



75 YEARS OF

# RECREATION & EDUCATION



Grand River Conservation Authority www.grandriver.ca

## The PAST

Recreation was a priority even back in 1934 when the Grand River Conservation Commission was ready to start building dams to solve the problems with river flows. As soon as the first dam, Shand Dam, opened in 1942, people started to visit the new reservoir. Cottages were built along part of the reservoir. By the 1950s, there was a parking lot where people could stop for a picnic. The Grand Valley Conservation Authority was formed in 1948, partly to develop a watershed-wide recreational plan.



### 1954

After WWII, car sales skyrocketed, the economy boomed and everyone wanted to pack the family and a picnic into their car and spend the day close to the water. Elora Gorge Conservation Area was the first conservation area in the province when it opened in 1954. It was the beginning of a network of conservation areas across the province. An aggressive program to create both conservation areas and provincial parks got underway in 1954.

### Two instant parks

Brant Conservation Area near Brantford was nicknamed an "instant park" when it opened in 1971 to 30,000 visitors and their 7,000 vehicles. They arrived for the National Campers and Hikers Association Campvention. This event provided enough funds to kick-start the services. It took only 18 months to complete the park. Guelph Lake Conservation Area started in the same way in 1979.



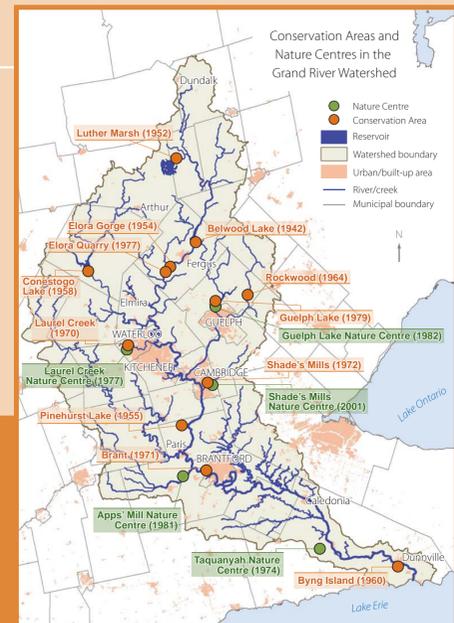
### A Canadian Heritage River

The Grand River system was the first river in an urbanized area to be designated as a Canadian Heritage River in 1994. This brought new attention to

the historic and recreational value of local waterways. Many community groups have worked to improve river access, plant trees, clean up the river and preserve the history of the river system.

## Where

are the conservation areas and nature centres and when did they open?



There are five permanent Nature Centre facilities and twelve Conservation Areas.



- camping
- fishing
- boating
- canoeing
- skiing
- swimming
- picknicking
- snowshoeing
- hiking
- tubing
- birding
- cycling



## The PRESENT

- With more than 2,500 campsites at eight conservation areas that offer camping, the GRCA is the second largest operator of campgrounds in the province – second only to Ontario Parks. The conservation areas are self-supporting and generate enough revenue to cover operating costs. They receive more than a million paid visits annually.
- Tubing started in 1997 at Elora Gorge and more than 18,000 people a year don the gear and travel two kilometres to experience the natural beauty of the gorge from the river.
- Four rail-trails, totaling 75 km, offer off-road cycling and hiking mostly along the waterways. They are available year-round free of charge.
- The Grand River is rated Ontario's top fly fishing river and Whitemans Creek (near Brantford) is second of 10 rated by Canadian Fly Fisher Magazine. Some stretches of the river are internationally recognized for trout, bass and walleye.
- Lots of small businesses and organizations have sprung up to support recreation such as fishing, canoeing, camping, cycling, hiking and birding.

## The FUTURE

The GRCA works with our many partners to improve recreational facilities, river access points and tourism information about the countless recreational opportunities close to home.

### Community and Family Programs

Families can visit conservation areas and nature centres for an owl prowl, to learn about pond life or even go snow shoeing. Kids can have "environmental birthday parties" at these centres and there are many special programs such as summer and March break environmental day camps and conservation badge programs for Scouting and Guiding groups.



## Outdoor education at GRCA Nature Centres

### When people enjoy the outdoors, they also learn about it.

For many years, people weren't taught about the environment in school. They didn't learn how important natural systems are or that each living creature has a unique and important place within an ecosystem. In fact, they didn't even learn what ecosystems were until university!



View of Laurel Creek Nature Centre and green roof

During the 1970s, educators and environmentalists thought that all children needed to learn about the environment so they could become

adults who respect and care for nature. And the best way to learn about the outdoors, is to be outdoors. This is why the GRCA's nature centres started. In the early 1970s, pilot outdoor education programs started at Laurel Creek, Belwood and Apps' Mill. There were not yet any permanent structures and the programs were often in portable classrooms.

Today, the GRCA has five permanent nature centre buildings and works with all the school boards in the watershed. Every student now learns about the environment in school and they also visit nature centres. The students learn to understand and appreciate the natural environment so they will grow up with the ability to solve environmental problems.

