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May 2020

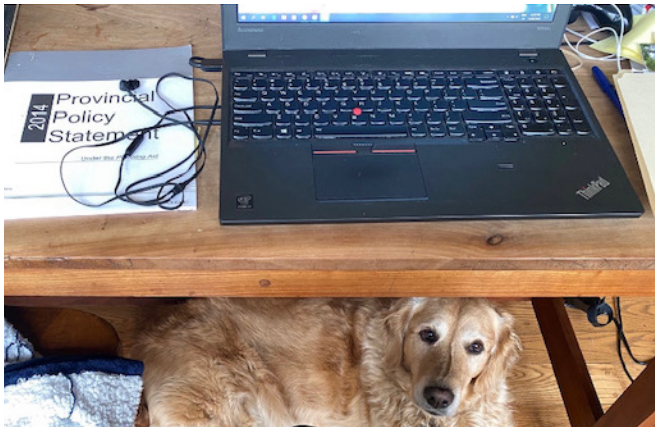


American Avocets at Pittock Conservation Area

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### Our Work Continues!

On Monday, March 16, the UTRCA Watershed Conservation Centre and all three parks closed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff moved quickly to set up their home offices to continue their work, while others have returned to working in the field with proper precautions and personal protective equipment.

Our priority is the safety and well-being of our staff and clients. We will continue to work with the guidance of the Province and the Occupational Health and Safety Act to ensure we are taking all reasonable precautions to ensure a safe environment for all involved.

The UTRCA staff will continue their hard work, even if it's from our dining room tables, with furry office assistants!

### #utrcaNatureChallenge

When it became apparent that social/physical distancing was going to be in place for a while, staff decided a social media campaign would be a great way to engage people to stay connected with the natural world. Community

Education and Partnerships staff presented 48 days of different and unique nature challenges. The family-friendly activities were designed to keep followers in touch with nature and to be accessible outdoors and indoors. Participants were encouraged to share responses using #utrcaNatureChallenge for a chance to win a UTRCA gift card or hat. The winners will be announced later in May.



Jane MacKean completed the "Up Close and Personal with Nature" challenge in which participants were encouraged to use and/or make binoculars to help focus on elements of nature that were of interest to them.

With the nature challenge completed, staff are transitioning into a new social media campaign called Watershed Wednesday! These posts will connect watershed residents to information, projects and actions being taken in many of the 28 subwatersheds.

Contact: [Maranda MacKean](mailto:Maranda.MacKean@utrca.on.ca), Community Education Specialist





This Perth South farm field suffers annually from erosion due to overland flow. The landowners, who just purchased the property, plan to repair and address future erosion concerns by constructing two water and sediment control basins.

### Working with Area Farmers

While the UTRCA's office is closed, staff in the Conservation Services Unit are still able to answer watershed landowners' requests for technical assistance. Spring is always a busy time with projects being set up for the coming field season, but it is also a good time to respond to calls for erosion control assistance. Staff have been busy conducting field surveys and drawing up technical erosion control designs. Although the winter melt was fairly gentle this year, the demand for erosion control site calls is still high. Staff are still active in the watershed and doing their best to respond to requests for assistance. Contact: [Craig Merkley](#), Conservation Services Specialist

### Permitting & Violations Work Continues

The UTRCA administrative offices may be closed, but staff continue to issue permits and investigate environmental violations.

With nicer weather approaching and more time being spent at home, it is understandable that thoughts have turned to how to improve backyard stay-cation spaces. While it may be tempting to tackle all the works you've been dreaming of since you moved in, please be mindful that your plans may be subject to specific environmental regulations as enforced by your local Conservation Authority.

Under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, written pre-approval (in the form of a Permit or a Letter of Clearance) may be required before undertaking any development, construction or site alteration which includes, but is not limited to, filling, excavating, or grading on or near waterways, flood plains, steep slopes, erosion hazards and wetland areas. Development includes both major (e.g. additions, garages, shops, pools, driveways) and minor/auxiliary structures (e.g. sheds, stairs, gazebos, fences, decks, docks, retaining walls, hard landscaping). Depending on the location, tree or vegetation removal may also require CA approval.



If you are a landowner whose property is affected by Conservation Authority regulations, we ask that you bear in mind the importance of protecting wetlands, flood plains, and the banks of watercourses that are prone to erosion. River and stream valleys are important natural features that can temporarily store floodwaters, help to moderate high water levels, protect water quality, provide groundwater recharge, and prevent erosion. These valleys also provide



essential habitat for wildlife and aquatic species. Given that their natural functions are based on the dynamic nature of these systems, it is essential that they be maintained in as natural a state as possible.

Inappropriate development and site alteration has the potential to alter drainage or water storage, which may often cause or exacerbate flooding or erosion on your property or adjacent/upstream/downstream properties. Development within these areas could be at risk due to flooding, erosion, or other unstable conditions such as the presence of organic wetland soils or a high or fluctuating groundwater table.

If you are looking to undertake any project or activity which may require prior written approval from our office, please discuss your plans with UTRCA staff prior to submitting an application. Inquiries may be directed to our permitting staff at [RegulationsInquiry@thamesriver.on.ca](mailto:RegulationsInquiry@thamesriver.on.ca). While response times have been affected by current closures, our staff are checking voice messages and e-mails frequently.

By contacting Conservation Authority staff prior to undertaking the work, you are abiding by the law, and doing your part towards protecting your development, neighbouring properties, and flood storage areas, and conserving our lands.  
*Contact: [Karen Winfield](#), Land Use Regulations Officer*

### SWM Pond Project

Maryam Yavarikia, a graduate civil engineering student at the Western University, is undertaking a project under the supervision of Dr. Imtiaz Shah, UTRCA Senior Environmental Engineer, to evaluate the performance of the stormwater management (SWM) wet pond next to the UTRCA's Watershed Community Centre (WCC). The pond was rebuilt in 2011-2012 to provide both stormwater quantity and quality control for the new UTRCA office building.

The performance of the pond will be evaluated by considering long term impact of sedimentation, in the absence of operation and maintenance. SWM ponds are an option for runoff detention, reducing peak flows and improving water quality.



The project involves updating the SWM pond model by updating digital elevations, incorporating new information, and considering additional low impact developments on the site.  
*Contact: [Imtiaz Shah](#), Senior Environmental Engineer*

### Upper Medway Project

Cover cropping is a farming practice that promotes soil health and improves water quality. Conservation services staff are leading a [demonstration project in the Upper Medway Creek subwatershed](#) to increase adoption of this best management practice across the Upper Thames watershed. The project aims to illuminate some of the economic and agronomic impacts of cover crops, as well as the environmental impacts on local water quality.

In partnership with VERITAS Farm Management, landowners planted cover crop trials in the fall



Conservation Services staff count cover crop plant population.

of 2019. After protecting the soil from erosion all winter, these trials are now being monitored to learn how the cover crops will impact this year's grain crop.

The warm spring temperatures brought on a growth spurt for the cereal rye planted last fall. Before the crop was terminated, Conservation Services staff were out collecting measurements of various soil parameters such as infiltration, temperature and moisture, as well as soil sampling. In addition, staff continue to collect water quality samples to investigate the impact of over winter cover on sediment and nutrient losses from the watershed.

This project was funded in part through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada through the federal Department of the Environment and Climate Change.

Contact: [Tatianna Lozier](#), Agricultural Soil & Water Technician

### A Tree Planting Year Like No Other!

The [Private Land Tree Planting Program](#) for 2020 wrapped up on Thursday, May 14. When the season approached back in late March, there were so many unanswered questions. Were we going to be able to get trees, when would we get trees, could we hire staff, and how were we going to deliver the program safely in light of COVID-19?



Family members pitched in to help staff plant trees this spring.

In the tree planting business in recent years, we've taken to saying that no two years are alike. We're always referring to the weather - either too wet/dry/hot/cold. This year, the weather couldn't have been better for tree planting, if only we didn't have a global pandemic to deal with.

In the end, we were able to deliver most of our tree planting program, with the help of spouses, family members, and a small crew of three. A big thank you goes to all who contributed. We could not have done it without you!

Unfortunately, we were not able to deliver the machine planting portion. It was not possible to have multiple staff working safely in close proximity to each other around a tractor and machine planter. Our landowners understood fully and, for the most part, agreed to move their planting projects ahead to spring 2021.

Our curbside pickup program for trees was very successful. Landowners were very respectful of our protocols and were more than happy just to be getting their trees. With time on their hands and, in many cases, kids at home, it gave them something to do. In fact, this spring we had more requests for trees than ever before. Maybe there is something to be said about a slower pace to life. Hopefully this will result in more trees planted in 2021.

For next year we can only hope that the weather will be as nice and the global pandemic will be in the rear view mirror.

Contact: [John Enright](#), Forester

### River Safety Program

When schools closed in March, the remainder of the UTRCA Community Education's in-class River Safety programs were cancelled. To ensure that Grade 2 students who would have missed out still received these important safety messages, staff developed a digital and interactive River Safety program for students to complete from the comfort and safety of their own homes.

In the new online program, students participate in many of the same aspects as the in-person program as well as a few new activities. These activities focus on how to stay safe near moving



water, the diversity of life that relies on our river, and the role of Conservation Authorities in protecting our communities from flooding events. The programs have also been tailored to the individual school so the students become familiar with waterways close to them. Once they've worked through each of the activities, students can either print or work online to complete our Activity Booklet full of mazes, crosswords, and puzzles to help reinforce the message. Thank you to our sponsors who make the River Safety program possible.

Contact: [Alexis Stupich](#), Community Education Specialist

### Communities for Nature of Another Kind

School and community involvement was sidelined in the planting of the Communities for Nature trees this spring, due to COVID-19. As a result, several tree orders from various nurseries were reluctantly canceled. Originally anticipating 5000 trees and shrubs of various sizes and species, we managed to get 800 planted throughout the watershed. Many of these were large stock, bare root trees for memorial forests. The Furtney (London), Zorra Township, City of Woodstock, Thamesford-Zorra, and St. Marys memorial plantings were all completed.

Partial projects were also completed that normally would have seen hundreds of participating local students and community members in areas such as Medway Creek, Hodges Pond, Brick Ponds, Tavistock, and Hudson Boat Works (London). UTRCA staff and their



Physical distancing of staff and family members planting the Furtney Memorial trees.



The Welker family planting at Medway Creek.

families were instrumental in getting the trees in the ground, in what also has been an unusually cold spring. Good tree planting weather!

Protocols in place included one staff per vehicle, family members in their own cars arriving on site, everyone having their own designated shovel for the duration of the planting, hand sanitation and, of course, physical distancing during the planting, which was not hard to do given the size of the sites.

While it was disappointing to have to postpone many projects, staff and family members of various ages worked hard to complete what we could do safely, which also included the unloading of trees.

Thanks go to all of your children, spouses (special needs education staff Sherri Glasman, "retired" Val Clarke, real estate lawyer Alex Kelly, financial consultant Charlie Maaskant), UTRCA carpenter Matt McCutcheon and his assistant Kevin, who had never planted a tree before but quickly learned, ESA staff Brandon Williamson and Richard Brewer, Wildwood staff Kaitlyn Muma and Maranda MacKean, with her family, as well as the Hertner, Maaskant, Smith and Welker families.

Contact: [Karen Pugh](#), Resource Specialist

### 4Rs Improving Profitability & Water Quality in Ontario

The term 4Rs stands for Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, and Right Place. The 4Rs is an

industry-led program to educate and encourage landowners to adopt good nutrient management designed to maximize crop nutrient uptake and minimize crop loss, while positively impacting local water bodies. The 4R program was initiated in the northern USA in response to water quality concerns in the Great Lakes.

Recently, Ontario's agri-business sector has led the way in bringing the program to this side of the border. A Steering Committee comprised of a diverse group of industry, government, agricultural organizations, and Conservation Authorities provides guidance and funding to encourage farmers and agri-business to adopt 4R Certification. More than 1700 farmers have signed onto the program so far. The Conservation Authorities are represented by Craig Merkley. *Contact: [Craig Merkley](#), Conservation Services Specialist*

### **Indigenous Perspectives in Outdoor Education**

For the month of April, two Alternative Field Experience students from Western University, Mirco Hemmi and Adrianna Boersen, joined the education team at the UTRCA. Although Mirco and Adrianna could not participate in the regular Community Education activities at Fanshawe and Wildwood CAs as planned, they stepped up to the challenge of completing a research project instead. For the project, they investigated how Indigenous perspectives are currently being incorporated in various outdoor and environmental education settings as well as at our local school boards.

Mirco and Adrianna worked closely with the education teams at Wildwood and Fanshawe and reached out to school board representatives and local Indigenous contacts to complete the project. The Community Education and Partnerships team is now taking their research and is looking at practical ways to apply their findings to our programs and work with the community. We look forward to sharing how we can include more Indigenous perspectives in our work at the UTRCA in the future. *Contact: [Karlee Flear](#), Community Education Supervisor*

### **2019 Oxford Stewardship Award Winner**

The 2019 Oxford Stewardship Award was presented at the February 26 County Council meeting to Jeff and Diane Tribe. Also in attendance were runners up Gerard Pynenburg and his father Bernie, additional members of the Tribe family, and local artist Julie Hawkins.

The Tribe project consisted of digging an interconnected 1.4-acre wetland featuring two major and several smaller water features, supported by 8.9 acres of upland habitat. The project also included the planting of mixed native trees.

The recipient is chosen by Stewardship Oxford and the Oxford Soil & Crop Improvement Association from the pool of projects that received financial and/or technical assistance through the County-supported [Clean Water Program \(CWP\)](#) the previous year. The CWP, administered by the UTRCA, helps to fund and support the conservation and enhancement of natural heritage resources in Oxford County.

In 2019, a total of 83 CWP projects were funded in Oxford County. This reflected over \$389,000 in total project value and \$135,500 in grants. Oxford County committed \$70,000 to the program. *Contact: Craig Merkley, Conservation Services Specialist*

### **Full Circle**

Community Education Specialist Maranda MacKean has been working with the Kindergarten classes at Mornington Central Public School, providing Schoolyard Outdoor School. With a fall and winter visit completed, a spring visit with students is unlikely. Luckily, thanks to teacher Lisa Meszaros, there was already a plan in place to plant trees during the spring visit. Between Maranda's family and Lisa's family, they were able to alternate planting times and complete that work. When students do return to their school, they will have new places to explore and play in, and a designated outdoor classroom area.

On a personal note, Maranda has found this one of the most rewarding partnerships she has had with a school, as it takes her home. Mornington Central PS is where she attended Kindergarten



and the school is located in the community where generations of her family have lived. When her mother heard about this partnership, she dug out Maranda's year end Kindergarten report card. Under the curriculum area of Environmental Studies (yes, that was a curriculum area in 1983) it reads, "Maranda tells about many learning type



The Meszaros (above) and MacKean families planting trees at the school.



activities that she and her family experience together in the outdoors. She stores in her mind many interesting details about the wonders she has observed in nature. All animal and bird life holds interest for her. Her older brother teaches his sister about tadpoles, turtles, fish and other little creatures. Streams of water interest her very much and she describes them fully."

All in all, that's a story that has come full circle. As Maranda says, it reminds her that she's working in the field she was always meant to! Together (on different days), the Meszaros and MacKean families planted 28 trees at Mornington Central PS.

Contact: [Maranda MacKean](#), Community Education Specialist



### Kirkton-Woodham Conservation Area

Staff and four community volunteers spent a sunny May morning planting 100 hardwood trees, while maintaining physical distancing. A special thanks to Forestry Technician Jay Ebel, who spent two days digging holes in preparation.

Contact: [Brad Glasman](#), Manager, Conservation Services

### Introducing Wild Geranium

Mid-May to early June is the time to look for Wild Geraniums (*Geranium maculatum*) in our deciduous forests. These delicate looking spring ephemeral wildflowers bloom before the trees leaf out and shade the forest floor. The other common name for this flower is Spotted Cranesbill.



The flowers are 1-1 ½ inches wide with five petals, rose-purple in colour. The leaves are deeply and irregularly cleft into 3-5 lobes. The petals have slightly darker coloured lines running along their length that function as nectar guides.



A small bee explores a Wild Geranium flower.

Honeybees, bumblebees, many types of native solitary bees and syrphid flies are the most common pollinators, although ants and beetles also visit the flowers.

After pollination, a fruit develops. The fruit capsules have a long, central beak-like column, resembling a crane's head, and five basal cells each containing one seed. When ripe, the fruit springs open, expelling the seeds 10 to 30 feet from the mother plant. The seeds attract Mourning Doves and, where present, Bobwhite Quail. Indigenous peoples used Wild Geraniums medicinally to treat diarrhea and open sores or wounds.

Wild Geraniums are found widely throughout eastern North America in undisturbed dry to moist woods and woodland edges. It is a good plant for a shade garden under deciduous tree cover and is available from some native plant nurseries.

Confusingly, "geranium" is also the common name of the horticultural bedding plant popular in garden centres. That larger, showier geranium is in the same family as Wild Geranium, Geraniaceae, but is of different genus, Pelargonium.

Contact: [Cathy Quinlan](#), Terrestrial Biologist

### On the Agenda

The next UTRCA Board of Directors meeting will be a virtual meeting (due to COVID-19) on May 26, 2020.

- Audited Financial Statements
- Conservation Areas – COVID-19 Tentative Opening Plan
- COVID-19 Return to Work Plan
- 2020 April Year to Date Financial Update
- Budget Update – Mitigation Strategies
- Motherwell Follow up

Draft agendas, audio recordings, and approved minutes are posted at [www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca) on the "Board Agendas & Minutes" page.

Contact: [Michelle Viglianti](#), Administrative Assistant