



GRAND Actions

The Grand River watershed newsletter



March/April 2016 • Volume 21, Number 2

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Cover photo

Students plant new trees where buckthorn used to grow at Guelph Lake.

Photo by Moritz Sanio



Where buckthorn used to grow

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Restoration specialist Lindsay Campbell stands on the front line in the battle against European buckthorn.

She is at Dumfries Conservation Area in Cambridge, but could be at any number of locations within the Grand River watershed. She is reaching toward a small tree planted by a volunteer.

"I'm so happy to see that these native trees are doing so well," she said, smiling. "This was a good summer for trees."

This spring, GRCA staff will be back at Dumfries, working with staff from the City of Cambridge and volunteers to plant more native trees in another area where buckthorn has been removed.

Each year the invasive buckthorn grows thicker, stronger and bigger. It spreads to more locations in the watershed — birds eat the berries and spread the seeds far and wide.

Slowly and with time, the GRCA and many partners are fighting back against European buckthorn. This is a big challenge.

Bad for local ecology

Buckthorn is so much a part of the landscape that when it is being removed, some residents are surprised by what they see. Not everyone has heard about this problem and knows that some trees are bad for local ecology.

European or common buckthorn degrades biodiversity and drastically diminishes the complexity of the local ecosystem. It takes away habitat and food sources for insects, birds and animals. The ecosystem becomes less complex, less adaptable and less able to meet the challenges of the future. Within a short time, buckthorn can become so thick that it chokes out other plants.

Three years, section by section

On her visit to Dumfries, Campbell was also checking the work to remove buckthorn on



another two hectares of land. The work was carried out by a company certified to do so. Larger buckthorn trees were cut down and the stumps sprayed with a herbicide. This stops vigorous new shoots from coming up from the stump, as they would otherwise do. Smaller trees were individually sprayed and will be removed by the GRCA later.

“It will be three years before the area can be planted with new native trees again, just to be sure that all the buckthorn is gone,” Campbell explained. Assuming there are not too many berries on the dead buckthorn, the buckthorn will be chipped by GRCA staff. The area will then be replanted with native trees by volunteers. This gives the young native trees the best chance of survival.

Buckthorn goals

“On a property like Dumfries our goal is not to eliminate buckthorn. We would like to eliminate it, but it is very widespread. Instead, we want to minimize its impacts within a smaller area,” explains GRCA forester Ron Wu-Winter. “On other properties where buckthorn levels are very low, eliminating or maintaining it may be a realistic goal.” It is easier to keep it in check when it is growing sparsely.

The GRCA’s first large-scale buckthorn removal project was in 2011 at the Apps’ Mill



Students from Bishop Macdonell Catholic High School cut down buckthorn near their school in Guelph. They put plastic “buckthorn baggies” on two tree stumps in the foreground to prevent sunlight from getting to the root.



Photo by Janet Baine

Restoration specialist Lindsay Campbell is pleased with the progress made by native trees, such as the Kentucky coffee tree, that were planted by volunteers at Dumfries Conservation Area.

Black Oak Savannah site in Brant County, recalls restoration specialist Kevin Tupman. This is now a very unique ecological habitat.

Work on buckthorn removal has also taken place at Luther Marsh and in newly planted forest areas at Guelph Lake Park. At the same time, it has grown out of control in some places within the park.

“Where buckthorn and other invasive woody shrubs begin to grow in sensitive grassland and prairie habitats, these sites are a priority for control. Otherwise, it can start taking over an adjacent forest,” Tupman said.

Unfortunately, invasive species removal is not within the GRCA’s budget, so funding must be found before any project is undertaken.

“Donors and our partners pay for the buckthorn removal. We are really grateful for this, because it is important to local ecology,” Tupman said. These donations usually come through assistance from the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

Native buckthorn

Alder-leaved buckthorn is the native species of buckthorn, but it is quite different from European buckthorn. It only grows about a metre tall and it stays in wet areas, close to wetlands. It may be hard to identify, as there are several similar shrubs which grow in wet areas alongside it.

European buckthorn, on the other hand, grows in a wide range of conditions and can grow up to six metres tall.

Learn to identify buckthorn

If you see small buckthorn trees on your land, remove them. Birds love the small berries that contain seeds, so try to remove the small trees before late summer when they have berries. The plants are much easier to remove when they are small.

Priority should be given to removing female trees, because these ones produce berries and spread faster. Male buckthorn plants don’t produce berries.

Once they are bigger, the buckthorn roots need to be removed or the trees need to be treated. The area can be replanted once the buckthorn has been taken out.

Trees for Guelph has an innovative program that has been working very well. When city residents bring a European buckthorn root from their yard to a tree planting event, they are given a native tree to replace it.



Walter Muma

Invasive buckthorn is spread by birds that eat the berries.

Second year for Belwood Lake osprey cam

By Janet Baine

GRCA Communications specialist

The GRCA is expecting that the Belwood Lake osprey webcam will be up and running in early April for the second year.

Between April and September, this live webcam is above a nest near the entrance to Belwood Lake Park. It captivated viewers in 2015 when it operated for the first time.

The adult birds tended to their young under the watchful eye of viewers far and near. Within 24 hours of the GRCA Facebook posting about the webcam, 19,000 people had been reached.

Collectively, 3.7 million minutes were spent tuned in to the osprey cam – that is seven years of viewing time with up to 150 people watching at a time. A YouTube chat provided the opportunity for viewers to share their thoughts and a private Facebook page sprung up, as often happens with wildlife cams.

The adult birds are expected back at this nest again in early April. The camera will be turned on once the adults come back.

Watching is a way to connect with nature and learn about birds. However, be forewarned — this unfiltered look into nature is not always easy for viewers to

WHAT'S HAPPENING

watch. Ospreys and their young face many dangers, including harsh weather, predators, food shortage, disease, pollution and the challenges of learning to fly. The GRCA has developed an intervention policy, which is posted on the osprey webpage.

The young birds will not be named by the GRCA this year, although we recognize that some viewers who tune in regularly may come up with their own names.

Ospreys eat only fish, which they break into small pieces and feed to their young until the birds are skilled enough to feed themselves. The Grand River provided very well for these birds last year. There are several nests at Belwood Lake.

Increase interest in birds

“It is hoped that the web cam will inspire people to get out and explore nature and learn more about birds. This can be done by joining a local naturalists club or by participating in bird monitoring activities such as the Great Backyard Bird Count or the Christmas Bird Count,” said Tony Zammit, aquatic and terrestrial ecologist

with the GRCA.

Ospreys mate for life and return to the same nest year after year. The osprey parents at the nest by the park entrance at Belwood Lake are an experienced breeding pair that have likely raised many families at this nest.

This camera operates 24/7; however, the broadcast signal may be disrupted due to technical difficulties.

The camera setup allows viewers to review nest activities over the previous four hours.

Check www.grandriver.ca/osprey to find the link to the webcam once it goes live.

If you do visit Belwood Lake and spot the nest, please keep your distance and do not disturb the birds.

Donors can contribute to this program through the Grand River Conservation Foundation at www.grcf.ca.

Osprey timeline

Early April: Adults arrive at the nest

Late April: Eggs start to appear

Late May: Eggs begin to hatch

June: Young become more independent

Mid to late July: First short flight of hatchlings

August: Less and less time on the nest

September: Camera will be turned off when the osprey migrate



Photo by Kevin Tupman

The female osprey at Belwood Lake hovers close to the two young in the nest in 2015.

Crusader for rural women discussed at annual Heritage Day workshop

By **Melissa Larion**
GRCA Policy Planner

About 200 heritage enthusiasts attended the 19th annual Heritage Day Workshop in February to celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of Dumfries Township.

Karen Richardson, curator for the Haldimand County Museum, gave the audience a look at the history of women from the 18th century to present day with an emphasis on the women who made Dumfries Township their home. She took the audience on a biographical journey through the life and times of Adelaide Hunter Hoodless (1857-1910), undoubtedly one of the most famous Canadian women in history. Adelaide or “Addie” was born and raised in Dumfries Township on a farm outside the village of St. George. She attended German School as a child and later studied at Ladies

College in Brantford where she met her husband, John Hoodless. After leaving the farm and heading to her marital home in Hamilton, she had four children.



Hunter Hoodless

One of her sons, John Harold, died at a young age from ingesting unpasteurized, contaminated milk. Stricken with grief, Hoodless led a movement for mandatory pasteurization of dairy products. She also devoted her life to advocacy for domestic science education, which later was renamed home economics.

Hoodless was a strong supporter of rural women and their children. She felt that by empowering mothers to properly manage hygiene and the nutrition of a household, lives of children like her son could be saved and made better.

Her advocacy eventually led to the development of two Faculties of Domestic Science at the Macdonald Institute in Guelph (now part of the University of Guelph) and

in Quebec (now a campus of McGill University). The development of these faculties gave countless women the opportunity to gain a higher education that they would not have had otherwise.

Hoodless is noted as the founder of the Women’s Institute, YWCA, National Council of Women and the Victorian Order of Nurses.

Her homestead near St. George was designated a National Historic Site in 1995 and is now a museum open to the public. It is on Blue Lake Road in Brant County.

The Heritage Day Workshop was held at Forward Church in Cambridge and emceed by local broadcaster Joe Pavia. Many topics were discussed by the workshop’s presenters, including the ecological and cultural history of the township, heritage architecture and notable individuals from Dumfries Township.

The Heritage Day Workshop is held in a different part of the watershed each year. It is hosted by the Grand Strategy Heritage Working Group and municipalities in support of the Grand River’s Canadian Heritage River designation.



An early domestic science class.

MILESTONE

50 years ago: April 6, 1966

An Act of the Ontario Legislature was proclaimed law on April 6, 1966, and resulted in the amalgamation of the Grand River Conservation Commission (formed in 1934) and the Grand Valley Conservation Authority (formed in 1948).

The law brought them together to form the Grand River Conservation Authority that we know today.

They amalgamated in 1966 and are the two founding organizations of the Grand River Conservation Authority.

At that time Guelph Lake, Brant Park, Shade’s Mills and the Elora Quarry parks were not yet formed, while Laurel Creek was planned for 1967. Elm trees were being removed during the winters due to Dutch elm disease.

TAKING ACTION



Photo by Kevin Tupman

A oxeye sunflower is among the native flowers that the GRCA adds into the seed mix and could be seen blooming in the new meadow created by volunteers at Laurel Creek Park this summer.

Bees will love new meadow at Laurel Creek Park

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

This summer a new native meadow will come up blooming at Laurel Creek Park.

Volunteers did the planting last fall after the ground was prepared by GRCA staff, and the volunteers received gardening tips along the way.

Unlike creating other types of habitat, such as a forest that takes decades to develop, a meadow becomes excellent habitat within months, depending on the season when it is

planted. It is also becoming more common for the GRCA to create meadows and then use them as the foundation for tree planting.

“In my mind we really need more meadows. It is great pollinator habitat – bees love it along with other native pollinators and birds. People can also do this in their own backyards on a smaller scale. Once the invasive plants are suppressed and replaced with native plants, it is a low-maintenance landscape. It doesn’t require watering or fertilizers,” explained Moritz Sanio, a GRCA staff member who worked on this project.

“This meadow was a swath of weeds and goldenrod going through the park. We decided to use it to create access to a trailhead and bring back a useful ecosystem. We also saw the educational potential of this project,” said park superintendent Chris Murray.

There is a very big difference between putting in a conventional garden and a native garden.

How to create a meadow

The first step to create a native meadow is to shift the equilibrium of the ecosystem to give native plants a competitive advantage. That is where the hard work comes in. Invasive plants need to be controlled, which often means physically removing them. It may take a full growing season to get them out.

The next step is to lay down lots of wood chips which tend to reduce soil fertility. This gives native species a leg up over non-native invasive plants.

No compost or other fertilizers are added to improve the soil, because native plants don’t need rich soil.

“Working with native plants is easy. You don’t use fertilizers or compost. You want a lean soil, because that’s what native plants need and non-native plants or weeds despise,” Sanio said.

“I love doing this with volunteers because for me it is spreading the gospel of native species,” Sanio said. “A lot of the information is foreign to volunteers and it’s counter-



Photo by Moritz Sanio

Students sow seeds on the snowy landscape at Guelph Lake Park. Winter is an ideal time to spread native wildflower seeds mixed with sawdust, because the seeds are easily seen and in nature, winter is when seeds are spread.

intuitive not to add compost or fertilizer to a garden.”

Much of our gardening literature and history is based on the European model. It's a paradigm shift not to dig up the soil or add compost or add extra water.

Volunteers, organized through the GRCA volunteer program, spread woodships and seeds and planted plugs last fall. Sanio said winter can also be an ideal time to spread the seeds of native plants, because that is what happens in nature.

New trail at Laurel

The meadow at Laurel Creek is part of a larger project that involved many partners. A new 450 metre section of trail was added that includes a boardwalk through a wetland. The boardwalk is safer for traffic as well as trail users within the park.

A kiosk with interpretive signs will be installed around the time that the park opens to describe the meadow and explain to people the benefits of this type of habitat.

The Rotary Club of Kitchener-Grand River provided both hands-on and financial assistance for the trail that runs in and around the meadow. Steed and Evans Limited, an engineering and construction company in St. Jacobs, provided the aggregate material for the trail. This assistance was facilitated by the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

Two trail events to raise funds

The Rotary Club offers two events: the first is the **Mudpuppy Chase on May 1** that sees 1,500 runners starting and ending races of varying lengths at Laurel Creek.

The **Mudpuppy Trail Run on Sept. 10** takes place entirely within Laurel Creek. Together these two events helped raise \$70,000 for the local community last year. Some of the proceeds of the races go to trail improvements at Laurel Creek. Check out www.mudpuppychase.com for information and registration for these events. Runs are three to 10 km in length.

Volunteer Week April 10 to 16

Thank you to our volunteers. If you would like to find out more about volunteer opportunities with the GRCA, check www.grandriver.ca/volunteer or call Bronwen Buck at 519-621-2763, ext. 2239.



Photos by Janet Baine

Derek Lippert and JP Bartle paddle through Galt on their way to Lake Erie in 2015 while on the Grand River Adventure to raise money for tree planting.

Join Ayr's Grand River Adventure on the river April 10 to 16

By Janet Baine
GRCA communications specialist

For Derek Lippert and JP Bartle, a Grand River paddle is more than a simple diversion from the daily responsibilities of life.

For four years running, the pair has brought their canoe to the top of the Grand River and travelled all the way down to Port Maitland on Lake Erie, no matter what the weather or river conditions. They call the nearly 300 kilometre trip The Grand River Adventure. They do this to raise funds to plant trees and increase awareness of the local river. They received a 2015 Watershed Award and are hoping more people will join them when they paddle the river a fifth time in 2016.

This year's event takes place April 10 to 16, and the pair are looking for relay teams of six to eight people to dedicate a couple of days each in a relay paddle down the river. Contact 519-632-5218 or info@quietnature.ca if you are interested. To donate to this project, visit www.facebook.com/grandriveradventure

Both Lippert and Bartle are long-time paddlers accustomed to trips on pristine northern lakes and rivers. Lippert owns a landscaping firm, Quiet Nature, based in

WATERSHED AWARDS

Ayr, and Bartle is his landscape designer and right-hand man.

They take seven days, making this an arduous trip, because they cover a lot of river each day. They paddle through rain, snow, sunshine, dry conditions and spring floods.

“Every time it's like you're paddling on a different river,” said Bartle. At the start, the Grand is only a few metres wide. But near the mouth, the Grand is a big, broad river with speed boats and commercial vessels.

Their spring paddle depends a lot on the previous winter weather, the temperature and the amount of melting snow and rain flowing into the river. Some years there is ice and high water. Other years they walk the river bed at some locations, because there is not enough water.

The Grand River Adventure is well supported by family, friends and sympathetic strangers, as well as many sponsors. They have raised over \$15,000 for the Grand River Conservation Foundation to plant trees. This offsets the environmental footprint of the work that they carry out. They post photos, tweet and update their Facebook page at stops along the way.



A riverside stop

While the river is very urban, there are many stretches that are “absolutely beautiful,” and Bartle takes lots of photos along the way that reflect the spectacular beauty of the river. One year they published a photo book, and another they made a video. But they also see the impact of the carelessness of local residents.

“Our philosophy is to be as low-impact as we can in day-to-day activities on the job. If we are fueling machinery, we are very careful and we don’t leave waste on a site,” Bartle said.

Spending time observing nature means that when it is time to design water features or natural swimming areas, Bartle’s designs reflect natural land and river formations. They stick with native plants and trees and also restore tallgrass prairie habitat or stream banks. Trees and plants are thirsty, so vegetation soaks water into the soil and helps filter it so that it is cleaner by the time it enters the river. This is why planting trees is so important to improve the health of the river.

“Derek and JP have done a great job — not just of raising funds for tree planting, but also for raising the profile of the Grand River as a great natural resource in our community. Following their trip is very inspiring,” says Sara Wilbur, executive director of the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

Brantford’s Bob Scott always ready to lend a hand for the environment

If there is something going on in Brantford related to the Grand River, chances are Bob Scott has had a hand in it somewhere along the way.

Scott has been involved in many environmental initiatives since he moved to Brantford, and last fall he received a Watershed Award from the GRCA for his work.

“Thirty-five years ago when I moved to Brantford there was so much algae in the river that you could hardly paddle a canoe through it. The water has definitely gotten cleaner,” he said.

As a Scout leader, he organized the planting of 35,000 trees with ScoutTrees over several years. Sometimes he goes back to visit those trees and see how they are doing. He is also a member of the Brant Tree Coalition and the Earth Week team. Each spring he helps with planting events.

A long-time nature enthusiast, Scott’s river-related work really took off after he retired 14 years ago.

In 2004 to 2006, he was hired by the GRCA to be the Exceptional Waters coordinator and bring some attention to the stretch of the Grand River between Penmen’s Dam in Paris and Cockshutt Bridge in Brantford.

It is now rated as a top fishing spot. Each

fall the Grand River Spey Clave takes place at Brant Park and brings some of North America’s top anglers to town to show people new fishing techniques.

He also volunteers to teach students about the environment.

“I’m very impressed by some of the kids. I have faith that our young people will be able to do their best and carry on with river improvements. The kids from Pauline Johnson School put their heart and soul into planting trees,” he says. He joins the students and environmental studies teacher Tom Sitak when they plant trees and do stream restoration projects.

Recently he has been interested in the Mohawk Lake project, since there is now money to clean it up and improve access and river launches. Scott believes it is important for people to get out and enjoy the river so they also learn to care for it.

He is a guide and trainer for canoe outfitters and has done tallgrass prairie development and was part of the American Chestnut program.

“In Brantford, you can’t hardly see the river. Most people don’t know it is there,” he said, and yet it flows through the city and is important for recreation and ecology.

Monitoring projects he has worked on include bald eagle monitoring, a frog watch and the winter waterfowl count.



Photo by Tom Wilson

Bob Scott (right) demonstrates how to plant trees each spring in Brantford.

THE GRAND CALENDAR

Pollinator symposium, Saturday, April 2

Held at Dublin Street United Church in Guelph, by Pollination Guelph, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Registration includes lunch and two breaks. Check www.pollinationguelph.ca for details.

New Forest in the City Tree Planting, Brantford, Sunday, April 17

This project is in its fifth year and has seen the planting of over 47,000 trees. The goal is for the public to come and help plant another 10,000 native trees and shrubs in 2016, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. This event is led by the Brant Tree Coalition.

Rotary Forest Earth Week tree planting, Saturday, April 23

This annual Earth Week event is creating a 40-hectare forest at Guelph Lake Park. Bring your family, friends and a shovel if you have



Grab your family, your spade and help plant some trees.

one. There are also many family activities, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Brant County Community Tree Plant Event, Saturday, April 23

This annual tree planting event is led by the Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) at Paris District High School and will take place at Burford Lions Park at 2 p.m. The students are supported by the Brant Tree Coalition (made up of local volunteers, GRCA, City of Brantford, County of Brant and industry), Trout Unlimited and the Burford Lions Club.

Cache In Trash Out, Sunday, April 24

Help geocachers clean up Pinehurst Lake Park. Entry into the park is free, and bags, rubber gloves, maps and instructions are provided. Please bring your own GPS, work gloves and wear boots. Cachers will meet with the park staff near the beach area washrooms at 8 a.m., and someone will remain at this location until 2 p.m. so that volunteers can come and go during this time. Water and washrooms are available. Rain or shine.

More Information: www.geocaching.com

Upper Grand Trailway Tree Plant, Saturday, April 30

Come to the Grand Valley Trail on Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon, to help add trees along the Upper Grand Trailway. Planting starts at the trail entrance along County Road 25 in Grand Valley. Bring your own shovel. Please register with www.treesontario.ca Call 1-877-646-1193 for information.

Forests Ontario Tree Planting, Saturday, May 7

This family-friendly event at Snyder Flats, Bloomingdale offers participants the chance to directly support their community in a local reforestation project at 10 a.m. It takes place rain or shine and participants are asked to bring a shovel, gardening gloves and a lot of energy. Trees Ontario and the GRCA supply the rest.

Shimano Take a Kid Fishing Day, Saturday, May 7

Kids 8 to 14 and their parents can learn fishing techniques from the pros at Belwood Lake Park. Space is limited to 120 kids in the morning and afternoon sessions. Registration is required by emailing belwoodlakepark@grandriver.ca the child's with first and last name.

Mother's Day in the Park, May 8

Admission is free at Rockwood, Elora Gorge and Guelph Lake parks on Mother's Day Sunday. Bring Mom out for a day in the park.

For updates and more events, visit

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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