

The GRAND

GRAND RIVER
CONSERVATION
AUTHORITY
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Restoring biodiversity

A rich, diverse ecosystem makes our watershed and our communities healthier

By Janet Baine, GRCA Communications Specialist

Throughout history, humans have been changing the Grand River watershed, but the pace of that change is speeding up and has had a big impact on plants and animals.

Species that were common in the Grand River watershed a few centuries ago are gone or disappearing and the watershed is poorer for their loss.

"We can't separate humans from biodiversity — we're part of that. We've helped shape it and therefore we can't deny that we need to be stewards of the land and biodiversity in the future," said Martin Neumann, the supervisor of terrestrial resources at the GRCA.

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“Human activity is causing the diversity of life on Earth to be lost at a greatly accelerated rate. These losses are irreversible, impoverish us all and damage the life support systems we rely on every day. But we can prevent them.”

- United Nations statement declaring 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity

Along the Grand

Six habitats

Learn about six key habitat types in the Grand River watershed.

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GRCA budget

Infrastructure spending boosts the GRCA budget.

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Donor support

Donors to the Grand River Conservation Foundation have helped build biodiversity

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THE GRAND RIVER

A Canadian Heritage River



The GRCA

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A Message FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND THE CAO



The United Nations has declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity, urging people around the world to "celebrate life and earth and the value of biodiversity for our lives."

The word "biodiversity" is only a few decades old. It was coined to describe the many living things – plants, animals, birds, insects and others – that inhabit a particular area or region.

But the word conveys ideas that go beyond a simple list of species. It's used to describe the complex web of interactions that sustain all of those living things because, in nature, everything is connected to everything else.

When the GRCA was founded in 1934, it was charged with the responsibility of addressing two big problems: flooding and low flows. The solution was to build dams that would create reservoirs where water could be stored during spring flood season and released during dry months.

But there was recognition right from the beginning that managing water also means managing land. Forests and wetlands play an important role in moderating the flow of water over the course of the year. So as Shand, Conestogo, Luther and other reservoirs were built, tens of thousands of trees were planted around them.

Though it was not a primary goal, reforestation paid additional benefits by boosting biodiversity. Species that had been pushed out or decimated by human encroachment found the new forests to be hospitable places to take up residence.

Over the years the GRCA has acquired more than 20,000 hectares (50,000 acres) of land – about three per cent of the entire Grand River watershed. It now manages that land with an eye to protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

The GRCA has planted more than 26 million trees since it was founded. Many other individuals, groups, municipalities and agencies have also contributed to reforestation. Natural regeneration has played a part, too, in raising forest cover to 19 per cent, from just five per cent a century ago.

The Luther Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Dufferin County at the north end of the watershed has become one of the largest wetland complexes in Southern Ontario. Parts of the Dunnville Marsh, at the southern end of the river, have been acquired by the GRCA which is working to expand the marsh by naturalizing former farm fields.

By working with rural landowners and farmers through the watershed, many thousand of trees and shrubs have been planted along rivers and streams, to create riparian buffers that protect water quality.

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Municipalities and the province have spent tens of millions of dollars to improve sewage treatment plants which has led to a rebound in water quality, to the benefit of fish, bugs and other aquatic species.

The result of this work is a healthier, more robust and more resilient watershed. The proof is visible in the sight of bald eagles soaring above the river, a spectacle denied to watershed residents for too many decades.

It's also visible in the presence of hikers, canoeists, anglers and others who see the natural areas of the Grand River watershed as key components in the quality of life they enjoy. Healthy natural areas make our communities healthy as well.

There are some significant challenges ahead of us, though. Growing population, intensive agriculture, the arrival of invasive species and other factors mean that it is becoming harder to protect the advances we have made, let alone extend them.

There is the fact, as well, that it is not easy or cheap to undertake the work needed to protect and enhance natural areas. Competition for limited resources for all of society's needs means that not as much can be invested in biodiversity as many of us would like.

Still, the good news is that today there is a much greater appreciation of the importance of protecting biodiversity. The GRCA is but one of the many organizations – public and private – that are committed to maintaining and protecting the natural systems of the Grand River watershed.

Despite these challenges we can take comfort in the fact that we have already made incredible progress in the Grand River watershed. There is every reason to believe that we can continue down the path to a greener, healthier and more biodiverse watershed.



Alan Dale
Alan Dale
Chairman



Paul Emerson
Paul Emerson
Chief Administrative Officer

The municipality where you live appoints one or more representatives to the GRCA board to oversee the budget and activities of the conservation authority.

Townships of Amaranth, East Garafraxa, East Luther Grand Valley, Melancthon, Southgate: Tom Nevills

Townships of Wellington North and Mapleton: Pat Salter

Township of Centre Wellington: Shawn Watters

Town of Erin, Townships of Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch: Brad Whitcombe

City of Guelph: Vicki Beard, Mike Salisbury

Regional Municipality of Waterloo: (Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich) – Jane Brewer, Kim Denouden, Jean Haalboom, Ross Kelterborn, Claudette Millar, Jane Mitchell (GRCA 1st vice-chair), Wayne Roth, Jake Smola, Bill Strauss, Lynne Woolstencroft

WHO SPEAKS FOR YOU?

Town of North Perth, Township of Perth East: George Wicke

Regional Municipality of Halton: (Halton Hills and Milton) – Barry Lee

City of Hamilton: Jeanette Jamieson

County of Oxford: (Blandford-Blenheim, East Zorra-Tavistock, Norwich) – Alan Dale (GRCA chair)

City of Brantford: Robert Hillier, Vic Prendergast (GRCA 2nd vice-chair)

County of Brant: Robert Chambers, Brian Coleman

Haldimand and Norfolk counties: Lorne Boyko, Craig Grice

UN declaration highlights threats to natural systems

Continued from Page 1

To draw attention to the loss of species and biodiversity, the United Nations has declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity. Just as world leaders are worried about the biodiversity crisis, so are many people within the Grand River watershed who understand the connection between humans and nature.

One measure of the challenge is the increasing number of Species at Risk to be found in the watershed.

These are plants and animals that lived here 150

years ago and are now in danger of extinction or of disappearing from the province or the watershed. Once it is classified as "at risk," a species is added to the list of Species At Risk in Ontario.

Some are creatures that get a fair amount of attention, such as the bald eagle and the Jefferson salamander.

But it is important to remember that species at risk is only one aspect of biodiversity. The pesky mosquito is food to many and taken-for-granted cattails help remove contaminants from water. All of these living organisms are food or habitat upon which other animals, plants and insects depend.

Invasive species upset balance

One biodiversity challenge is the many new species that have been brought here from other places. Tulips and rhododendron are not

likely to leave a backyard and take over a natural area, but plants such as garlic mustard, phragmites and periwinkle. They take over the habitat of native species and in so doing, leave other native plants and animals without food or shelter.

Shrinking gene pool

As the size and quality of a habitat degrades, the number of individuals within a species decreases. This means the gene pool becomes very small. If one habitat area is cut off from others due to roads or development, individuals can't move from place to place, so the gene pool is weakened.

Lack of diversity within a species means it is less able to combat the challenges of change, including climate change. The same things that affect bugs, trees and fish have an impact on humans: availability of clean water, fresh air, nutritious food and finding a good place to live.

Everything is connected. The health of biodiversity affects people. What we do as individuals affects biodiversity — everything we do either uses natural resources or returns them as waste. The amount of land and resources that a population or a person uses is called an ecological footprint. As we build on, transform and use more of the land around us, some species are losing their homes, their health and their ability to adapt and survive.

Neumann jokes that his list of the top ten actions to improve biodiver-



GRCA employees prepare nuts for planting in a former farm field near Dunnville that has been renaturalized. Restoring land to a more natural state is an important way to protect and improve biodiversity.

sity is one action repeated 10 times: reduce your ecological footprint. On a global scale, this means using less resources, including fuel, transportation, water, the size of your living space, and thinking carefully before you purchase new items.

Change is natural — nothing in nature is static and it never has been. Before settlers came, the Upper Grand was cleared of beavers due to the fur trade which changed waterways and the creatures that lived there. A war between the native groups around 1650 left fewer people in the Grand River watershed for 150 years, leading to lots of time for forests to grow up and change the landscape.

Looking to the future

But since European settlement, humans have inundated the local ecosystem with change, overwhelming it.

"We can't go back to some fantasy untouched place from 300 years ago. Firstly, because there never was a static, untouched place and secondly, because we've irreversibly changed the ecosystem," Neumann said.

This may sound like a dire message, but many improvements are

already taking place that make the watershed more biodiverse and bring back lost habitat where plants and animals can live. Humans have learned more about the natural world and we can do more to preserve biodiversity.

Neumann looks to the future with an eye to the past for guidance. This tells him we need to plant more trees, protect and recreate wetlands and enhance naturalized areas. Techniques are evolving to

make improvements to accommodate both humans and the natural world.

This is not just a kind-hearted gesture to help out our fellow creatures, although that is part of it.

We do it for the survival of our economy and our own health and wellbeing.

In the end, we do it for our own survival, because we are part of the web of life and entirely dependent upon it.



Renaturalizing a stream channel, such as Mill Creek in the Cambridge-Guelph area, improves habitat for more species.



'We've irreversibly changed the ecosystem.'

Martin Neumann,
GRCA Supervisor of
Terrestrial Resources



Snapshots of six Grand habitats

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

Fish, bug, trees, animals, birds, humans — everything needs a good place to live.

But for many species, a home may be hard to find or hard to keep. Habitat loss and degradation are among the biggest challenges to biodiversity in the Grand River watershed. Habitat is being lost or transformed as humans change the landscape.

It is clear that if you take a fish out of water, it isn't going to last long, but the connection between habitat and life is not as clear for many other species, or has been overlooked. Experts are learning more all the time about the uniqueness of the match between a species, other species in its community and the overall habitat.

Each species has adapted to a unique home, based on factors such as soil type, available food, what else lives in the area, climate and availability of water. The thousands of species of the

Grand River watershed are so diverse and interconnected that it is a complicated task to understand their relationships.

The more we learn about the habitat needs of each species, the more changes we can make to restore it. This will keep or even improve biodiversity in the watershed. There are at least 229 species in the watershed that are considered rare. Of these, 74 are listed as species at risk in Ontario.

About the numbers

The total of the size of various ecosystems is more than 100 per cent due to overlap. For example, a wetland may also include a forest, or an urban area may include a wetland.

Rivers and streams



The Grand was once shunned as a place for recreation but is now considered a species-rich fishing waterway.

Streams and rivers are the connectors in the web of life, because they carry water from place to place. They are the link between natural areas such as forests and wetlands, just as roads are the link between communities. Many streams have been turned into drains or altered so they are no longer productive habitat.

The water quality declines as rivers pass through urban areas and intensive farming country. This is a challenge for the living creatures that live there.

The good news is that there are numerous ways to reduce pollution and improve water quality. Sewage plant upgrades can make a big difference. On a smaller scale, renaturalizing a creek can help, too. In one creek tested four years after improvements were made, 55 per cent more fish were found and the number of species increased from 10 to 15.

River facts

- **Historic size:** The total length of mapped waterways is about 11,000 kilometres. Many small creeks and streams have disappeared or shrunk due to urbanization or farm drainage practices.
- **Strategy:** Naturalize stream corridors where practicable by planting buffer trees and shrubs, restoring stream beds, removing small dams.
- **Species at risk:** 22 – bald eagle, eastern sand darter, reidside dace, queen snake.

Open water facts

- **Historic size:** 5 square kilometres
- **Current size:** 29 square kilometres
- **Strategy:** Manage reservoirs to provide some of the same processes as lost natural areas, e.g. forests and wetlands.
- **Species at risk:** 4 – black tern, Forster's tern, bald eagle, Fowler's toad (shoreline)

While other types of habitat have declined, humans have increased the area of open water due to reservoirs, dramatically increasing this type of habitat. Quarrying has also led to a small increase in open waters.

The seven reservoirs operated by the GRCA perform the functions that were once naturally provided by wetlands and forests. They hold back flood waters in the spring, saving millions of dollars in damages. They also ensure there is sufficient water in the summer and fall to keep rivers flowing.

The open waters have also increased recreational opportunities, since people love to swim, fish, boat, lie on sandy beaches and enjoy the vista of open water from nearby trails and forests. Turning the land around the reservoirs into a natural landscape has helped provide diverse habitat.

But reservoirs have been both good and bad for biodiversity. Reservoirs create more than open water — their entire ecosystem brings biodiversity throughout the year.

Their fluctuating levels create temporary shore bird habitat. Water stored in the reservoir warms up, which has an adverse impact on aquatic life.



Bald eagle

Wetlands



Luther Marsh, at the north end of the Grand River, is one of the largest wetland complexes in Southern Ontario.

Wetlands are one of the most biodiverse of all habitats in the Grand River watershed, because they are the meeting place of land and water.

They are found in pockets of different sizes. Among natural areas, wetlands provide a high level of "ecosystem services" such as water regulation, waste treatment, food production and recreation. It's been estimated that those services are worth about \$22,000 per hectare per year, which would make the combined value of the watershed wetlands about \$1.4 billion. Most of this value is provided by the biodiversity of the wetlands — the combination of all the plants, fish, insects, amphibians, birds and mammals that do a job that we hardly notice.

That's why it is so important to protect existing wetlands. Removing things from wetlands that should not be there helps increase biodiversity. Leaving existing vegetation around a wetland undisturbed, or planting new vegetation, will help protect the wetland. Lost wetlands can be recreated, and the GRCA is doing this successfully in some locations, including Luther Marsh at the north end of the watershed and Dunnville Marsh near Lake Erie.



A GRCA employee conducts a species count in a wetland at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area.

Wetland facts

- **Historic size:** 1,840 square kilometres – 27%
- **Current size:** 644 square kilometres – 10%
- **Strategy:** Protect existing wetlands and recreate former wetlands where possible
- **Species at risk:** 14 – king rail, least bittern, Hill's pondweed, small white lady's slipper

Forests



Planting trees at the Guelph Rotary Forest. The watershed forest has rebounded significantly in the past 75 years.

When the early settlers arrived two centuries ago they found a watershed that was essentially one large forest.

However, by the turn of the 20th century, forest cover had declined to about six per cent as land was cleared for farms and settlements. Now after many decades of tree planting and natural regeneration, forests cover about 19 per cent of the watershed.

Environment Canada recommends 30 per cent forest cover for a healthy watershed. The GRCA and its partners are planting 451,000 trees this year. Tree locations and species are carefully selected to have the biggest positive impact. For example, trees increase biodiversity when they are planted along a waterway, since they cool the water and allow more species of fish to live there.

Forests made up of diverse native trees attract a bigger variety of wildlife, insects and plants. These forests are also resilient and are likely better able to withstand disease and environmental damage.

For this reason, the GRCA encourages native plantings that are suitable to the climate zone. It has its own tree nursery where trees are grown from seeds that have been collected from the watershed.

Forest facts

- **Historic size:** 5,700 square kilometres – 85%
- **Current size:** 1,200 square kilometres – 19%
- **Strategy:** Plant trees to reach 2,000 square kilometres – 30%
- **Species at risk:** 29 – Acadian flycatcher, grey fox, American chestnut tree, green dragon wildflower

Grasslands



A grassland near Dunnville.

Prior to settlement, grasslands covered about 243 square kilometres in an egg-shaped area south of Cambridge. However, they were quickly turned to farm fields by early settlers. Today only a very tiny fraction of prairie and savanna communities remain.

Grasslands are a globally imperiled ecosystem and endangered in Canada. One way to manage grassland habitat is to hold prescribed burns, because many grasslands are fire-driven ecosystems.

This spring, prescribed burns covering 40 hectares took place at four locations to help enhance prairie and savanna habitat that depend on fire. The burns took place — at Snyder's Flats near Bloomingdale, Brant Conservation Area in Brantford, Apps' Mill Conservation Area west of Brantford and a parcel of land west of Paris.

The burns promote fire-dependent native prairie and savanna vegetation and create critical wildlife habitat. Fire tends to discourage non-native species and increases seed yields for native species, which have adapted to survive fires.



Prescribed burns are used to restore grasslands.

Grassland facts

- **Historic size:** 240 square kilometres – 3%
- **Current size:** tiny fragments in scattered pockets
- **Strategy:** Protect and enhance existing grasslands
- **Species at risk:** 19 – Henslow's sparrow, American badger, eastern hognose snake, bird's foot violet

Urban spaces



Urban green spaces such as Victoria Park in Kitchener are important habitats.

Backyards and urban spaces are an especially important habitat because this is where watershed residents can make a real difference. Though species at risk seldom call a backyard home, they can sometimes be found there.

What people see most frequently in urban areas, however, are generalist species, such as blue jays, cardinals, squirrels and raccoons. These are species that tolerate or even thrive in disturbed habitat and urban areas.

Backyards and other public spaces, such as schoolyards, parks and around factories and businesses, can be managed to improve biodiversity as a whole.

Carefully manicured lawns and gardens filled with exotic plants are becoming less common. New pesticide and watering restrictions help steer gardeners to native plants which promotes biodiversity.

Planting tulips, marigolds or vegetables is okay, since these are not going to move easily from the backyard to the nearby natural areas.

The thing that people should consider is whether their gardening practices will have a negative impact on nearby natural areas, by introducing invasive exotics like periwinkle and Norway maple.

What you can do in your own backyard:

- Provide a variety of short and tall native plant species
- Cut down or clear out plant growth in your garden in the spring, not fall. Plant material provides food and shelter for a variety of species during the winter months.
- Learn about the native and non-native plants in your yard and steer clear of invasive non-native plants such as gout weed, periwinkle and phragmites that may move into a natural area.
- Plant native species, but don't dig them out of a naturalized area to plant in your backyard. Instead buy them from a reputable nursery.
- Go on a native garden tour, learn about the native garden plants that do well, especially those that don't require lots of water

Urban space facts

- **Size:** About 6% of the watershed is urban space, with many backyards, parks and other green spaces
- **Species at risk:** 74 – cerulean warbler, red-shouldered hawk, common hop tree, prickly pear cactus

Spending on infrastructure boosts GRCA 2010 budget

The board of the Grand River Conservation Authority has approved a budget of just under \$33 million for 2010.

The budget covers the cost of GRCA programs that protect water quality, reduce flood damages, protect natural areas, support responsible development and provide outdoor recreation and environmental education.

The budget is about \$1.6 million greater than in 2009 but much of the increase is due to one-time stimulus grants from the federal and provincial governments for construction projects at conservation areas.

Revenues

The GRCA has three main sources of revenue:

■ **\$10 million (32 per cent)** from watershed municipalities. The municipalities raise the money through their general tax rates or through charges on their water bills. The municipal levy works out to

about \$9.68 per person.

■ **\$8 million (25 per cent)** from the provincial and federal governments. This includes regular operating grants, one-time capital grants under stimulus programs and money to pay for source water protection planning.

■ **\$13.4 million (43 per cent)** in self-generated revenue such as money from campground fees, planning fees, tree sales, hydroelectricity generation, rental property income and other sources.

Expenditures

The budget is broken down into four sections:

Base operating budget — \$18.6 million (57 per cent). This covers the ongoing programs of the GRCA including flood prevention, environmental education, planning advice to municipalities and landowners, operation of trails, forest management and others.

■ About \$1.4 million will be spent to complete a two-year

upgrade to the Conestogo Dam near Drayton to allow it to safely discharge more water during periods of extremely high flows.

Special Programs — \$2.1 million (6 per cent). One-time projects or continuing programs that are usually paid for with money from outside sources. They include:

■ \$700,000 for the Rural Water Quality Program which provides grants to rural landowners to take action to protect water quality on the farm. The money is provided by watershed municipalities.

■ \$300,000 to purchase environmentally sensitive land, covered by proceeds from earlier land sales.

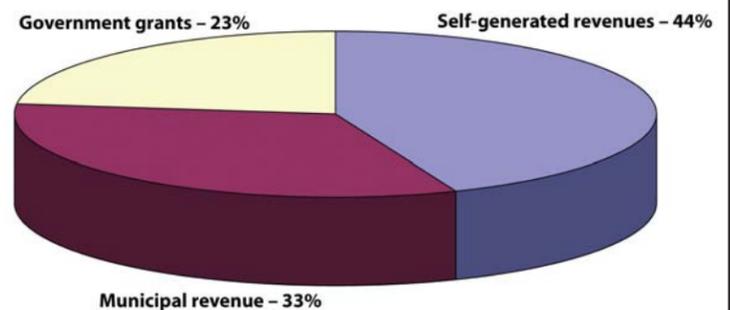
■ \$100,000 for a subwatershed study for the Upper Blair Creek area in the City of Kitchener, paid for by the city.

■ \$200,000 to continue an update of the Grand River Basin Water Management Study. This will look at three issues – water quality, water supply and flood control – on a watershed basis with an emphasis on addressing issues brought about by climate change and population growth. Municipalities, Six Nations and provincial and federal agencies are also participating in the program.

Conservation Area operations — \$8.2 million (25 per cent). Fees from park users cover the entire operating cost of the GRCA's 11 active conservation areas which draw more than one million paid visits a year. In 2010 this budget also includes \$2.1 million worth of infrastructure improvements at four parks. Of the total cost, about \$1.6 million is offset with grants from the provincial and federal governments.

Source Water Protection program — \$4.1 million (12 per cent). The cost of this program is covered entirely by provincial grants. The program is developing source water protection programs under the Clean Water Act in four watersheds – Grand River, Long Point Region, Catfish Creek and Kettle Creek – to implement recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry.

GRCA revenue sources



Where your money goes...

The municipalities of the Grand River watershed contribute about 33 per cent of GRCA revenues. The average cost per person for all watershed residents is about \$9.68 a year.

Here's how it will be spent in 2010:

\$968 used for:	Your cost in 2010:
✓ Watershed studies	\$0.04
✓ Resource inventory, environmental monitoring	\$1.60
✓ Flood forecasting & warning	\$0.72
✓ Flood & erosion control structures	\$1.97
✓ Floodplain regulation	\$0.59
✓ Resource management support cost	\$0.27
✓ Municipal plan input & review	\$0.33
✓ Private land tree planting, forestry	\$0.35
✓ Soil & water conservation, stream restoration	\$0.62
✓ Conservation information (Nature Centres & communications)	\$0.80
✓ Conservation land property taxes	\$0.15
✓ Administration/head office facilities	\$2.24

The per person cost was calculated by dividing the portion of the GRCA's total general municipal levy of \$9.19 million by the estimated number of residents (950,000) in the Grand River watershed. The \$9.68 was then applied to the net cost of the various GRCA program areas that are partially funded by municipalities.



Special events were held throughout 2009 to mark the 75th anniversary of the GRCA, including 'birthday parties' in many of the conservation areas.



Donna Cansfield (right), Minister of Natural Resources, receives a gift from GRCA Board Vice-Chair Jane Mitchell after Cansfield spoke at a special 75th anniversary meeting of the GRCA board in Brantford.



Award winners honoured by GRCA

Awards presented as part of 75th anniversary events

The GRCA has given out watershed awards each year since 1976 to recognize individuals, families, corporations and groups that have made a tangible contribution to the preservation and improvement of the Grand River watershed and its natural heritage.

The Watershed Awards are presented for outstanding conservation and environmental work.

The 2009 awards were presented at a ceremony at the GRCA office in Cambridge in October as part of the GRCA's 75th Anniversary Open House.

In some years, a special Honour Roll Award is given to those who have a sustained record of achievement over an extended period of time.

Honour Roll Award

Peter Krause, St. George

The top honour in 2009 went to Peter Krause for 21 years of passionate commitment to the Grand River.

Lorraine Bergstrand, former GRCA vice-chair and Haldimand mayor, noted in her nomination that Krause's commitment to environmental conservation has been displayed locally, nationally and internationally.

"Peter was a visionary, a diligent worker, a solutions-oriented leader," she wrote on her nomination form.

A second nominator, GRCA board member Lynne Woolstencroft, said that "throughout his over two decades of service, Peter advocated for the river, for its habitat, for the parks, for the cleaning up of the river so that fish and birds could be reintroduced and thrive."

Krause became a GRCA board member in 1986 representing the Region of Waterloo. He quickly rose to leadership positions, serving as chair of the GRCA for nine years. He also chaired Conservation Ontario, representing all conservation authorities across the province.

He was the GRCA's representa-



The 2009 Grand River Conservation Award recipients prepare to cut the cake and help celebrate the GRCA's 75th anniversary at the awards presentation ceremony. From left are Les Kuczynski (Blount Canada of Guelph), Paul Emerson (CAO of the GRCA), Norm Lundvall of Guelph, Honour Roll

recipient Peter Krause, Alan Dale (chair of GRCA board), Dave Sitak of Brantford, Mike Emeneau (Speed River Chapter of Trout Unlimited), and Murray Schlueter of Wellesley.

tive in 2000 when it received the Thies Riverprize in Australia, an award for the best-managed river in the world. Since that time, Krause has remained a river advocate on the international scene, currently serving as executive director of the International Rivers Foundation, based in Australia.

Honour Roll awards are not given out every year.

Watershed Awards

Murray Schlueter, Wellesley

Schlueter is a long-time guardian of bluebirds. During 2009 alone he ensured that 42 baby birds took to the skies from bluebird boxes he built and oversees.

Schlueter has played a role in bringing these shy birds back from

the brink of extinction by installing the boxes throughout Wellesley Township over many years.

Thomas Sitak, Brantford

Tom Sitak teaches environmental courses at Pauline Johnson Collegiate and Vocational Institute in Brantford. Many of his students have been inspired to take up environmental work.

Sitak and his students have worked since 1994 to improve D'Aubigny Creek, undertaking numerous projects to increase their understanding of the natural world as they also take measure to rehabilitate the creek. More recently, they have planted 4,000 trees along Silver Creek in a suburban neighbourhood. He even has a trout hatchery in his classroom.

Norman Lundvall, Guelph

Norm Lundvall has helped the Grand River Conservation Foundation raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for GRCA projects.

He has the distinction of being the longest serving volunteer in the history of the foundation, having served for 36 years as a director.

He is also a past president of the foundation and has chaired most of the organization's committees.

Blount Canada, Guelph

Blount has paved the way in developing corporate landscaping practices that are environmentally sound and are a model for other corporations.

About 20 years ago the company opted to disconnect its irrigation system and stopped using pesti-

cides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. Native species were planted in company gardens. It worked with the City of Guelph and the GRCA to improve other land near the north end factory.

Trout Unlimited Canada – Speed Valley Chapter, Guelph

This enthusiastic group is bringing trout back to Marden Creek, an important tributary of the Speed River at the north end of Guelph.

The group started three years ago and they have naturalized the stream, taking ponds offline to cool the water so that trout can once again thrive in the creek.

The group has up to 40 people of a variety of ages and backgrounds who help on their workdays.





The GRAND RIVER CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Biodiversity builds healthy communities

Have you ever had a really, really bad day?" asks Sara Wilbur, the executive director of the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

A day when you need to go for a walk in a natural area to see the sky, the open water and watch two ants try to carry something very large. Or, you need to throw a fishing line into a gurgling river until you are rejuvenated by holding your ground against the current.

Wilbur and many donors to the Grand River Conservation Foundation know that natural places, especially in heavily populated areas, are important for emotional and physical health. They help people find balance in busy lives until we come to a place where our problems, whatever they are, shrink down to a manageable size as we focus instead on an aspect of the biodiversity around — it may be the song of a bird or the glimpse of a minnow in moving water. It may also be invigorating physical exercise and fresh air.

More companies and organizations recognize the restorative power of natural areas. Of nearly

Foundation donors help restore natural areas

\$700,000 in donations received by the Grand River Conservation Foundation in 2009 about \$425,000, or 60 per cent, was earmarked for habitat restoration. Some of this is from individuals but most is from organizations. In 2009, donor dollars were used to construct ponds, plant forests and hold prescribed burns so that fire-dependent natural areas can once again flourish.

"I think donor organizations see this not just as new forests, ponds and environmental projects, but more as building community resilience," explains Wilbur.



Wilbur

She works closely with Martin Neumann, the supervisor of terrestrial resources at the GRCA. Neumann heads a team of experts who know how to restore lost and degraded habitat to bring biodiversity back to the landscape. They also know where these changes will have the biggest positive impact for natural areas. Together they strive to find a balance between the needs of ecosystems and the people who use natural areas.

The foundation helps funnel donations to these projects and give plants, animals and aquatic species more places to live. It also gives the nearly one million watershed residents local places to experience the outdoors.

Tied to prosperity

Neumann and Wilbur both know that biodiversity and natural areas are tied to local prosperity. There is a direct link between a healthy landscape and a vibrant local economy. Healthy ecosystems absorb our waste, clean our air, clean our waters and provide productive soils to grow food. In the smaller scheme of personal finance, visiting a natural area helps us calm our nerves so we can unwind after a day of work.

You can help, too!

For more than 40 years, the Grand River Conservation Foundation has improved our quality of life by enriching the natural values of the Grand River watershed and encouraging people to enjoy, and to learn from, the great outdoors.

- For more information:
- Subscribe to RiverNews, the Foundation newsletter by signing up on www.grcf.ca
 - To donate, visit www.grcf.ca
 - Phone toll-free 1-877-29-GRAND
 - E-mail foundation@grandriver.ca



Foundation donations are going towards projects such as the Guelph Rotary Forest, now in the third year of a 12-year planting program that will create a 40-hectare forest just north of the Guelph Lake Nature Centre. This project, spearheaded by the Guelph Rotary Club, gets people planting trees and equally important, connecting with nature.

Other examples are Snyder's Flats in Bloomingdale where 40,000 trees have been planted and a Rotary Trail is being installed thanks to the Kitchener-Conestoga Rotary Club and the Fisher Mills Restoration project which has the backing of local residents who sought funding.

Funeral homes have been sup-

porting memorial forests for 25 years since the first one was established in Brantford. Wilbur looks forward to a day when each large community in the watershed will have its own memorial forest.

Individuals can also donate to plant a tree, usually to remember someone or to commemorate a special occasion.

"An individual or a family has the opportunity to leave a lasting green legacy on the landscape, whether they donate land or funds or both for restoration," Neumann said.

He and his team ensure these are transformed into top-notch habitat to increase biodiversity close to home.



Volunteers help plant trees around one of two new ponds built along Chilligo Creek in Cambridge with the support of donor groups and individuals.



Participating in the ribbon cutting at the launch of the Snyder's Flats Rotary Forest project were Mike Klein, chair of the 2008 Rotary Dream Home Lottery (left); David Hales, president of the Grand River Conservation Foundation; Ian Murdoch, member of the foundation board and the Kitchener-Conestoga Rotary Club; and Tony Denison, President of the Kitchener-Conestoga Rotary Club.

Learn more about the Grand River Conservation Foundation at www.grcf.ca