber, Kitchener.

Gorge, Rockwood, Pinehurst Lake and Byng Island, were purchased and developed by the authority.

When the GVCA began to look into constructing a reservoir northeast of Guelph, it was stepping into the GRCC's territory. The objectives of the two organizations were becoming parallel.

A wedding or hostile takeover?

In 1964 the new Minister of Energy and Resources, J. R. Simonett, called representatives of the eight municipalities that formed the commission to Toronto and told them the commission would have saved $500,000 over the years if it had amalgamated with the Grand Valley Conservation Authority. Interestingly, he didn't invite the commission members themselves to the meeting.

Jim Bauer

"It might not be fair to say the minister delivered an ultimatum, but he politely but firmly stated the commission had to become amalgamated with the authority, which at present looks after the recreation along the valley and does all the other things except build and manage dams and other things," wrote Hugh Templin, who attended the meeting and conceded that while he was sad about the turn of events, no river needs two authorities.

Amalgamation seemed inevitable, and the commission soon unanimously agreed to invite the chief executives of the GVCA to all future general meetings.

The first joint meeting was in October 1966, but a transition period followed and it wasn't until Dec. 31, 1968, that the two organizations merged and got a new name — the Grand River Conservation Authority. Jim Bauer, a former mayor of the City of Waterloo, was appointed by the province as the chair, since he had been on both the GRCC and the GVCA and was accepted by both.

When they joined together, it was variously described as a wedding and a hostile takeover, a swallowing up of the commission by the authority. Undoubtedly there were some hard feelings, but it was also a natural and necessary step.

Today the GRCA manages the biggest watershed in southern Ontario, bigger even than the province of Prince Edward Island. It operates the most complex water management infrastructure. It has the most municipal partners — 34-lower tier and four upper-tier. The complexity of the watershed presents many challenges to the 26 board members, who need to work together in order to improve the natural resources.

ANNIVERSARY EVENT

GVTA marks 75th with many hikes

If you enjoy hiking or think you'd like to give it a try, get your hiking boots ready for lots of opportunities to hike the Grand Valley Trail this year.

In honour of the 75th anniversary of the GRCA, the Grand Valley Trail Association has planned three different series of hikes that will keep people on their feet from April to December.

The GVTA has 400 members from across the watershed. Since 1972, they have been working with landowners to create the 275-km Grand Valley Trail. This runs along the Grand River from its mouth at Lake Erie up through Brantford, Waterloo, and Fergus all the way to Alton, near Orangeville.

The GVTA is holding these hikes as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the GRCA because the two organizations work closely together, said Georgia Mulholland, the GVTA president.

"There is a lot of interaction between our two organizations and we'd like to foster that relationship," she said. "It's also a new opportunity to introduce people to the Grand Valley Trail."

'Best of the Grand' hikes

The "Best of the Grand" hikes are open to the public. They will be two or three hours and will explore different spots along the Grand Valley Trail. The first of these is Saturday April 18, and hikers should meet before 10 a.m. in the parking lot of the Elora and District Community Centre, 60 David Street, Elora. This is a 15-km loop, but hikers will be able to drop out in Fergus. The other three hikes in the series will be at Snyder's Flats, Brantford to Paris and Ruthven Park National Historic Site. Details will be posted as they are finalized.

Family hikes

Family hikes will be loops that start and end at the same point and are no more than two hours. These are for children accompanied by adults and will be

GVTA president Georgia Mulholland will lead the end-to-end hike this summer. Here she helps with trail maintenance.

at a leisurely pace on well defined trails with gentle inclines, suitable for new hikers and families. They will be at Ruthven (June 6), Brant Park (date to be confirmed), Rockwood (Sept. 12), and the Elora Gorge (Oct. 17). The details will be posted as they are finalized.

End-to-end 275 km hike

Serious hikers will be able to do the end-to-end hikes that take place one weekend a month on a Saturday and Sunday starting April 4 and ending Dec. 13. The April 4 hike starts at Rock Point Provincial Park on Lake Erie and goes 14.7 km to Byng Island Conservation Area. Gradually by participating in 18 hikes the group will work their way north to complete the 275-km Grand Valley Trail. They will be hiking four or five hours each day.

Mulholland led an end-to-end hike last year on Thursdays and 20 people participated.

All of these hikes will be led by trained hike leaders. For more information, please visit www.gvta.on.ca or check www.grandriver.ca, or call and leave a message at 519-576-6156.

The GVTA welcomes new members who can participate in a broad range of events and assist with trail maintenance and organizing events.

A trail guidebook is in its sixth edition and is available from local book stores as well as from the GRCA.

Tree planting, clean-up and other events are taking place in communities across the watershed for Earth Day.

Earth Day 2009

Earth Day is **Wednesday, April 22** and there are so many environmental events throughout the watershed in April that it is impossible to fit them all into Grand Actions.

Environmental issues are increasingly important to people and this is especially true around Earth Day when many people are planting trees and cleaning up the waste left after the winter snow has melted.

Chuck Beach formed an Earth Week events committee in Brantford two years ago. This year there are a dozen listings for events in that community alone. These include school yard greening projects, community clean-up events and lectures.

Beach says these are listed on www.earthday.ca, where many other community Earth Day events across the country are listed. The City of Kitchener has several events there and all the cities within the watershed have some listings, but this will be updated as Earth Day gets closer.

The GRCA partners with several organizations on events around this time of year as well, including tree planting on both public and private land. The events which are public are listed on www.grandriver.ca, as well as the Earth Day website.

The first Earth Day was held April 22, 1970. Now more than six million Canadians join people in over 180 countries in staging events and projects to address local environmental issues.

Brant Tree Coalition Tree Plant, Wednesday, April 22, Brantford. The Brant Tree Coalition will be planting 5,000 native trees and bushes. The coalition is an industry-led group and hopes to build upon the support it received from several high schools in 2008. The plantings will take place along Sinclair Creek in the northeast part of the city. For information, or to participate, industries should contact Jim Berhalter at Apotex 519-756-8942 (ext. 4222), and high schools should contact Chuck Beach at 519-752-4828.

Earth Day Rotary Forest, Guelph Lake, Saturday, April 25, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., second annual tree planting and Earth Day event for Guelph. Up to 2,000 trees will be planted by Rotary Club members and visitors, who will also participate in environmental activities. Bring your family and friends to help celebrate and plant trees. There will be food and drinks. Parking is across from the Guelph Lake Nature Centre on Conservation Road. There is also a free shuttle bus from St. George's Square in downtown Guelph.

Sunoco Earth Day Celebration, Laurel Creek Conservation Area, Waterloo, Sunday, April 26, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. The annual Sunoco Earth Day offers a fun-filled day of family activities with an environmental theme. Dig in to plant 1,000 trees and shrubs or enjoy some hands-on activities offered by local experts. School Challenge: Waterloo Region schools who register the most participants will receive a prize voucher for a schoolyard naturalization project at their school.

Note: *Check www.earthday.ca or www.grandriver.ca for more events.*

Bald eagles closely watched by volunteers

By Duane Brown
GRCA Resource Interpreter

On July 6, 2008, a young bald eagle leaped from its nest south of Caledonia for its first tentative flight.

Eagles are still considered a "rare breeder" in southern Ontario and are on the endangered species list, so this flight was special and carefully watched. The young eagle soared, following its parent across a gap in the forested hill and then landed awkwardly in a large red oak tree. It then flew over the Grand River before looping back and disappearing out of sight — the months of careful preparation were paying off. But an hour later when it was landing, the eaglet fell about five metres, caught onto a tree branch and stayed there for the rest of the day — calling in a squeaky voice and resting.

Historically, the eagle population radically declined throughout North America and even disappeared from southern Ontario by the 1970s. This was due to high levels of contaminants, especially the pesticide DDT. But after DDT was banned, a cooperative program reintroduced eagles to Lake Erie and they could be seen above the Grand River several years ago. Eagle nests were first confirmed on the Grand in 1994 and the first eaglet fledged from this nest in 1995.

In 2008 there were five nests — two in Dunnville, one in Caledonia, one in Brantford and another in Luther Marsh. These have all been meticulously monitored by volunteers.

Caledonia eagles closely watched

The Caledonia eagle family — the parents of the eaglet just mentioned — are local celebrities. Nearly 500 people visited them between April and July 2008. Four people, including myself, have spent about 125 hours watching them. We've seen the baby grow from a fuzzy, white, wobbly-headed baby in April to a dark adult-size bird in June. It took some time to tell the difference between the parents, but females are generally bigger and in this case one was slightly darker, while the other had a band around its leg.

Until the eaglet was adult size, one parent would remain at the nest while the other was out hunting. If an adult was not on the nest, it could be in one of three regular perches, or on the lookout for intruders. The parents were seen chasing away red-tailed hawks, gulls and ospreys.

If nature films showed what animals do most of the time, they would be boring. As the young eagle grew, the adults would mostly sleep, preen, or stretch their wings and rearrange their feathers between short naps.

One time, an adult brought a headless sucker caught in the Grand River to the nest, and the young eagle was so hungry that it ran and nearly knocked the parent out of the nest.

For weeks, the eaglet prepared for its first flight by flapping its wings and walking out to the edge of its nest and then changing its mind. Or it walked onto the limb of the tree to flap so hard that it would have lifted off the branch, had it not been still holding on with one foot.

After that first flight, I saw the young eagle in the area only two more times. But local residents tell me they have seen an immature eagle as of late December. Unfortunately, most eagles die during their first year of life, succumbing to extreme weather, starvation, or most commonly for bald eagles, being shot.

If it survives, this young eagle will spend the next five years trying to survive to adulthood, travelling as far as the Bruce Peninsula, Pennsylvania, Quebec,

Bald eagle flying over the Grand near Cambridge. These majestic birds are now breeding in the watershed. This photo was taken by David Bebee, one of two Record photographers who are taking photos daily through 2009. See these photos at www.therecord.blogs.com/a_year_on_the_grand.

and perhaps returning to the Grand River.

Eagles mate for life, and this one's parents were still in the area in February. They had started to bring sticks to the same nest and sit there together. This is a good sign that they are preparing to start over this spring. Once again they will be carefully monitored by volunteer eagle-watchers who want to learn about eagles and ensure their successful return to the Grand River area.

Frazil ice can frazzle trout

By Roger Kelley and Jack Imhof
Trout Unlimited Canada

Studying ice in the winter may sound as important as counting dandruff flakes on a snowman's scalp, but as scientists are finding out, ice and its effects on fish are critical to understanding how fish survive in the winter.

Of particular concern is the formation of frazil ice. Frazil ice resembles a thick-looking mixture of water and ice (think 7-Eleven Slurpee®) that forms in rapids and riffles and accumulates in pools. The water in these areas becomes supercooled by continuing to lose heat after the air temperature falls below 0°C.

As water temperature decreases due to super cooling in open riffles during periods of severe cold, ice crystals form on minute suspended sediment particles in the water column. Wide, shallow riffles have more surface area and therefore cool faster and produce more frazil ice crystals than narrow deep riffles. The ice crystals are suspended in the water and as they are pulled along by the current they begin to grow, quickly breaking into more crystals that continue to grow and multiply.

In its early stages frazil ice can be difficult to see, but creates a hazy look to the water column. The individual ice crystals are either needle shaped or flat like a pancake, but in the water they resemble a parade of ice crystals floating in the water column. As the frazil ice multiplies it is clearly visible and becomes extremely viscous, sticking to boulders, large woody debris or the riverbed, where it can eventually form anchor ice and other habitat altering formations.

Frazil can kill fish

Frazil ice is of particular concern to fisheries biologists because, at its early stages, the floating ice crystals — often 0.1 to 1 mm in diameter — can striate fish gills, leading to hemorrhaging and, in extreme cases, death. Fry and juveniles may also be susceptible to suffocation by frazil ice as the crystals plug their small mouths and restrict the flow of water over their gills, reducing oxygen absorption. It is unknown whether eggs in the gravel of a riffle covered by frazil or anchor ice can survive.

Of equal or greater concern is the ability of frazil ice to alter stream habitat such as pool or deep water refuge areas that trout, salmon and other fish depend on for winter habitat. Frazil ice can put a literal squeeze on these areas by sticking to the bottom of surface ice on top of the pools and sticking to the riverbed at the bottom. When frazil ice accumulates beneath surface ice it forms a hanging dam extending down into the pool. Ice sticking to the bottom of the pool can reduce pool depth by as much as 75 per cent.

As the ice from the top, bottom, or both fills the pools, the water column becomes filled with frazil ice crystals, forcing fish to relocate if they can. The increased water velocity caused by the accumulation of frazil ice forces the water to flow through a smaller area, further reducing the pool's habitat value and altering the stream channel as well. Under these conditions, fish migrate to areas of either ground water influx that maintains streamwater at temperatures above 0°C or to pool areas covered with surface ice. The surface ice insulates the water and eliminates the supercooling conditions required for frazil ice formation.

The loss of habitat as a result of frazil ice formation is a naturally occurring

Frazil ice forms in the Grand River when the temperature plunges, and the water starts to freeze and form a slush. The slush starts to bond together forming paddies on the river surface. Not only does frazil cause problems for fish, but also for river managers who monitor it carefully because it can result in flooding.
Photo by Mathew McCarthy of The Waterloo Region Record. To see more photos or submit photo ideas, visit www.therecord.blogs.com/a_year_on_the_grand.

A long-tailed duck has a slushie swim in frazil ice on the Grand River. Photo by David Bebee of the Waterloo Region Record. To see more photos from the photo blog, "A year on the Grand," visit www.therecord.blogs.com/a_year_on_the_grand.

Frazil ice is just one of several ice forms that affect fish and their habitat. Others include:

Anchor Ice: Submerged ice attached or anchored to the river bed, irrespective of the nature of its formation;

Border Ice: Ice formed along and fastened to the shore. Border ice does not extend the entire width across the river. Also called shore ice;

Breakup Jam: Accumulation of broken ice pieces that restrict the flow of water; may contain frazil ice or remnants of freezeup jam;

Candled Ice: Decayed sheet ice that takes the appearance of thin vertical crystals shaped like candles;

Freezeup Jam: Accumulation of frazil that restricts the flow of water; may contain some broken border ice pieces;

Pancake Ice: Circular, flat pieces composed of frazil and slush ice with a raised rim; the shape and rim are due to repeated collisions;

Sheet Ice: A smooth, continuous ice cover formed by freezing in the case of lake ice, or by the arrest and juxtaposition of ice floes in a single layer in the case of river ice;

Shear Walls: Ice left along shoreline when a freezeup or breakup jam fails and moves downstream.

Definitions from Ice Engineering bulletin No. 15, Jan. 1997, by Kate White, U.S. Army Corps of Engineering.

phenomenon which can accidentally be increased by human induced activities — including habitat improvement projects. Researchers now understand that summer habitat work on ice susceptible streams must include understanding the structural characteristics of a channel that creates frazil ice and planning for these winter conditions. Without this consideration, seemingly beneficial habitat improvement projects such as the addition of boulders and other material can lead to habitat destruction in the winter when frazil ice accumulates on the habitat structures and in the water column.

But in-stream work doesn't always lead to loss of winter habitat by increasing frazil ice formation. Riparian zone management, long a concern for water quality and fish habitat, can also decrease the threat from frazil ice. The addition of trees and riparian vegetation can reduce radiant heat loss from streams, thereby reducing the potential for supercooling of the stream, frazil ice production and consequent habitat degradation.

This story has been reprinted with permission from Trout Unlimited Canada's newsletter Currents Winter 2009. Trout Unlimited has chapters in Guelph and Brantford and is known for its Yellow Fish Road program. For more information, visit the organization's website at www.tucanada.org.

WATERSHED AWARDS

Environment tops at River's Edge Goat Dairy

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Phillip and Katie Wilman have grown a successful farm business, River's Edge Goat Dairy, while bringing nature back to their farm just east of Arthur.

"At first we used our environmental practices as a selling point, but we found that we are educating our customers, too," Katie Wilman says. "We are able to market our products as environmentally-friendly and people love to see the area when they come to the farm to buy our goods."

The couple are both graduates of the University of Guelph agriculture program. They bought the 34-hectare farm nearly 10 years ago. No one was living

Kids lounge in the sunshine at the door to the barn on the farm just east of Arthur.

in the house and the land was in very poor condition — the stream banks were overgrazed and eroding badly.

Over the past decade they have created a thriving business that includes sale of goat dairy products and meat, soap and skin care products which are sold at a farm store and at local markets.

Under the guidance of the GRCA's Rural Water Quality Program, the Wilmans began to work towards enhancing the farm environment. One of the special features of the farm is the Conestogo River that runs through the property.

First, they put up fences on either side of the waterway. They planted 2,000 trees in the year 2000 with the help of friends and family. Katie says it is surprising to see how much these trees have grown. They have allowed the natural vegetation to grow near the river, creating a buffer that enhances the quality of water as it flows to communities further south. They installed an environmentally-friendly stream crossing to bring the tractor across to the fields on the other side of the river.

In total, the Wilmans retired less than four hectares of land to carry out the environmental projects and they have been very surprised by the payback to their business and the natural environment.

Strong environmental advocates

Now they are strong environmental advocates committed to nature, which is coming back to their land.

They've held open houses and created educational posters about the natural features on the farm to show the ways these features have been enhanced.

"The buffer attracts all kinds of wildlife. We've seen foxes, rabbits, turtles, frogs, all kinds of birds including kingfishers and it's a great place for the kids to play. The water is cleaner and we've seen more fish in the creeks, including pike and bass," Katie says.

The buffer has also reduced the work and led to a cleaner, more attractive farm, which is good for business."

Phillip and Katie Wilman of Arthur in front of their home where they operate a farm business, River's Edge Goat Dairy which people can visit to buy their products. The Wilmans received a 2008 Grand River Watershed Award for their environmental work.

April 30 deadline for watershed award nominations for 2009

The Grand River Conservation Authority is looking for nominees for its 2009 environmental awards.

Each year since 1976, the authority has presented awards to individuals, families, organizations and businesses that have taken action to protect and enhance the natural environment of the Grand River watershed.

The GRCA presents two types of awards: the Honour Roll Award for a sustained record of achievement over an extended period of time and Watershed Awards for outstanding examples of conservation and environmental work.

Nominations can come from anyone in the watershed, so if you know a person, organization or business that you think deserves an award, please make a nomination. The deadline for nominations is April 30. A nomination form is available from the "Watershed Awards" link on the GRCA website at www.grandriver.ca.

The 2008 Watershed Award winners were Dave Belleville, who organized community clean-up events in Brantford for many years; Richard Cook of Wellesley who is the GRCA's only volunteer dam operator; the Port Maitland "on the Grand" Historical Association which has been cleaning up the Port Maitland Lock; Katie and Phillip Wilman, who have been working hard to bring nature back to their farm, River's Edge Goat Dairy; Doug Ratz who has been a founder and environmental organizer behind many initiatives in the Elora area; and the Woolwich Clean Waterways Group, which has worked with farmers since 1992 on restoration projects in Woolwich Township.

The 2009 winners will be selected by the Special Recognition Committee of the GRCA board and they will be honoured at an event in the fall.

Heritage workshop focused on rural areas

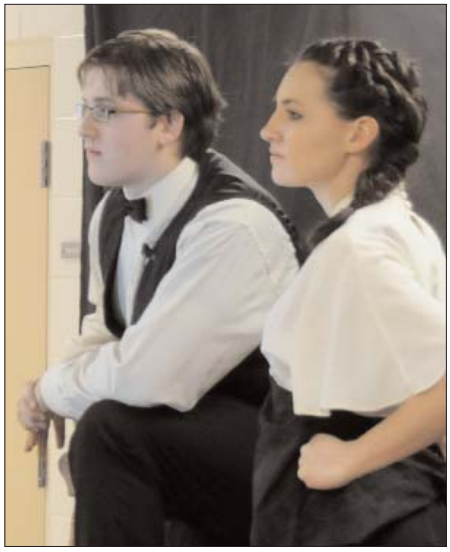
By Barbara Veale
GRCA Coordinator of Policy, Planning and Partnerships

Three Waterloo Region townships hosted the 12th annual Heritage Day workshop which attracted over 270 people to Baden.

The workshop started with a "virtual tour" of the rural countryside prepared by students from Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School under the supervision of Sharon Rice. Using a mix of archival and contemporary images and music, the presentation captured the rural essence and social fabric of the area. A key creator, Jessica Hinton, will be honoured by having a tree planted this spring at Castle Kilbride in her memory. Sadly, Jessica died suddenly in a car accident. The tree has been donated by the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

Ken Seiling, Waterloo Regional Chair, presented an overview of the history of the townships. He focused on the ethnic communities, heritage features, cemetery headstones, his family history and the church architecture.

The tensions between Germans and the British during WW I was covered by University of Waterloo history professor Geoff Hayes. He also spoke about re-establishing German culture after the war. One of his key points was that heritage instills pride, identity and a sense of cultural belonging.



Enacting the history of Wilmot.

The history of Wilmot Township came alive with a dramatic multi-media play, narrated by local storyteller Mary-Eileen McClear. The presentation featured local young actors playing roles to enact the early survey of Wilmot Township, a country school, Sir Adam Beck and electricity, the Nith River "monster," harness racing and the recent fire of the New Hamburg grandstand.

Woolwich Township history was highlighted in four presentations by Barb Draper, Marion Roes, Bertha Thompson and Susan Hoffman. Topics included changes in early settlement, changes in health care, transportation and modes of travel, and the influence of Mennonite values on the creation and evolution of three unique educational facilities.

The annual heritage day workshop includes displays by heritage organizations.

MILESTONES

Ron Hackett and Kate Hagerman provided a detailed community history of the first settlers in the Wellesley area of the Queen's Bush, a vast area between Waterloo County and Lake Huron. Del Gingrich, Executive Director at the Visitor Centre-Telling the Mennonite Story in St. Jacobs, provided a fascinating overview of the diversity of perspectives embedded in the Mennonite culture – traditional, conservative and modern. The focus on Wellesley Township concluded with a rousing rural country auction, led by Murray Gerber of Gerber Auctions.

The last presentation was about Ingersoll's success in using local heritage to bolster tourism. The Fusion Youth and Technology Centre was created by the municipality and several local groups and businesses, said James Timlin, CAO, and Bill Mates, economic development officer. This is an innovative and unique approach for creating a vibrant educational facility for local youth that positively influences them.

The day ended with a reception at Castle Kilbride National Historic Site in Baden. It featured an exhibit called the Mighty Nith River and tours of the castle.

A special thank you is extended to the workshop's two moderators, Susan Cook-Scheerer from Rogers TV and Dave MacDonald from CTV Southwestern Region, as well as to the numerous sponsors, donors to the auction and exhibitors.

The location and date for the 2010 Heritage Day Workshop has not yet been decided. An announcement will be posted on the GRCA website as soon as details have been confirmed.

Heritage river inventory launched by GRCA

By Barbara Veale
GRCA Coordinator of Policy, Planning and Partnerships

The year 2009 marks the 15th anniversary of the Canadian Heritage River designation for the Grand River and its major tributaries, the Nith, Conestogo, Speed and Eramosa rivers.

In recognition of this milestone, the GRCA has launched the Grand River Heritage River Inventory at www.grandriver.ca.

The inventory contains information about historic sites, people and events that support the heritage designation. It has a short description of more than 450 items and associated photos. It also locates these features on maps of the watershed through the Grand River Information Network (GRIN), the GRCA's mapping tool.

While the inventory has no status under the Ontario Heritage Act, it can be used by decision-makers when they are considering replacing, demolishing or modifying heritage features, so that their national significance will be taken into consideration. Converting the heritage river inventory to a web-based searchable database was made possible through the generous support of the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation.

The Heritage River Inventory is a work in progress. It will be added to and changed as more heritage research is carried out. Guidance in determining which features are important to the heritage river designation is provided in the second edition of A Cultural Framework for Canadian Heritage Rivers, published in 2000 by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, Parks Canada. The GRCA uses the information collected for the inventory to report annually to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board on the status of the human heritage resources which support the heritage river designation.

"Not finding an item in the database doesn't mean that it has no historic importance. It means that the research on it has not yet been carried out, hasn't yet been brought to the attention of the GRCA, or the item is not relevant to the Heritage River designation. With time, more river-related heritage features and values will be incorporated into the data base," said Barbara Veale, co-ordinator of policy, planning and partnerships for the GRCA.

If you have any information you think should be added to the Heritage River Inventory, Veale would like to hear from you. Genealogical societies, for example, may have information about pioneer cemeteries, or Local Heritage Advisory Committees may have information on significant buildings or structures.

Veale can be reached at bveale@grandriver.ca or 519-621-2763, ext. 2274.

The Mighty Nith is a photographic display at Castle Kilbride that continues until May 30. The photo above was taken around 1905 and is from the Lautenschalger Collection. The photos feature the beautiful yet powerful Nith River, and they are also from the Ernie Ritz Collection and the New Hamburg Independent. A visit to the castle was part of the Heritage day celebration and workshop.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

May 31 scholarship deadline

Applications are being accepted until May 31, 2009, for the S.C. Johnson Environmental Scholarship. This scholarship, worth $1,500, is made available by the Grand River Conservation Foundation to help university students continue their studies in conservation and environment-related fields.

Applications are open to full-time students who have completed the third year or sixth semester of an honours program at a watershed university (Waterloo, Guelph, Laurier) or college (Conestoga). Students must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents and in one of the following programs: environmental sciences, engineering, chemistry or manufacturing.

Applications may be downloaded from the scholarship link on the foundation's website at www.grcf.ca. The application deadline is May 31, and a selection will be made by the foundation's awards committee prior to Aug. 31. For further information contact the Grand River Conservation Foundation by e-mail at foundation@grandriver.ca or by phone (519) 621-2763 ext. 2271.

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.

100%

The Grand Strategy Calendar

Maplefest Sunday, March 29, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Apps' Mill Nature Centre, Brantford. Explore the history of maple syrup with hikes to the sugar bush and demonstrations. Purchase hot pancakes with real maple syrup, refreshments and other maple products. Admission is $1.00 per person (children 5 and under are free). Please enter through the main parking lot of the Nature Centre at 308 Robinson Rd.

Papers accepted until May 1 for "History on the Grand," a one-day symposium at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, downtown Cambridge. The symposium takes place Oct. 20 and is a forum to share research and discuss issues arising from the study of local history. Please submit a 500 word paper abstract and a brief C.V. Papers may be on a wide range of themes including local history, architectural history, natural heritage and community histories. Presenters will be notified by June 15. For more information and to submit papers, contact Jim Quantrell at the City of Cambridge Archives, P.O. Box 669 Cambridge ON N1R 5W8, or by e-mail at quantrellj@city.cambridge.on.ca.

Tree Planting and Clean Up Day, Saturday, May 2, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Conestogo Lake Conservation Area, Wallenstein. Help clean up the park and plant trees. Members of the GRCA's forestry department will demonstrate proper tree planting techniques. At 3 p.m. Marcel Labelle from Arthur will show visitors how he constructs birch bark canoes in the traditional way. Free hot dog and pop for participants. Admission to the park is free for Scout groups but park admission applies for other visitors.

Shimano Take a Kid Fishing Day, Saturday, May 9, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Belwood Lake Conservation Area. This will be the fifth year for the event at which more than 700 children have been instructed in the joys of fishing. Courses include: Rigging Lures & Tying Knots, Archery, Fly Tying, Fishing for Rainbow Trout, Bassmaster Casting Competition, Learning about Fish with a Biologist and Pro Fishing Seminars. There are two sessions per day running 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. The event is free for children 8-14 years of age and lunch is included, but the $2.50 admission fee ($4.25 for adults) into the conservation area is applicable. The event is limited to 120 kids per four hour session, so register early by calling 519-843-2979 or by e-mail to dstrub@grandriver.ca.

Belwood Lions Club Pike Derby, May 23-24, Belwood Lake Conservation Area, Fergus. Join in the family fun for this pike derby that has been going on for more than 20 years. This is a live release derby for the whole family and includes a youth category for those under 15 years. First prize in the adult category is $1,500 cash, second prize takes a fishing charter, and third prize a rod, reel, life-jacket and tackle box. Cost is $25 for adults, $5 for youth 15 years and under, and $50 for a family (includes parents and children under 15 years of age). There is a small fee for boat launching payable to the conservation authority. Contact Gerry Ellen at 519-843-2990 for more information.

Note: *A complete listing of events in the GRCA's conservation areas and nature centres is available on www.grandriver.ca.*