

fyi

April 2019



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Celebrate Earth Day London!

Sunday, April 28, 11 am - 3 pm, Harris Park

[Earth Day London 2019 Flyer](#)

All are welcome to attend London's Earth Day event at Harris Park, from 11 am to 3 pm. Activities will include pollinator planting, flood walks, Canadian Raptor Conservancy demonstrations, water festival activities, river art, Earth Day mandala, fish sampling demonstrations, a beaver baffle demonstration, turtle talks, face painting, and a free draw for a children's bike.

This event is made possible through the sponsorship of the London Community Foundation, Back to the River, Dillon Consulting, the City of London, and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

Please consider riding your bicycle along the path to Harris Park (bike parking available), or take London Transit bus routes #5 or #13.

Contact: Steve Sauder, Marketing Specialist, or Karen Pugh, Resource Specialist

Cover Crops for Water Quality

Conservation Services staff spent the beginning of April in the Upper Medway determining residue cover on agricultural fields. Crop residue intercepts rain drops and provides opportunities to slow down water runoff in the field, thus helping to reduce erosion.

This assessment is part of an ongoing water quality project in the Upper Medway subwatershed, which encourages farmers to plant cover crops. Cover crops add a component of living vegetation, which can increase infiltration and the soil's water-holding capacity. As the soil absorbs more water, the likelihood of surface runoff and erosion are reduced.

A long term goal for the subwatershed is to plant cover crops on the majority of farmable acres, all while maintaining 60% residue cover in the watershed through the winter and spring months. Cover crops and residue management are Best Management Practices that contribute to improved water quality.

Contact: Tatianna Lozier, Soil & Water Quality Technician



Staff estimate the percent residue cover using a knotted rope placed across the field. Each knot that is touching a piece of residue is counted, giving an estimate of total cover.



Students work together to solve flood related tasks.

Focus on Flooding “Escape Room” Pilot

After many months of brainstorming, planning and constructing, Community Education and Partnerships staff were excited to pilot a Focus on Flooding “Escape Room” with students this winter. Students in grades 5 to 8 at Nicolas Wilson PS and Knollwood Park PS were the first to participate in the new program.

Funded by the National Disaster Mitigation Program, the program is designed to teach students about flooding in a fun and engaging way. The escape room format of teaching and learning also aligns with the current direction of education, which focuses on teaching students critical thinking and problem solving, as well as collaboration and communication skills.



Unlocking a box to collect an Escape Room token.

During the Escape Room, students work through five stations that teach them key concepts related to flooding. As the students rotate through the stations in small groups, they solve flooding related tasks which allow them to unlock boxes and earn tokens to use in the final activity. After participating in the Escape Room, the students take what they learned and produce news clips about flooding in our area.



Using the virtual reality sand table to learn about runoff and flooding.

Students and teachers alike were very excited to participate in the Escape Room experience. UTRCA staff look forward to offering the program to other students in our watershed in the future.

[Escape Room pilot photos](#)

Contact: Karlee Flear; Community Education Supervisor

Western Ontario WISKI Hub

The Western Ontario WISKI (Water Information System KISTERS) Hub, hosted by UTRCA, is a network of member conservation authorities sharing a single database system for managing hydrometric, water quality and ecological data beyond watershed boundaries. Since its inception in 2016, the network has grown to include 10 members within southwestern and northern Ontario, with another three conservation authorities in the process of joining.



Western Ontario WISKI Hub members

The hub has allowed for increased knowledge, resource and cost sharing among all members as well as improved data accessibility. These benefits are being highlighted in a KISTERS North America presentation, titled “The Story of Ontario Environmental Data Hubs: Pooling Resources to Improve Data Management and

Access,” at the Canada Water Resources Association’s 72nd Annual Conference this spring.

Additionally, UTRCA has been included as a case study for [KISTERS’ Biological Monitoring brochure](#) for our work integrating our aquatic monitoring data into KiECO (KISTERS’ Ecological Data Software) for improved data management, analysis and reporting.

Contact: Laura Flynn, Water Management Data Specialist

River Safety 2019

“Stay safe near rivers and streams,” are words that Fanshawe and Wildwood Community Education staff say a lot during the River Safety program season. While having fun with hands-on activities, Grade 2 students learn how they can stay safe near waterways year round and especially during times of flooding.

Splish and Splash are two water droplet friends in *The Journey of Splish and Splash*, a story written and illustrated by staff. The two droplets share with the students the adventures they encounter while travelling through the water cycle. Water safety



Community Education staff bring the River Safety message to students at Little Falls PS in St. Marys.

messages from the story spill over into the other activities, including the ever-popular, interactive wooden puzzle. At the conclusion of the program, students are excited to receive a take-home activity booklet along with a Splish and Splash bookmark, highlighting the water safety messages.

Teachers are always pleased to welcome us into their classrooms each year for this important safety program. This year, our 21st, Fanshawe and Wildwood staff visited more than 2300 grade 2 students!

Our appreciation and thanks go to the following generous sponsors, without whom the River Safety program would not be possible:

- The Optimist Club of Arva & District
- The Optimist Club of Bryanston-Birr
- The Optimist Club of Carling Heights
- The Optimist Club of Downie
- The Optimist Club of Ilderton
- The Optimist Club of Kirkton-Woodham
- The Optimist Club of London East
- The Optimist Club of London Fanshawe
- The Optimist Club of London Middlesex

- The Optimist Club of London North
- The Optimist Club of London Oakridge Acres
- The Optimist Club of Mitchell
- The Optimist Club of North Dorchester
- The Optimist Club of Sebringville
- The Optimist Club of Shakespeare
- The Optimist Club of Thorndale
- The Optimist Club of Tavistock
- Highbury Pet Hospital
- Ingersoll Community Foundation
- Mitchell Kinettes
- Rotary Club of St. Marys
- Rotary Club of Stratford
- Tecumseh Community School
- Thamesford Lions Club

Contact: Pat McLean, Community Education Technician, or Vanni Azzano, Community Education Supervisor

Rural Landowner Workshop Draws Record Crowd

The annual UTRCA Rural Landowner Workshop was held in St. Marys at the Pyramid Recreation Centre on Tuesday, March 19. This workshop continues to grow in popularity, drawing a record crowd this year of more than 125 landowners.

The audience was treated to five presentations by local experts. Dan Breen, a dairy farmer from Putnam and winner of the 2018 Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association Soil Champion, was the keynote speaker. Dan spoke of his ongoing efforts to build soil health by including cover crops in his rotation.

The other four presentations were by UTRCA staff. John Enright spoke about local efforts to revive butternut, which is a tree species at risk. Tatianna Lozier presented information on creating wetland habitat and highlighted local examples. Craig Merkley talked about the Cade Tract, a new conservation area just outside of St. Marys. Jay Ebel concluded the evening by circulating a survey and engaging the audience in a discussion about what it would take to encourage more landowners to participate in conservation programs.



Workshop participants listen to a presentation on butternut, a tree species at risk.

After the door prizes were handed out, many landowners stayed to talk with the speakers. The evening was very well received and staff are already planning next year’s workshop.

[Landowner Workshop photos](#)

Contact: John Enright, Forester



The federal funding announcement took place on a recently reconstructed section of the West London Dyke, north of the Queens Avenue bridge over the North Thames River.

Canada helps protect London from Flooding

On March 27, the UTRCA co-hosted a media event on the West London Dyke (WLD), to announce new federal funding for phases 5 to 13 of the WLD Reconstruction Project. The project will include the reconstruction of approximately 1,600 metres of the dyke, from Blackfriars Bridge north to Oxford Street West, and from the Forks west to Cavendish Park.

The work will increase the dyke elevation to better protect thousands of residents and businesses from flooding of the Thames River. Once complete, this project will improve the City's ability to mitigate the effects of storm and flooding events, while also protecting public utilities and transportation services, and ensuring the health and well-being of residents.

The Government of Canada is contributing up to \$10 million to this \$25 million project, through the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF). The City of London will provide the remainder of the project funding. The UTRCA will manage the project in partnership with the City.

The federal DMAF funding will significantly reduce the time needed to complete the WLD Reconstruction Project, and reduce the flood risk to more than 2600 people and 1200 structures behind



The project will include the reconstruction of approximately 1,600 m of the dyke, including this section near the Oxford Street West bridge, pictured during the February 2018 flood.

the dyke. It is estimated that without the dyke, total damages today from the Regulatory Flood (based on the April 1937 flood) would exceed \$65,000,000.

Several dignitaries were on hand to announce the funding, including Marco Mendicino, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, London MPs Peter Fragiskatos and Kate Young, Mayor Ed Holder, and two UTRCA Board Members from the City of London, Chair Sandy Levin and Councillor Anna Hopkins.

DMAF is a \$2-billion, 10-year program to help communities build the infrastructure they need to better withstand natural hazards such as floods, wildfires, earthquakes and droughts.

[DMAF announcement photos](#)

Contact: David Charles, Supervisor, Water Control Structures



The UTRCA's Jay Ebel, John Enright, Brenda Gallagher and Brandon Williamson with Dr. Sharon Reed (MNRF), next to a newly installed sap beetle flight trap.

Oak Wilt – The Next Threat!

Oak wilt appears to be the next in a long list exotic diseases to threaten our forest cover. Oak wilt is a vascular disease caused by the fungus *Bretziella fagacearum*. The fungus grows on the outer sapwood of oak trees, restricting the flow of water and nutrients through the tree.

Oak wilt was first identified in Wisconsin in 1947. Since that time, it has spread across 23 States. In 2016, oak wilt was confirmed on Belle Isle (Michigan) in the middle of the Detroit River, 500 metres from the shores of Windsor. To date, oak wilt has not been found in Ontario.

While all oak species are susceptible, the red oak group (red, black and pin) appears to be the most susceptible, with mortality frequently occurring within one growing season. The fungus can be spread by nitidulid beetles (sap beetles) and through root grafting.

The many species of sap beetles are attracted to fresh wounds or pruning cuts during the active growing season. To reduce the spread of oak wilt, avoid pruning oak trees between April and August. If a tree is wounded or pruned during this period, it is recommended that the damaged area be covered immediately with a latex paint or wound dressing.

In 2019, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) will be conducting a flight trap study to get a better handle

on when the various species of sap beetles are flying. Three study locations have been chosen: the University of Guelph Arboretum, the Royal Botanical Gardens (Hamilton/Burlington), and the UTRCA's Fanshawe Conservation Area (London). From March until November, UTRCA forestry staff will monitor three flight traps weekly, and ship sap beetles collected to the MNRF lab in Sault Ste. Marie for identification.

[Find out more about Oak Wilt.](#)

Contact: John Enright, Forester



UTRCA staff at the Go Wild Grow Wild displays.

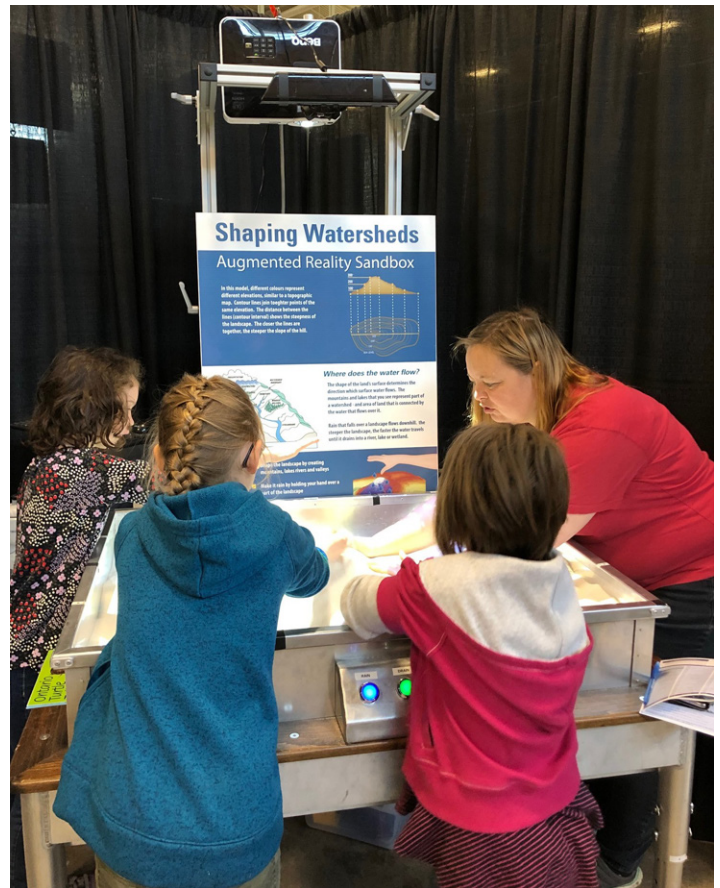
Go Wild Grow Wild

Saturday, April 6 was Carolinian Canada's annual "Go Wild Grow Wild" Green Expo at London's Western Fair District. The UTRCA had a strong presence, with displays and information on a range of topics including the Conservation Areas, native trees and plants, watersheds, flooding and more. The UTRCA's Brandon Williamson gave a talk on the Urban Beaver, explaining the importance of this mammal to the ecosystem, the challenges beavers can create in an urban environment, and management strategies that benefit both the beaver and the community.

At a shared booth, the Friends of Stoney Creek, Friends of Medway Creek, and Dorchester Mill Pond Committee shared information about their volunteer groups. The augmented reality sandbox drew in the crowds while the children enjoyed crafting with natural materials. All three groups enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people at the event, share information about their groups, and network with one another.



Three "Friends of" groups shared a display booth.



The virtual reality sand table is always popular.

This event is an excellent opportunity to spread the conservation message and make connections, with attendance in the thousands.

[Go Wild Grow Wild photos](#)

Contact: Steve Sauder, Marketing Specialist



The craft table attracted lots of children.



A back country campsite at Wildwood CA.

Wildwood CA Back Country Camping: Innovative Experience Award Finalist!

Wildwood Conservation Area's "Back Country Camping Sites" initiative was one of three finalists for the Innovative Experience Award through Ontario's Southwest Tourism. The award recognizes an experience, event or festival that uses new or refurbished innovative strategies to improve the tourism experience or marketing activities.

Paul Switzer, Superintendent at Wildwood CA, was invited to attend the awards ceremony on March 6th at London's Best Western Lamplighter as part of the Ontario's Southwest Tourism Conference where the winner was announced.

It was Paul's vision and dedication that brought the back country sites to fruition. An avid camper himself, Paul noticed the increasing popularity of remote, "off the grid" camping as people sought truly rejuvenating experiences at campgrounds in northern Ontario. Seeing the benefits as well as the possibility of developing a similar offering in southwestern Ontario, Wildwood CA staff created four backcountry campsites at Wildwood. These sites, located on the shore of the reservoir, are for people looking for a more remote and private experience similar to what they can find in northern Ontario, but closer to home.



The UTRCA contingent at the awards dinner.

The two other finalists were "From Tree to Table – A Build-your-own Board Experience," and "Regenerate-Heritage Grain Weekend." The award went to "From Tree to Table." Paul and his team should be extremely proud of the unique opportunity that they created for Wildwood CA visitors.

Also in attendance were Sandy Levin, Chair of the UTRCA, and staff members Dave Griffin, Ryan Mullin, Karen Sockett, Erik Fink, James Miller, Michelle Viglianti and Jennifer Howley. [Back Country Campsite photos](#)

Contact: Paul Switzer, Superintendent, Wildwood CA

London Farm Show

The UTRCA's Conservation Services Unit has had a display booth at the annual London Farm Show for close to 50 years. The spring show draws more than 22,000 visitors each year, making it an excellent opportunity to connect with landowners from within the watershed and beyond.



This year, UTRCA staff designed a new set of display panels featuring examples of "What We Do" and "How Can We Help." Also new this year was an "Ask The Expert" component. Several cover crop experts from around the watershed took turns at the exhibit, answering questions from visitors about their own experience with cover crops. Their expertise was a valuable addition to our cover crop information displays. The UTRCA is leading a cover crop demonstration project in the Upper Medway subwatershed.

[London Farm Show photos](#)

Contact: Craig Merkley, Conservation Services Specialist

Curling Funspiel

The 12th annual "Fish Habitat & Friends Curling Funspiel" was held on March 23 at the Ilderton Curling Club. This bonspiel began as a way to connect with government agency staff who specialize in protecting fish habitat in southwestern Ontario. Over the years, it has grown to include various consulting firms, agency partners, First Nations, and friends.

This year, UTRCA staff (and friends) hit the ice with three curling teams. The beauty of this funspiel is that it is geared to all skill levels, so it is a fun day of networking or just plain socializing.



Tracey Haycock with her Hot Shot trophy!

While none of the UTRCA teams took home the “Big Fish” team prize, Tracey Haycock managed to swim above the experienced curlers to win the highly competitive “Hot Shot” (fish) trophy. Tracey’s win makes this the third time that a UTRCA staff member (or spouse) has taken home this very prestigious award. Congratulations, Tracey! Honourable mention goes to Mark Shifflett, who came in second at the Turkey Shoot.

Contact: Karen Winfield, Land Use Regulations Officer

Board of Directors – On the Agenda

The next Board of Directors meeting will be on April 23, 2019, at the Watershed Conservation Centre, located in Fanshawe Conservation Area. Agendas and approved minutes are posted on our “Board Agendas & Minutes” page at www.thamesriver.on.ca.

Please note that a brief Source Protection Authority meeting will precede the Board of Directors meeting.

- Response to March 12, 2019 St. Marys Letter
- Correspondence from Perth East and Perth South
- Deferred Motion to Rescind Budget Vote
- Board Representation Report
- Conservation Ontario Report Regarding Streamlining and Client Services
- Finance & Audit Committee – Open Position
- Conservation Authorities Act Review
- Administration and Enforcement – Section 28
- New Funding Summary
- Quarterly Financial Report
- Reserves Board Report
- Environmental Planning & Regulations Presentation

Contact: Michelle Viglianti, Administrative Assistant