



GRAND Actions

The Grand River watershed newsletter



May/June 2014 • Volume 19, Number 3

What's Inside:

Features

Trout Stockers 1

Heritage River

About the heritage rivers . 3

Taking Action

Race director award4

Tree planting5

Doon valley5

Now Available

Waterloo county tours 6

Foundation

Natural playground 6

What's happening

REEP's RAIN program 7

Summer camps 7

Conestogo at work 8

Calendar 8

Cover photo

Community members stock fish in Mill Creek, Cambridge, each year.

Photo by Robert Messier.



Trout stockers big and small

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

For 12 springs, Waterloo resident Brad Knarr has volunteered to organize the brown trout release into the Conestogo River.

An electrician by trade, Knarr is also a keen angler. It takes him a week of legwork to get ready for the two stocking days when thousands of small fish arrive at the river.

“It’s my way of giving back to the fish and the river,” says Knarr, who is quick to add that he has no intention of giving up his volunteer position.

The week before the stocking begins, Knarr knocks on the doors of the landowners — mostly farmers whose properties border the river. They generously allow volunteers onto their property each year, but they need to be asked and to know when the volunteers will come.

Fish are brought from a Ministry of Natural Resources hatchery — either Chatsworth Fish Culture Station in Grey County or the Harwood station south of Peterborough, both of which are

a few hours away.

The fish can survive only for a short time after the long trip from the hatchery. There is a rush to get them into the river quickly to give them the best possibility of survival.

Dozens of volunteers show up set for a full day of work no matter the weather on fish stocking days. They are members of Friends of the Grand River and the Conestogo River Enhancement Workgroup (CREW) as well as others who want to help. For example, staff from Google’s Kitchener office spend the day stocking fish using rented canoes. Google has a program to allow staff members to volunteer for a day and still get their wages. Student volunteers from Linwood Public School come each year thanks to their teacher Kathy Puskas, who organizes the field trip for them.

The overwhelming success of the trout stocking in the Grand River began 25 years ago, and volunteer Al Newsome has taken responsibility for this part of the program for the past few years. Newsome and Knarr both do the same thing on





High school students in hip waders bring some brown trout in a bucket to their new home in the Grand River.

different rivers.

They line up volunteers by sending out an email message which gets posted online and passed around among people who have volunteered before. There is always a good mix of ages and backgrounds for volunteers.

“Most volunteers are fisher people who fish the river or just want to help because it’s fun. They range from doctors and lawyers to teachers and general workers. There is a common bond. They all want to help and perhaps give something back, Knarr says.

The volunteers bring bucket after bucket of fish to the river at a variety of spots. Or they load up canoes with trout and then release them a few at a time as they paddle down the river.

“Some projects, such as stocking, benefit tremendously from the extra help and enthusiasm provided by the citizens. It is really impressive to see how they take charge



Brad Knarr gives directions to volunteers.

of programs such as this,” says Robert Messier, an ecologist with the GRCA.

In the beginning, stocking was led by the staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources, but now Knarr and Newsome have taken the lead.

The Ministry of Natural Resources staff have the vitally important job of bringing the fish, thanks to the Ministry of Natural Resources Fish Culture program.

Brown trout are not native

Brown trout are not a native fish species, but they have adapted well to conditions in the Grand and Conestogo rivers. This is especially true below the two big dams — the Conestogo and Shand. These dams are operated in a way that brings the cold water from near the bottom of the reservoir into the river below the dam. The cold water cools down the water for many kilometres downstream, making it cold enough for brown trout. This is called a tailwater fishery.

For many of the anglers who participate in the stocking program, this is a way to give back to the river and help improve the fishery.

Knarr grew up in the area and remembers fishing the local rivers as a child. After the stocking is all done, he takes another day off work to go fishing on the Conestogo.

Newsome is on the Grand River every day during trout season. He now knows all 38 locations where the trout are stocked, so he knows where to find them.

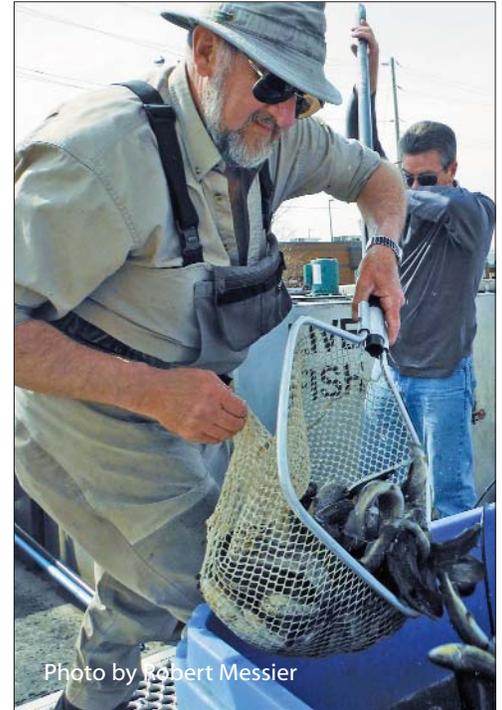
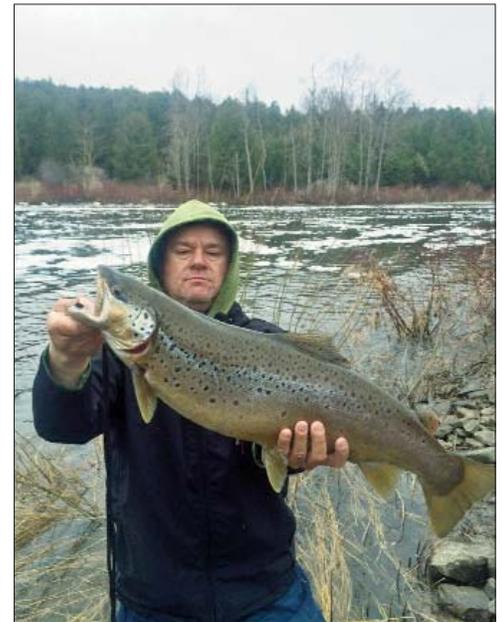


Photo by Robert Messier

Al Newsome has organized stocking of the Grand River for the past few years, but has volunteered with the program for almost two decades. He started in order to find out where the fish are, but now it is his way of giving back to the river that he fishes five hours a day during trout season. Newsome lives on Lake Scugog, but is a seasonal camper at Elora Gorge Park.



This trophy brown trout caught in early May in the tailwaters below Shand Dam measured 29" by 18" and weighted in at over six kilos. It is one of the brown trout provided by the MNR fish culture program.

Heritage river facts

From the longest river to the shortest

Altogether 1,150 kilometres of rivers have been designated as Canadian Heritage Rivers within the Grand River watershed, including the Grand and its four main tributaries.

Nearly a million people live within this watershed which is the biggest in southern Ontario. It covers 6,800 square kilometres and is bigger than Prince Edward Island. All the creeks, streams and rivers add up to about 11,000 kilometres of waterways within the Grand River system.

Do you know which main tributary is the shortest, which is named after a famous Scottish river and which one the Tragically Hip wrote a song about?

The Grand River

- 311 kilometres long
- **Origin of the name:** The river has had many names, but the one which stuck came from the French explorers.
- The source is near Dundalk.
- Has a large reservoir in the north called Belwood Lake that is formed by the Shand Dam.
- Millrace Park, Cambridge, has had a Canadian Heritage River plaque since 1994.

The Nith River

- 167.5 kilometres long
- **Origin of the name:** Named after the seventh longest river in Scotland which flows through Dumfries, Scotland.
- The Nith River is the longest tributary of the Grand River from its source, north of Millbank in Wellesley Township, to Paris, where it enters the Grand River.
- The troublesome Nith River has no reservoir and floods occasionally around New Hamburg and Ayr.
- During high flows, the Nith has excellent whitewater for paddlers between Canning and Paris, where it enters the Grand River.
- Scott Park, New Hamburg, has had a Heritage River plaque since 2004.

The Conestogo River

- 87 kilometres long

HERITAGE RIVER

- **Origin of the name:** Early Mennonite settlers named the river the Conestoga because of its resemblance to the Conestoga River in Pennsylvania. In 1865, the postmaster of the Village of Conestogo altered the name to Conestogo, and an 1895 history book stuck with this spelling for the river as well, so this spelling remains today.
- The second longest tributary of the Grand River, the Conestogo originates near Damascus in North Wellington and enters the Grand River at the Village of Conestogo.
- It incorporates the biggest reservoir in the watershed, Conestogo Lake.
- The Conestogo River has a stocked brown trout fishery, with stocking managed and carried out by volunteers each spring.
- A Heritage River plaque was placed in St. Jacobs in 2004.

The Speed River

- 71 kilometres long
- **Origin of the name:** John Galt named the Speed River because he was impressed by the power of the river's current. The name was intended to connote success, fortune and prosperity, according to the book *Cambridge: the Making of a Canadian City* by Kenneth McLaughlin.

- There's a Tragically Hip song called the Speed River and inspired by this river.
- Starts southeast of Fergus close to Erin and flows through Guelph Lake Park to Cambridge, where it joins the Grand River.
- Guelph Lake Dam is on the Speed River
- Guelph's John Galt Park, has had a Heritage River plaque installed in 1999.

The Eramosa River

- 40 kilometres long
- **Origin of the name:** Local history books say it is named after Un-ne-mo-sah, an Indian word meaning dog. There is also evidence from books and the internet that it could refer to a specific kind of dog: black dog, dead dog or dog leg. Exactly which native language is murky. There is no "m" in any of the Six Nations languages. Ojibway dictionaries give "animosh" as the translation for dog. A book called *The Dog's Children: Anishinaabe Texts Told by Angeline Williams* tells many Ojibwe/Anishinaabe stories about half-dog people.
- Starts near Ospringe and flows through Guelph where it joins the Speed River at the Boathouse.
- It is the shortest of the four main tributaries of the Grand River.
- Lots of groundwater enters the Eramosa River, keeping its waters cool and clean.
- A Canadian Heritage River plaque was placed in Halton Hills in 2004.

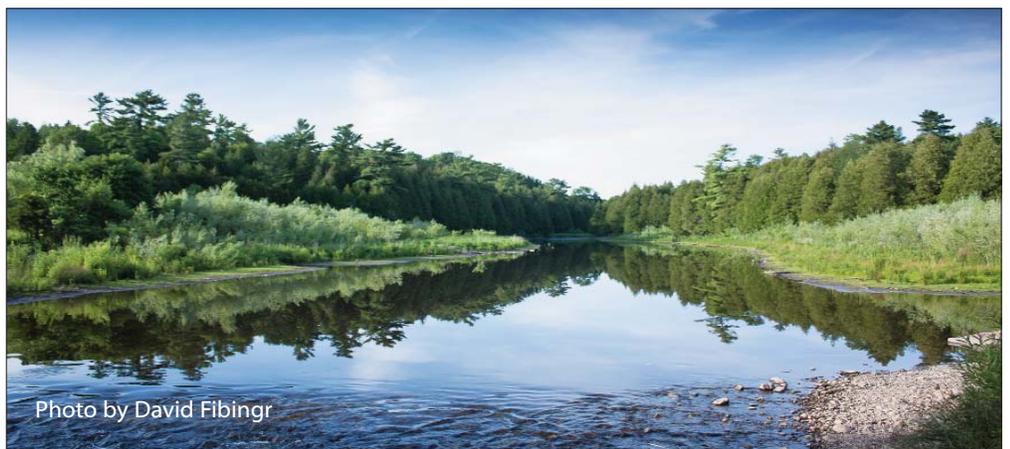


Photo by David Fibinger

The Eramosa River as it runs through Rockwood is the smallest of the designated tributaries.

Sarsons receive conservation award

By Janet Baine

GRCA Communications Specialist

Enthusiasm and careful attention to details are bringing world-class runners to Run for the Toad at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area between Paris and Cambridge, Ontario.

The couple behind the Run for the Toad trail race, George and Peggy Sarson, received a 2013 Grand River Watershed Award from the Grand River Conservation Authority for their dedication to getting people outside and improving the facilities at Pinehurst Lake.

Twelve years ago, the Sarsons, residents of Waterloo, thought that the Carolinian forest and rolling landscape of Pinehurst near Ayr would be ideally suited to a trail event. George had been there when he was younger and the memory stayed with him. Their first Run for the Toad attracted around 200 runners who raced on a 12.5-kilometre loop for a total of 25 or 50 kilometres. Their top priority then and now is to ensure that each participant and spectator is treated with dignity and walks away feeling happy and fulfilled at the end of the day.

“If we were going to do it, we wanted to do it right,” George Sarson said.

This year there were 1,250 participants in the race, which is now Canada’s top trail

TAKING ACTION

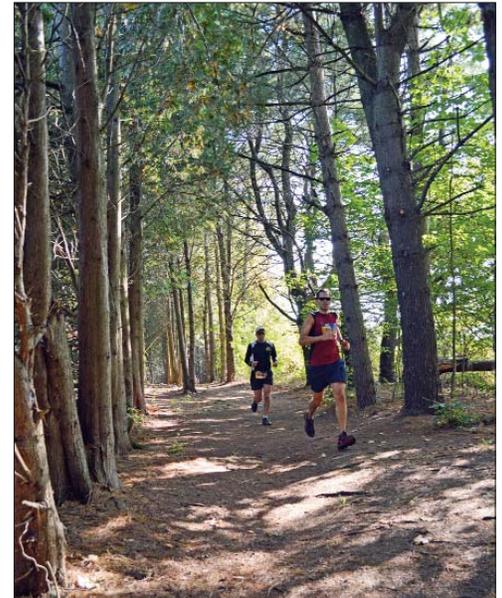
race. The Association of Canadian Ultramarathoners (ACU) turned this event into its 2013 championship venue, so top long-distance runners from Canada, the United States and Britain are vying for the \$7,000 prizes. The Sarsons could not be more delighted.

“The enthusiasm this year is beyond my wildest dreams. I can’t even describe it,” George said. There are 125 volunteers helping the Sarsons, but volunteering is so popular that there is also a waiting list.

“The Sarsons have been tireless in their efforts to improve the trails. They have become strong ambassadors for Pinehurst and the GRCA. The event connects people to the environment through shared outdoor activity. The Sarson’s passion for the outdoors is contagious,” said GRCA CAO Joe Farwell, who also enjoys running at Pinehurst.

In fact, many GRCA staff members have Run for the Toad as a result of their enthusiasm. There are four events- 25 and 50 kilometre runs, a 25-kilometre walk and a team relay.

A training day in July attracted nearly 400 participants last year to run the trails at Pinehurst. Thanks to thousands of volunteer



Running the trails at Pinehurst.

hours on the part of the Sarsons and their team, the trail is well maintained. They both also work full-time, but this is their passion.

A tent city at the event includes a medical response unit with 35 people, an exhibition area with the top brands in running and children’s activities and films organized by the GRCA’s nature centre staff. The Sarsons know that training takes time and dedication, and they make sure all family members are happy during the race, no matter what the weather. At the starting line spectators can be five deep, and there are bleachers at the finish line as well as many places suitable for photos. This is all topped off with a sit-down catered post-run spread that offers delicious and nutritious food.

The trail has been transformed from “a billy goat path” to one of the top five in Ontario, Sarson estimates. Funds raised from runners, who have the opportunity to donate when they register for the run, and from the event itself have resulted in new kiosks, benches, interpretive signs and improvements to the park. The new boathouse is a small gift from Peggy.

“My volunteer role here is pretty darn rewarding. It keeps my wife and I in touch with each other. We want to leave a legacy that’s going to benefit the GRCA, and we are all about healthy lifestyle,” Sarson said.



George and Peggy Sarson at Pinehurst Lake, where the Run for the Toad takes place each fall.



Myles Henderson visits a tree planted long ago on GRCA property. As the saying goes, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago and the second best time is now.

Spring planting tradition

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Giving nature a helping hand by planting trees each spring is a growing tradition throughout the Grand River watershed.

“Many people do it because they grew up planting trees. But this can also be the beginning of a new tradition for many families,” says GRCA forestry specialist Myles Henderson. “It can spread through the neighbourhood or throughout families. This is very noticeable in rural areas.”

While Henderson began planting trees as a child with his dad on their rural property, he is now teaching his young son about trees as well as organizing community plantings. He and other GRCA staff members organize events each spring.

The GRCA had eight planting events in watershed communities this year. Many other GRCA planting projects are geared to specific groups of volunteers, such as students, companies and community organizations. These volunteers are helping to plant trees while also connecting with nature and having fun. Up and down the

watershed, other community organizations will also be starting off spring by getting young trees in the ground.

At some planting events, such as the Guelph Rotary Forest, GPS locations of the trees are given to volunteer planters, so they may come back years later to see how their trees are growing. This can be deeply satisfying, as the trees grow much bigger than the people who planted them.

In rural areas, GRCA staff help landowners with planting projects. Many are expanding forests started by their parents, grandparents or previous owners of their properties, or transforming barren lands. These projects have many benefits for the environment and also the landowners themselves, who will enjoy the birds and wildlife they bring and the shade and wind protection that trees provide.

Sometimes, several members of the same family who live close to each other will all plant on their own properties. Find the biggest trees, and you may also find the neighbour or family member who originally started planting. This is because interest in tree planting grows as the seasons pass and the benefits become noticeable.

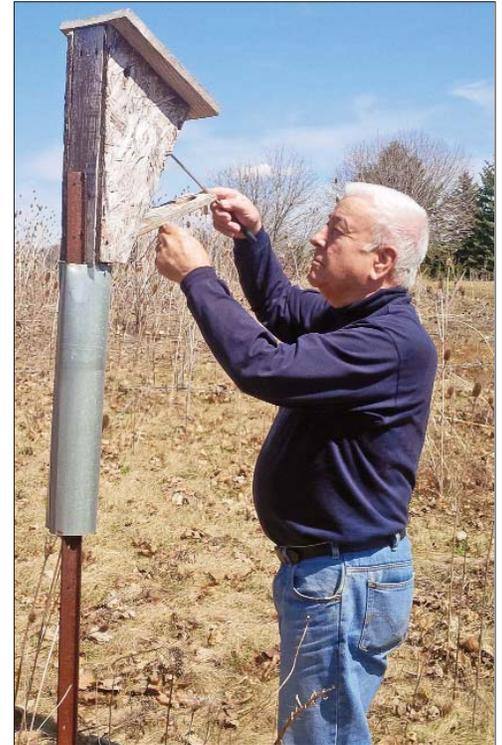
In addition, contractors have been hired to plant 290,000 trees from north to south this spring, which is about on par with last year’s tree planting numbers.

The most northerly of these projects is on a private property close to Shelburne, and the most southerly is in Haldimand County.

About 38,000 trees were sold directly to landowners by the GRCA, both online and over the phone, and these will be picked up at the GRCA. A tree sale took place May 9 for watershed landowners. These are mostly native trees and are not nursery-quality trees but are suitable for large rural properties.

Ice storm, severe weather and emerald ash borer in 2013 damaged forests throughout the Grand River watershed, increasing awareness of how vulnerable local forests are to severe weather. These downed branches and trees are not all bad, because this creates an opportunity for forests to be renewed.

“That loss creates an opportunity for new growth. It is giving the forest a chance to reinvigorate and make space for new trees to grow up, making the forest more diverse. Down the road it may be that hole in the tree from the lost branch that can be a nesting place for an owl,” Henderson says.



Volunteer Peter Wilhelm checks one of the bird boxes he has installed.

Bird man at Doon Valley

By Todd Doering
Superintendent, Doon Valley Golf Course

The longtime golf players at Doon Valley Golf Course, nestled beside the Grand River in south Kitchener, know volunteer Peter Wilhelm as the “bird man.”

Wilhelm came to Doon Valley 10 years ago after he moved into a new condominium next door to the course. He proposed setting up bird nesting boxes on the golf course.

At the beginning in 2004 there were about 50 nesting boxes. In 2011, after the expansion of the golf course, more space brought the nest box total to 74 boxes. These are checked and maintained by Wilhelm.

The eastern bluebird is a cherished sight for birdwatchers across its range, and many volunteers in the Grand River watershed install and monitor nesting boxes. The small, shy bird and its well-loved song is a harbinger of spring.

Peterson-style nesting boxes are installed at Doon Valley. These are known to attract

bluebirds, but they also attract other cavity nesters such as tree swallows, chickadees and wrens. Working through a local connection, almost 200 hatchlings were banded during



Bluebird

the 2006 and 2007 seasons.

There have been problems with predators throughout the years. Squirrels and raccoons needed to be kept away but the non-native house sparrows were a

much bigger problem. After the bird banders recommended to trap them, the number of bluebird and tree swallow fledglings slowly increased (eight bluebird fledglings in 2006 vs. 31 in 2013; 32 tree swallow fledglings in 2004 vs. 294 in 2013).

We are aware that our golf course is only a very small area of the Grand River watershed, but many small actions have a positive impact on the whole.

Camp adventures

Grand River nature centres are great places for kids to connect with nature this summer.

The GRCA has updated and increased the variety of summer camps on offer at the five nature centres locations (Belwood Lake, Rockwood, Guelph Lake, Laurel Creek and Apps' Mill).

"Many kids really enjoy staying with us for a few weeks experiencing some different camps. Every week is different and there are many more camping opportunities than we've ever had before," said Tracey Ryan, manager of environmental education and restoration at the GRCA. A few camps are already sold out, but there are still many different types of camps for kids six to 16 years old.

Camp information is available on www.grandriver.ca/naturecentres and camp registration website is www.grandriver.eventbrite.ca.

In addition, nature centre staff are providing many visitor service programs suited to families at the Grand River parks. For more on these programs and on other GRCA events, check www.grandriver.ca/events.

FOUNDATION

Natural playground and amphitheatre

By Janet Baine

GRCA Communications Specialist

A new natural playground and amphitheatre is in the works for Shade's Mills Conservation Area.

Logs, stones, grass and wood will form the play structures, instead of the metal and plastic that is used in traditional playgrounds. There will be an obstacle course, a slide built into a hill, stones to climb on and poles.

Knowing that the playground needed to be replaced at Shade's Mills, park superintendent Brian Hunt investigated natural playgrounds to see if this could work for his park. These play areas offer many other benefits. It will be less costly for the GRCA to install, because some of the materials can be found on GRCA land. For example, some of the trees that have been lost due to the ice storm last December are being salvaged for this project.

"The original playground at Shade's was removed a few years ago, so right now we don't have a playground," explains Hunt. "Natural playgrounds are up-and-coming and they better reflect what the GRCA is all about, so this makes a lot of sense. They help reconnect kids with nature."

Toyota amphitheatre

This summer, the first part of the natural

playground will be installed — the Toyota natural amphitheatre that will be used for nature centre programs, special events and the very popular Friday night movies under the stars. The new amphitheatre will have tiered armour stone and grass seating and a platform at the base. This part of the project has been funded by the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Company, with funds coming to this project through the Grand River Conservation Foundation. The amphitheatre will cost about \$30,000 to install. So far \$40,000 of a total of about \$105,000 has been raised for the natural amphitheatre and playground.

"It is a pilot project for the GRCA with the hope that projects like this could be built at other Grand River parks in the future as fundraising efforts allow," says Cam Linwood, development co-ordinator with the Grand River Conservation Foundation. "As the traditional playgrounds need to be updated and replaced, we could replace them with natural playgrounds." Contributing to projects such as this is an ideal way that donors can support facilities used by the local community.

If you would like to make a contribution to this project, please contact the Foundation at 519-621-2763, ext. 2372 or foundation@grandriver.ca.



Natural playgrounds help reconnect kids to nature.

RAIN program helps prevent damage and protect rivers

By Cheryl Evans
RAIN Program Manager

As the snow melted and the rain poured down one grey spring day in 2013, Kitchener residents James Barr and Jackie McGinnis helplessly watched their basement fill with water.

An overwhelmed sump pump couldn't handle the amount of water flowing toward their foundation. After they cleaned up the 15-cm deep pool of water in the basement, they called REEP Green Solutions in Kitchener to ask about a free RAIN home visit so they could stop the flooding from happening again.

RAIN, an urban stormwater education program, is a Green Communities Canada program delivered locally by REEP Green Solutions, in partnership with the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo. It provides workshops, presentations, best practice tours, online resources and one-on-one consultations.

Over the past century, intense land development in urban areas has covered over natural areas such as forests, meadows and



The RAIN program helped Jackie McGinnis and James Barr solve a water problem.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

wetlands that can soak up and store high volumes of water during rainfall events.

In today's cities, rainwater rushes off of hard surfaces, such as pavements and rooftops, picks up pollutants and rushes quickly into rivers. This leads to increased erosion, flooding and poor water quality. The goal of the RAIN program is to help property owners reduce the risk of flood damage and to soak up water on their properties in order to protect rivers.

In Kitchener and Waterloo, property owners can qualify for up to a 45 per cent reduction on their stormwater utility fees if they can demonstrate that they are using city-approved best practices.

Free home visits

Barr and McGinnis met with a certified RAIN guide for a 90-minute discussion about the water challenges they faced. Their guide helped them come up with a practical, action-oriented plan, and told them how it would save money. They also received a summary report.

Keen do-it-yourselfers, Barr and McGinnis set to work right away. They regraded the soil around their home so a slope would direct water away from their foundation. They also installed rain barrels at two of their downspouts in order to use their rain as a garden irrigation resource. They made sure to direct the overflow from their rain barrels and their eavestroughs to absorbent lawn areas at least 10 feet away from their house to prevent it from making its way into their basement.

They were very happy with the results, which included receiving a 20 per cent credit on their stormwater utility bill and keeping their basement dry during subsequent storms.

This spring they will install two more rain barrels and will create two sunken gardens, known as rain gardens, to soak up additional water. They will also replace their cracked

and leaking eavestroughs. Once they have completed this work, they will receive the maximum stormwater credit of \$32 a year for soaking up thousands of litres of water during heavy rains.

Thousands of home, business and institutional property owners have soaked up a collective total of 553 million litres of water per year on their properties through this program.

RAIN home visits are available to Kitchener residents only this year but a free RAIN home visit workshop at REEP House for Sustainable Living is open to everyone. The house is located at 20 Mill Street in Kitchener. It is also open to the public each Saturday from noon to 4 p.m for educational tours. Expanded services for Kitchener and Waterloo business and institutional owners this year include free RAIN Business Visits, workshops and presentations to interested groups.

For more information, or to register for workshops and RAIN Home or Business Visits, visit www.reepgreen.ca (there are some great resources and videos) or call 519-744-9799.

Waterloo countryside tours

An updated package of four Historic Countryside Tours in Waterloo Region is now available.

These tours were put together in 2006, and have been redesigned. They now include new historic and scenic attractions along routes in the townships of North Dumfries, Woolwich, Wilmot and Wellesley.

The tours are a great resource for cyclists, hikers, day trippers, heritage enthusiasts, local residents and visitors. They take two to three hours to drive and include stops at many heritage locations such as buildings, bridges, landmarks and trails.

The maps are also available on the Region of Waterloo website. The tours are now customizable and available for both handheld and tablet devices.

The tour packages are available at many locations including the Waterloo Region Museum, Joseph Schneider Haus, the Kitchener Public Library, and the Region of Waterloo administrative headquarters and libraries.



Conestogo Dam at work: The reservoir system was working overtime in April as you can see the area below the Conestogo Dam (left) was flooded when the reservoir was full. Compare that to the photo (right), taken in the same location last July, when water from the reservoir was being released from the reservoir to meet the needs of communities downstream.

THE GRAND CALENDAR

Grand Opportunities Fly Fishing Forum, June 7

A day of on-river seminars and many related events about fly fishing sponsored by Friends of the Grand River. This is a great way to learn more and meet other anglers at Belwood Lake Conservation area.

Groundswell Conference on Groundwater Innovation, June 16 to 18, University of Guelph.

Creating shared value for groundwater communities, researchers and technical innovators featuring Alexandra Cousteau as keynote speaker. Details are available on www.groundswellconference.com

Party In The Park, June 22, Guelph Lake Park

Bring your family and friends and come out to kick off summer with a full day of fun for everyone. Events include critter shows, water fun, beach games, a scavenger hunt, craft tables, geocaching and giveaways, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., free admission.

Conestogo Lake Fishing Derby, July 6

Try your luck at catching catfish,

smallmouth bass and pike in the annual event. Prizes awarded for the longest fish in adult and children's categories, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Meet at the boat launch. This is one of many fishing derbies on the Grand River. It costs park admission plus \$1.

Healthy Hikes challenge at many locations until the end of October

The Healthy Hikes events offered by the GRCA are part of a provincial challenge that allows people to win prizes when they participate in Healthy Hikes events. These events at the GRCA are primarily geared to families and children and are taking place until the end of October. Healthy Hikes events are taking place at many GRCA parks, including Rockwood, Laurel Creek in Waterloo, Pinehurst Lake near Paris, Brant, Elora Gorge and Shades' Mills in Cambridge. A complete listing is available on www.grandriver.ca/events.

Note: Events at the GRCA's conservation areas and nature centres are posted on www.grandriver.ca/events.

About Grand Actions:

This newsletter is produced bi-monthly by the Grand River Conservation Authority.

More information:

Current and back issues as well as complete subscription information is available online at www.grandriver.ca/GrandActions.

Submission deadlines:

The 15th of February, April, June, August, October and December. Submissions may be edited for length or style. Photos and event information are welcome. We do our best to publish items, but we are not able to guarantee publication.

To subscribe by e-mail:

GrandActions-subscribe@grandriver.ca

To subscribe by mail, change your subscription or for information:

Janet Baine, *Grand Actions* editor
Phone: 519-621-2763, Ext. 2302
E-mail: jbaine@grandriver.ca
Mail: Box 729
400 Clyde Road
Cambridge ON N1R 5W6

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.

