



The workshop is an excellent opportunity for landowners to talk with staff, look at displays and gather informational handouts.

### St. Marys Rural Landowner Workshop

On March 21, the UTRCA hosted the annual Rural Landowner Workshop in St. Marys at the Pyramid Recreation Centre. This was the twentieth year that such a workshop has been held. These workshops started off as strictly tree planting workshops but, in recent years, the agenda has been diversified to appeal to a wider audience. Over the years, we have moved the workshop around the watershed to make it convenient for landowners. St. Marys has always attracted a very good crowd and this year was no exception, with over 100 landowners in attendance.

This year's audience was treated to five very informative presentations on the following topics:

- Characteristics of a Healthy Forest - UTRCA's Brenda Gallagher described the succession of a natural ecosystem and how a forest evolves over time.
- Sustainable Woodlot Management - UTRCA's Jay Ebel spoke on the importance of managing woodlots in a sustainable manner. Jay covered aspects such as County Woodlands Conservation By-laws, finding a logging contractor, logging methods and planning for your woodlot's future.
- Shifting our Focus to Soil Health - Tyler Vollmershausen farms with his father and grandfather near Innerkip. In 2016, Vollmershausen Farms was named the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's "Soil Champion." Tyler spoke on how cover crops have improved their soil's health and productivity.

- Managing Runoff from Farm Buildings, Rooftops and Elevators - UTRCA's Alison Regehr spoke on how to manage rainwater runoff from impervious surfaces, through methods such as rainwater harvesting, enhanced swales, soakaway pits, infiltration trenches and rain gardens.
- Best Management Practices (BMP) Farm Video Series - UTRCA's John Enright introduced this topic. In 2016, the UTRCA worked with nine local farmers to create a series of short BMP videos. In these videos the farmers spoke about why they implemented their BMPs and their experiences in doing so. The BMPs include cover crops, windbreaks, buffer strips, fragile land retirement and erosion control structures. The videos are posted at <http://thamesriver.on.ca/landowner-grants-stewardship/farmland-bmps>

The evening workshop wrapped up around 9 pm with closing remarks and door prizes. Many in the audience stayed until almost 10 pm to discuss projects with the presenters. Stay tuned for next year's workshop, coming to a community near you!

Contact: John Enright, Forester

### Let's Get Planting!

Spring is time for planting trees, and the UTRCA will plant more than 60,000 trees over the next few weeks. The conservation authority has planted an estimated 11 million trees over the past 70 years.

Contact: John Enright, Forester



The hand planting crew started at the beginning of April.



Paperwork time: new seasonal staff at the Fanshawe Conservation Area Orientation Day.

## Opening Soon: A Conservation Area Near You!

Staff at Fanshawe, Pittock and Wildwood Conservation Areas (CAs) are taking advantage of the spring weather and getting ready for the parks to open for the season at 8 am on Friday, April 21. The past winter's lack of snow really helped staff get a head start on preparing for the camping and day use season. Preparations include hiring and training all the amazing seasonal staff who ensure we have a great season and our visitors enjoy themselves. The UTRCA employs more than 70 full time and seasonal staff in the three CAs.

As in the past, CA Unit staff organized an Orientation Day for each park, on April 7 (Fanshawe CA), April 13 (Wildwood CA) and April 24 (Pittock CA). The new Fanshawe CA seasonal staff enjoyed meeting their supervisors and coworkers, as well as learning about the park and the UTRCA. The day is also an opportunity to complete Human Resources paperwork, participate in the Health and Safety Orientation, meet the Workplace Health and Safety Committee representative, and begin job specific training.

UTRCA Directors are always welcome to attend the Orientation Days. Murray Blackie was in attendance at Fanshawe's and Nancy Manning and Marcus Ryan will be attending Wildwood's.

*Contacts: Steven Musclow, Superintendent, Fanshawe CA;  
Paul Switzer, Superintendent, Wildwood CA;  
Brent Verscheure, Superintendent, Pittock CA*

## Grade 2 Students Learn about River Safety

Community Education staff were in schools across the watershed from late February to the end of March, delivering the River Safety program. This program is aimed at grade two students as research has shown they are at a vulnerable age for accidents near water. The program also ties in with the grade two science curriculum.

The program is timed to coincide with spring flooding and unpredictable river conditions. The students participate in four fun and interactive activities to build their understanding and



A student at Anne Hathaway School shows his classmates the watershed puzzlepiece he was given - a water mill - so they could figure out what it was and where it fit on the big puzzle to his left. (Photo credit: Galen Simmons, Stratford Beacon Herald)

knowledge of water safety. At the end of the program, they each receive a bookmark and an activity booklet as reminders on how to be safe near rivers, streams, and other bodies of water.

The many service and community groups throughout the watershed that sponsor the program enable us to deliver this in-class program free of charge. This year, staff visited nearly 100 classes, reaching more than 2000 students. Since the program began in 1998, more than 50,000 students have received the important river safety message. We wish to give a big thank you to all of the generous sponsors who continue to support the River Safety program, year after year.

*Contact: Mia King, Community Education Technician*



Aerial drone photo of the harvester removing every other tree within the windbreak.

## Mature Windbreak Thinning Demonstration

Many windbreaks are approaching an age where thinning should be considered in order to maintain tree health and windbreak longevity. The UTRCA recently thinned two 30 year old, double row, Norway Spruce windbreaks at the Fraser Farm in Oxford County. Every other tree was removed from a single row within the windbreak, using a track harvester. This spacing was chosen to minimize stress on the remaining trees by avoiding potential wind damage or altering their environment too quickly. The

remaining trees will be monitored over the next few years to measure growth patterns and observe how the gaps (where trees were removed) fill in.

This thinning project was a first for the UTRCA and will serve as a pilot project to evaluate the logistics of thinning and financial options for landowners. Funding for this project was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs as part of the Canada-Ontario Agreement.

There are photos and a video of the project on the UTRCA's Flickr and YouTube channels.

Contact: Jay Ebel, Forestry Technician



Soil sampling equipment used in the Medway Creek Priority Subwatershed study.

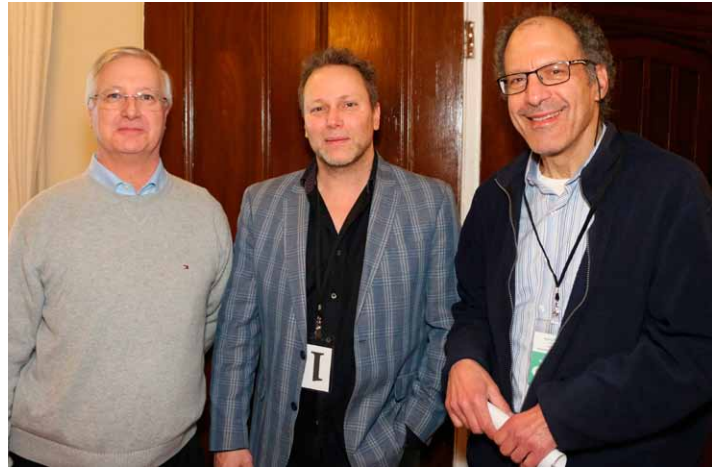
## Soil Sampling at Medway Creek Farms

In fall 2016, soil samples were taken across farms in the Medway Creek Priority Subwatershed. Steve Redmond, Precision Ag Specialist with Hensall District Co-op, sampled approximately half of the fields in the study area.

The study aims to assess the impact of agricultural best management practices (BMPs) on phosphorus levels in the headwaters of Medway Creek. The soil sampling was undertaken to determine background phosphorus levels in the soils, which will help the UTRCA monitor future progress of BMPs in the watershed. This soil sampling will also help to identify target areas for reducing nutrient loads into the creek.

UTRCA staff and Steve Redmond conducted site visits with each landowner as a follow up to the fall sampling. These visits help build relationships, allow for data sharing and promote discussion on reducing nutrient losses from local farms.

Contact: Michael Funk, Agricultural Soil & Water Quality Technician



From the March 30 Urban League meeting about reducing Phosphorus in the Thames: Tom Copeland, Division Manager, Wastewater and Drainage Engineering, City of London; Wes Kinghorn, President, Urban League of London; Sandy Levin, Director, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (L to R).

## Phosphorus Presentation

UTRCA Board Member Sandy Levin recently invited staff representatives to two Urban League of London meetings to discuss water quality in the Thames River and London's Pollution Prevention Control Plan. Mark Snowsell, UTRCA Land Use Regulations Officer, attended the first event, called "Pints & Politics," to talk about these topics with Urban League members in an informal setting.

The second event was the regular monthly meeting of the Urban League at Grosvenor Lodge. Steve Sauder, UTRCA Marketing Specialist, gave a presentation called "The Thames: Heritage River and Phosphorus Source," and Tom Copeland, City of London's Division Manager, Wastewater and Drainage Engineering, spoke about the City's Pollution Prevention Control Plan. The presentations were well received and members had many questions about the watershed from both rural and urban perspectives. Many thanks go to Sandy for organizing these sessions.

Contact: Steve Sauder, Marketing Specialist

## Wildwood Outdoor School Expands for the 2016/17 School Year

Wildwood Outdoor School is in its second year, giving students the chance to experience and learn within the same natural setting multiple times throughout the school year.

UTRCA Community Education staff lead students on engaging and interactive hikes to various areas in Wildwood CA with curriculum-linked activities connected to the season, while using their "animal senses" to observe and explore their surroundings. The hikes encourage emergent and inquiry-based learning, such as students discovering animal tracks in the snow and using clues to determine what and why they were there. Students also make connections between nature and the classroom, such as when a Kindergarten class brought their recently acquired knowledge of patterns out into the "dark forest" (a spruce plantation) and created a pattern using spruce cones they had gathered.



Students getting up close and personal with Sycamore leaves.

This year, grade three students have been learning about differences over the season through observing a young tamarack tree. During a fall visit, the students learned to identify various trees. When the classes were brought to the yellow-needed tamarack, the students used their knowledge to determine if the tamarack was a coniferous or deciduous tree. When they visited the tamarack in the winter, the students noted that the needles had dropped, which is normal for a tamarack tree, but something unusual was also observed – some of the bark had been rubbed off. A quick investigation of the area found a clue: deer scat! This was an exciting example of a wildlife-plant interaction. During the spring visit, students will once again visit the tamarack to see how it has changed from the winter; hopefully, the tree has survived its injury!

In total, 22 classes are taking part in the Wildwood Outdoor School program, with more classes interested in participating for the 2017/18 school year. We hope that each visit holds surprise and wonder and also reminds students of earlier visits, awakening pleasant feelings and a curiosity for nature.

Contact: Mia King, Community Education Technician

## Ontario Soil Network

On March 23-24, UTRCA staff participated in the Ontario Soil Network Leadership Course, which brought together farmers and extension staff from across southern Ontario. The goal was to increase leadership relating to soil health within the agricultural community. The two-day workshop was coordinated by the Rural Ontario Institute, with support from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs,



Participants in the Ontario Soil Network Leadership Course.

The participants learned new leadership and communication skills from a variety of speakers, through group discussions, and from each other. Over the next 10 months, farmers and staff have been challenged to share their soil health stories by organizing and participating in different learning opportunities, such as farm tours and group meetings.

This network-based workshop helped build new partnership opportunities between farmers and extension staff to spread the message of soil health.

Contact: Tatianna Lozier, Agricultural Soil & Water Technician

## On the Agenda

The next UTRCA Board of Directors meeting will be April 25, 2017. Agendas and approved board meeting minutes are posted at [www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca); click on “Publications.”

- Request for Capital 2017 (Deferred from March 2017)
- Request of Use of Capital Maintenance Reserve for Microscope
- Appointment of Brent Verscheure as Officer Pursuant to Section 28 of the Conservation Authorities Act
- Administration and Enforcement - Section 28
- Quarterly Financial Report

Contact: Michelle Viglianti, Administrative Assistant



[www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca)  
 519-451-2800  
 Twitter @UTRCAmarketing  
 Find us on Facebook!