



GRAND Actions

The Grand River watershed newsletter



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Mac Coutts with CAO Joe Farwell and the sign that names a GRCA property after Coutts.

Photo by Janet Baine



Northern property named G.M. Mac Coutts Tract

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Gordon MacLeod Coutts set the course for the first 25 years of the Grand River Conservation Authority and a property in the northern part of the watershed is being named after him.

Coutts was the first employee of the GRCA and was the general manager between 1966 and 1991.

The G.M. Mac Coutts Tract is in West Luther Township and it links the Luther Marsh Wildlife Management Area with the Keldon Source Area, a critical source of groundwater that feeds the Grand River. It is close to the farm on Highway 89, just outside the watershed where Coutts grew

up. It is also close to the one-room schoolhouse where he taught after World War II when teachers were scarce. School officials in need of a teacher came calling for his mom, a former teacher — and when she turned down the job, their eyes fell on the recent high school grad, Mac Coutts, who was home at the time.

He was first hired in 1953 as a field officer for the Grand Valley Conservation Authority. By this time, he had taught in Fergus for two years and had a B.Sc. in Agriculture from the Ontario Agricultural College. He was the only GVCA employee at the time. He received direction from the board of the conservation authority, which then had 83 members. Now there are 26 representatives on the authority's board.





A younger Mac Coutts at the gabion wall along the Grand River in Bridgeport.

“That meant that a lot of my work was to visit all of these municipalities. There were so many, I couldn’t see them all within a year. I spent a lot of time explaining, especially in the north where I was from, that the whole watershed was connected. What people did on their land mattered to all the municipalities further south along the river,” he explained. The connection between north and south was still a relatively new idea at the time.

During those early years, many GRCA programs of today got underway, and Coutts set the course for these. For example, the authority was the first to plant trees on private land. Landowners would pay one cent a tree to the provincial Department of Lands and Forests, and the authority would plant the trees. This program got underway in 1954. In 1955, 2,000 acres of trees were planted by the authority on private land. Because most land in the watershed is privately owned, this broadened the opportunity and scope of tree planting, and set the course for a program that has continued through the decades.

Another major accomplishment was starting the system of conservation areas, beginning with the Elora Gorge in 1954.

A fine balance

In 1964 Coutts became the Grand Valley Authority’s director of operations and secretary-treasurer. By that time there were a dozen employees; half were park

superintendents. In 1966 when the Grand Valley Conservation Authority and the Grand River Conservation Commission amalgamated, Coutts assumed the lead role as the general manager of the new Grand River Conservation Authority. He held this position until he retired in 1991.

Coutts had the ability to balance political and administrative concerns with practical hands-on knowledge. This helped the GRCA grow into a leading conservation agency in the province.

“A touchstone in Mr. Coutts’s long career has been his concern for other people and his insistence on giving them credit,” according to the citation he received as the 1992 Honour Roll Award recipient.

During his retirement years, it has been a pleasure for Coutts to see the changes in the watershed and at the GRCA.

“I see everything is expanded and blossoming and I look at it with great pride. It seems to me the authority has really grown in the years since I left,” he said.

Did you know?

Through a quirk of history, two organizations sprung up at different times to manage the unpredictable Grand River.

1934: The Grand River Conservation Commission (GRCC) was formed.

1948: Grand Valley Conservation Authority formed.

1966: Nearly 50 years ago, in 1966, the two joined to form the Grand River Conservation Authority of today.

HONOUR ROLL AWARD

Whitcombe receives top GRCA award

By Janet Baine

GRCA communications specialist

Brad Whitcombe is the recipient of a posthumous 2015 Grand River Honour Roll Award, the highest award given out by the GRCA.

Whitcombe died suddenly of a rare disease in November 2014, leaving a long record of environmental service to the Grand River watershed. He was a long-serving politician in Puslinch Township and Wellington County. Among his many accomplishments, he was co-founder of two very successful environmental programs.

“Stewardship captures Brad’s approach to life. He believed his role was to convene all the forces and resources necessary to care for his community,” said Lise Burcher, Whitcombe’s spouse and a former City of Guelph councillor.

A lifelong resident of Puslinch Township, Whitcombe grew up on a farm on Gore Road. He was a hog farmer in his 30s when he entered local politics. He became a township councillor in 1989 because he was concerned about the agricultural challenges facing farmers at that time. He remained active in politics and served as Mayor of Puslinch Township for 15 years, until 2010. He also served as Wellington County warden for three terms — in 2000, 2005 and 2006.

Solutions to water challenges

Whitcombe sought solutions to the water challenges within Puslinch Township. He was the chair of the Mill Creek subwatershed study, which was completed in June, 1996. This identified the work that needed to be done to improve this important, but damaged creek that runs close to Highway 401 through Puslinch and enters the Grand River in Galt. A broad-based committee established the Puslinch Township

Groundwater Monitoring Program — the first of its kind in Canada. This program is still in operation, ensuring that water resources are understood and protected.

“Brad was the prime proponent of both the subwatershed studies and groundwater monitoring program, which were considered visionary and ground-breaking at the time,” said Larry Halyk, who was stewardship coordinator in the area.

In 1999, Whitcombe also chaired the committee that introduced the GRCA’s Rural Water Quality Program to Wellington

County, bringing this new program to the second municipality in the watershed — the program originated in Waterloo Region.

He co-founded the very successful Friends of Mill Creek in 1998. This multi-faceted program became a model for community engagement in other areas. He helped bring together environmentalists, business leaders, landowners and local agencies to work together to improve the creek. In other communities, this would be a nearly impossible task. But in Puslinch, people set aside their differences when they entered the meeting room. They worked together. Many improvements have been made to Mill Creek and the brown trout population has expanded, while native brook trout have regained territory within the watershed.

High school students are hired as Mill

Creek rangers every summer to undertake restoration projects along the creek. Local businesses pay for this program.

“It has been a great benefit not only to the stream, but also to the young people. For many, it is their first opportunity to get environmental experience and this likely influences their career choice,” Whitcombe

“We should be inspired by what is possible and get ready to roll up our sleeves and make it happen.”
-Brad Whitcombe

said during the 10th anniversary of the program. As president, he received a 2012 Watershed Award on behalf of Friends of Mill Creek. He was serving as president when he passed away last year.

The second major program he co-founded was Wellington Green Legacy. This started as a one-time event to plant 150,000 trees during the 150th anniversary of the founding of Wellington County in 2004. But Green Legacy has continued, and it has been recognized by the United Nations as the largest municipal tree planting program in North America. Through Green Legacy, nearly two million trees have been planted in the county over the years. Whitcombe and program manager Rob Johnston received a watershed award in 2010 on behalf of this program, which continues to expand. Now there is a proposal to turn it into a province-wide program.

“We should be inspired by what is possible and get ready to roll up our sleeves and make it happen,” Whitcombe said.



Award recipient Bill Christmas with his wife Helen who has also helped out on work days.

Award for bringing back brook trout

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Bill Christmas has turned his considerable talent to rehabilitating small cold water streams so that they can become nurseries for brook trout — young ones that are way too small to be hooked on a fishing line.

This is no small task. It takes the diverse skills of tool fabricator, motivator, teacher, partnership builder, workday planner, problem solver and even red-tape-cutter. Christmas already has a wall in his Caledonia home filled with awards, many for environmental accomplishments. Now he is also receiving a 2015 Watershed Award from the Grand River Conservation Authority.

He joined Trout Unlimited Canada in 1972 and is a long-time volunteer. He founded the Ted Knott Chapter in 2005 and remains the chapter president. About 125



Brad Whitcombe stands by Mill Creek, which runs through Puslinch Township and enters the Grand River in Galt.



Bill Christmas checks the temperature of a stream as part of a monitoring program.

people between 5 and 85 work on stream rehabilitation in Mill Creek — a cold water stream in the southern Grand River that runs through Taquanyah Conservation Area near Cayuga. The group also does work on Bronte Creek in Burlington.

Strong partnerships

When Christmas sends out a workday email, people drive to the Cayuga area from Mississauga, Burlington and Waterloo. They slog through muck, confront ticks and do the job of the day, whether it is restoring the stream bank, creating dappled sunlight on the stream, or planting trees. These are tasks that require ingenuity, brute force and lots of tools and supplies, some that have been specifically designed by Christmas. Collectively the group has spent 2,700 hours working on Mill Creek.

Christmas and other group members have also built strong partnerships with organizations and individuals. For example, last year a Home Depot provided 70 unsold Christmas trees to be used to restore stream banks. A property owner stored the trees, and a volunteer with a truck delivered the trees in batches as they are required on

workdays. They were used on private properties where the landowners welcomed the trees and the work crews.

“We have been blessed with a great volunteer community in Haldimand, and this is really a great story. Regardless of their affiliations, they are passionate about the impact we have had,” Christmas said. Last year when he was ill, all the workdays he planned took place without him, thanks to other volunteers.

Christmas was on the committee that developed the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan and he has a solid understanding of all the human, biological and technical issues at play in restoring a stream.

Some thought it was going to be impossible to bring brook trout to Emerson Creek, a tiny tributary that feeds into Mill Creek, Christmas said. But Christmas and his group found ways to bring oxygen into the water, monitor the insects last summer with a student crew and ensure the conditions in the stream are ideal. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry agreed that the young fry that hatch there will have the shelter, food and temperature

to grow, and issued a permit to relocate brook trout to the stream. Last spring tiny fry were moved there, and in October the creek became home to bigger brookies. This native species needs the cleanest, coldest water of all trout species in order to survive.

The native brook trout of Lake Erie depend on small streams like Emerson Creek to lay their eggs and provide a safe haven for the young fry that hatch.

Each time there is a stumbling block, Christmas finds a way around it. Over the years, he has come up with techniques to help keep volunteers safe and minimize their impact, while maximizing the beneficial impact on the river.

Sometimes a class of students from the University of Waterloo or Centennial College come to learn rehabilitation techniques. Some students have joined the work crew to get hands-on experience. Other times parents bring their children, and Christmas knows the young people will take ownership of the small streams they have worked on.

Christmas knows there is lots of work ahead, and ensuring that young people take ownership of the stream is vitally important to the success of the project.

“This kid is going to own that stream for the rest of his life. He will always want to come back here. Just like the people who have planted trees come back to see the trees and care for the forest. Those kids are the future,” Christmas said.

“Even though there are now brook trout in Emerson Creek, the group has lots of work ahead.

This is just one step. There is still a lot more to be done to rehabilitate the stream, because Emerson Creek is one small area. There is a lot more to do to rehabilitate Mill Creek as it passes through Taquanyah,” he said.

Stories about more award recipients will be published in future issues of Grand Actions.

Did you know?

There are three chapters of Trout Unlimited Canada doing work within the Grand River Watershed.

The two others are the Speed Valley Chapter that has improved Marden Creek, a tributary of the Speed River, and the Middle Grand Chapter that has made many improvements to Whitemans Creek and its tributaries in Brant County.



One Honour Roll Award and six Grand River Conservation Awards were given out by the GRCA in October. From left (back row) are GRCA Chair Jane Mitchell, Lise Burcher (receiving a posthumous Honour Roll Award for Brad Whitcombe), Bill Christmas, Bob Scott, GRCA CAO Joe Farwell, Barry Lee; (front row) JP Bartle, Josh Shea (representing Waterloo Region Nature) and Derek Lippert. Award recipient Hugh Whiteley was unable to attend.

New volunteer program blossoming at GRCA

WHAT'S HAPPENING

By Janet Baine

GRCA communications specialist

The GRCA's new volunteer coordinator, Bronwen Buck, can hardly catch her breath between volunteer events that she is working on.

Buck's email box is full of heartfelt requests from prospective volunteers and a steady stream of proposed projects from GRCA staff. Buck brings volunteers and projects together, looking after the details. Judging from the response to this new program, volunteers really want to help out.

"I love nature. Since I was young, Canada's natural environments have continued to inspire and amaze me," said Stephanie Cote, who helped plant a pollinator garden at Laurel Creek

Conservation Area in October. "It feels great to get out, get my hands dirty, and do something that helps protect the natural environment, which is so important for our community's health and well-being. I had a lot of fun and learned a lot with a great group of people."

Buck works with individuals such as Cote, but also with groups and companies.

The Gee family donated a memorial bench that was placed along the trail at FWR Dickson Wilderness Area, south of Cambridge, an area their parents had enjoyed. They then contacted Buck, who set up a trail maintenance day. They shared memories as they worked on the trail.

A couple of companies, including the Co-operators, have helped prepare the newly landscaped area at Guelph Lake Park that will surround the nature centre slated for construction when sufficient funds have been raised. They planted 36 species of flowers and grass, mulched, watered and

broadcast wildflower seed.

Community support

The GRCA's new volunteer program builds upon strong foundation of community involvement. "This program will increase opportunities for volunteers to help nature in a meaningful way," Buck explains. "I'm working with park superintendents, Nature Centre staff and our natural heritage team to define where assistance is most needed. We will be offering a series of volunteer events focusing on tree and wildflower planting, trail work and restoration efforts." The site of Guelph Lake's new nature centre will also give rise to a number of opportunities in the near future.

Buck has also been connecting with community organizations, such as local chapters of Trout Unlimited Canada, to help facilitate their restoration work.

GRCA volunteer event opportunities that are open to the public and are listed on www.grandriver.ca/events.

If you are interested in learning more about the GRCA volunteer program, check www.grandriver.ca/volunteer, or email volunteer@grandriver.ca.

GRCA gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation in assisting with this project.



Photo by Bronwen Buck

Volunteers including Stephanie Cote prepared a pollinator garden at Laurel Creek in Waterloo in October. Volunteer opportunities such as this one are increasing at the GRCA.

Join Dan the Nature Man and help raise funds for a new GLNC

By Cam Linwood

Grand River Conservation Foundation

Dan Schneider (affectionately known as 'Dan, Dan The Nature Man') has been a familiar face at the Guelph Lake Nature Centre for more than 30 years, helping young and old develop an appreciation for our natural world.

"We would pull up along the wooden fence in front of the centre and there would be Dan, waving and smiling at us, as if we were being welcomed home. The days with Dan were the best part of school for me," said Rachel Greene, a former Guelph Lake Nature Centre student.

Guelph Lake Nature Centre holds a special place in the hearts of many children and adults. Visiting students readily recall their hike to the hugging tree, sitting silently with the chickadees, or wading in the river looking for critters. A day at Guelph Lake has always been something special.

This past spring, Schneider made a tough decision, setting sight on his next adventure — retirement. But there was a catch — he wanted to leave the nature centre just a little better than he found it.

GRAND RIVER CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The current Guelph nature centre has been around as long as Schneider has, and has seen more than 600,000 students during that time. A former bungalow, it is ready for its retirement party and it's time to give it a proper send-off.

Your support in this campaign will help create a dedicated natural learning space at the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre Complex, where students and visitors can learn and explore an area that is very special to Schneider.

New complex

After more than 30 years of operation, it's time to look ahead to support coming generations of outdoor learners. The GRCA and the Grand River Conservation Foundation are raising funds for a brand new Guelph Lake Nature Centre.

When all is said and done, the new Guelph

Lake Nature Centre will be an 8,000 square foot space. It will be purpose-built with one primary focus — to closely connect people to nature. One-third of the \$3-million goal has been raised. Construction is expected to begin in June 2016, once 75 per cent of the funds have been raised.

In any significant project, many hands make light work. Creating a new Guelph Lake Nature Centre Complex is no different. A donation to the Join Dan campaign provides you with access to some incredibly unique, one-of-a-kind perks. How cool would it be to bring your ENTIRE school out for a movie night on the island at Guelph Lake?

If helping financially isn't an option for you, we'd really appreciate you taking the time to share this project with your friends, family and neighbours. Each person you tell about the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre Complex gets us one step closer to creating a new, and very special place on the shores of Guelph Lake.

How to help

You can get involved in the 'Join Dan' crowdfunding initiative until Dec. 23 through a new Indiegogo campaign set up by the Grand River Conservation Foundation that will channel funds to this new learning space.

"The park itself has no government support," said Sara Wilbur, executive director of the Foundation. "It is run like a business. That's always been a challenge for us, because people think of GRCA as a government organization."

Donors to this campaign will be rewarded with unique gift opportunities including T-shirts, engraved stepping stones that will be placed on a trail around the new facility, or your own private movie night on the Guelph Lake island.

To donate to the 'Join Dan' campaign or learn more, visit the "Join Dan The Nature Man" crowdfunding site. There is a direct link to this campaign on www.grandriver.ca.



Students assist with a project for the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre. There has been lots of community involvement in helping to prepare the landscaping around the centre.

Nolan Melchin outdoor classroom at Laurel Creek Nature Centre

On Oct. 3, the Nolan Melchin Memorial Outdoor Classroom officially opened.

This special project celebrates the life of Nolan Melchin, who passed away at a tender age in 2013 following a courageous battle with a paediatric brain tumour.

Nolan's family and friends, led by his parents, Melanie Shaw and Todd Melchin, raised \$30,000 to construct the outdoor classroom at Laurel Creek Nature Centre in Waterloo.

It was designed to honour Nolan's love of nature and includes several special features:

- a research area, with child-size discovery tables and shade trees
- a meeting place for children and instructors that has amphitheatre-style seating, an instructional stage and large trees for natural shade
- a chickadee feeding station, always a great way to experience nature

was a place we often hiked and biked through as a family and he had visited a number of times on class trips — he absolutely loved it! This place holds a special place in my heart for the simple fact that whenever he was here, he was smiling.”

Laurel Creek Nature Centre provides outdoor education programs to students from both school boards in Waterloo Region. In addition, it is home to the Laurel Creek Nature Centre Adventure Day Camp, a summer camp for children ages six to 16. “This outdoor classroom was designed to honour Nolan's love of nature,” says Tracey Ryan, manager of environmental education for the GRCA. “Thanks to the generous donations of Nolan's family, friends and the larger community, this space will enhance the outdoor learning experience for the thousands of kids who visit Laurel Creek Nature Centre each year.”

Honour Nolan's memory

“My little hero was an amazing six-year-old boy who loved nature, camping, bug collecting, fishing and sports,” said Melanie Shaw, Nolan's mom. “He was vibrant and full of life, and when he passed away after many months of treatments, it was devastating for us. We wanted to find an appropriate way to honour Nolan's memory. The Nature Centre

TAKING ACTION

Dam safety award

In October the Canadian Dam Association recognized the Grand River Conservation Authority with a corporate award for work in the area of dam safety.

“This is an award related to advancing dam safety and it means a lot to be recognized by your peers within the Canadian dam safety community,” said Joe Farwell, the GRCA's CAO.

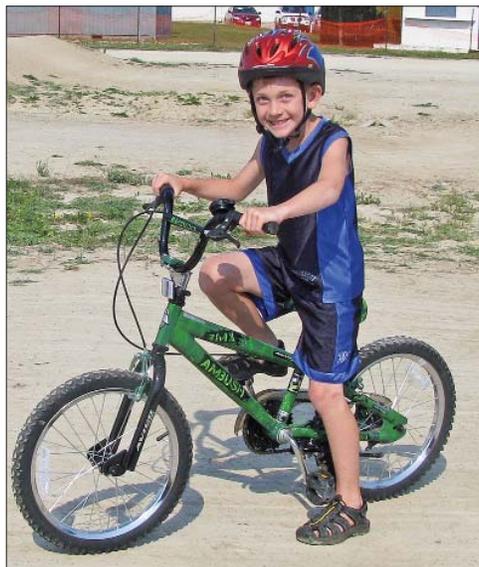
The award itself says that it “recognizes valued contributions, commitment and support of advancement of knowledge and safe management of dams.” The GRCA has been improving its dam safety program over many years to bring it to the rigorous program that it is today.

The GRCA operates 27 dams. Seven of these are actively used to manage river flows within the watershed and are classified as multi-purpose dams. These dams serve two key functions — controlling floods and supplying water to the river when there is not much rainfall. Other benefits include hydro production and recreation in the



Three environmental scholarships in 2015

Three scholarships were given by the Grand River Conservation Foundation to support students attending post-secondary institutions in the watershed. Top: The SC Johnson Environmental Scholarship of \$4,000 was presented to Callee Marie Rice, University of Waterloo by Robin-Lee Norris. Middle: The Allan Holmes Scholarship of \$3,000 was presented to Laura Sauder, University of Waterloo by Shirley Ann Holmes, and the McEwen Clean Water Prize of \$3,000 was presented to Joel Gretton, University of Guelph, by Norris. Scholarships are awarded by the Foundation each year.



Nolan Melchin was an active boy who loved nature and passed away in 2013.



reservoirs that are created by the dam system.

The GRCA's other 20 dams are generally run-of-the-river dams or earthen embankment dams with small head ponds.

Although the smaller dams are not used to manage flows in the watershed, they are a legacy to the early days of settlement and important community features. There are many other dams within the watershed that are not owned by the GRCA.

Warning markers

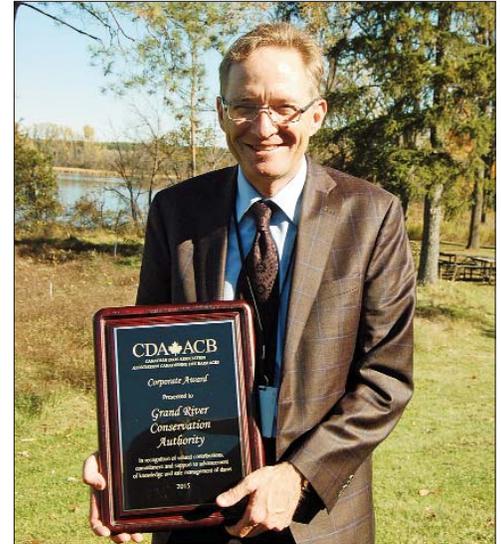
It is the responsibility of dam owners to take safety measures around dams and weirs, and the GRCA installs warning markers and buoys upstream of dams where the rivers are navigable. These are in place between May

and October at GRCA dams.

Each year the province provides \$5 million in funding for dam repairs to the 36 conservation authorities, through the Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure Program. This program is vitally important to dam and dike safety and these funds are matched by local conservation authorities.

Naomi Moore, water resources project coordinator at the GRCA, is a member of the Canadian Dam Association's public safety around dams and emergency management committees. This group works to improve public safety at dams.

A dam safety booklet created by the GRCA for students has been reprinted several times. This booklet can also be downloaded from www.grandriver.ca.



CAO Joe Farwell with the 2015 award for the GRCA from the Canadian Dam Association.

THE GRAND CALENDAR

Caring for your horse and farm workshop, Dec. 5

A free environmental stewardship workshop for horse farm owners. Learn to manage horse manure, improve pasture quality and protect natural features on your property such as ponds, wetlands and streams. Mel Lloyd Centre Auditorium, Shelburne 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Free with registration sstephens@nvca.on.ca or 705-424-1479, ext. 239.

Winter Adventure Days at Guelph Lake and Laurel Creek, Dec. 21 to 31

Registration is open for Winter Adventure Days Guelph Lake and Laurel Creek nature centres starting Dec. 21. Kids 6 to 12 can come for any or all days. Daily outdoor activities allow them to explore the fields and forests that surround the nature centres. The goal is to introduce children to a lifetime of appreciation for the natural world that sustains us all. For details and to register online check www.grandriver.eventbrite.ca.

Guelph organic conference

Celebrating its 35th year, the 2016 event includes international speakers, seminars and introductory workshops on key topics. There is a free Organic Expo/Tasting Fair with exhibitor tables and food samples. For more information visit

www.guelphorganicconf.ca or call 519-824-4120, ext. 56311.

Heritage Day Workshop, Cambridge, Feb. 12

Mark your calendar to attend the 19th annual Heritage Day Workshop taking place in Cambridge. The theme for 2015 is Roots and Shoots and will focus on settlement of Block One, Dumfries Township, to mark the bicentennial of the settlement of this area. It was purchased by William Dickson in 1816, and he named it after his hometown of Dumfries in Scotland. The event is sponsored by the Heritage Working Group of The Grand Strategy. It is free, but donations are gratefully accepted. The workshop takes place at Forward Church, 455 Myers Rd., Cambridge. Complete the registration form posted online at www.grandriver.ca/HeritageDay/HeritageDay.cfm.

Order trees from the GRCA anytime before March 1

Landowners can order trees to be planted on their own properties of 2.5 acres or more (exclusive of buildings) from the GRCA until March 1. Orders must be for 200 seedlings or 20 saplings or more. For more information or to arrange a visit to your property, check www.grandriver.ca/trees, email trees@grandriver.ca or call 519-621-2763.

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 is also welcome. We do our best to publish items, but we are not able to guarantee publication.

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The Grand River Conservation Foundation

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