UPPER THAMES RIVER
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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November 2022

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Celebrating Natural Connections at the Dorchester Mill Pond with a drumming circle.

Thank you for Inspiring a Healthy Environment!

With the November municipal elections over and the new requirements of the Conservation Authorities Act, there will be many changes in the membership of the UTRCA's Board of Directors in the New Year. We wish to thank all of our Board members for the time and effort they have put into this organization. Their contributions and dedication have been instrumental in the success of the UTRCA and are sincerely appreciated.

Celebrating Natural Connections

The UTRCA is "Celebrating Natural Connections" with free public events across the watershed, thanks to funding from the Canadian Heritage Celebration and Commemoration Program Reopening Fund!

The **Celebrating Natural Connections (CNC)** project commemorates front line workers and celebrates the natural spaces that became so important for physical and mental health during the pandemic.

The UTRCA has hosted seven in person CNC events across the watershed so far, including:

- **Burgess Park, Woodstock** (August 27)
- **Wildwood Conservation Area** (September 24)
- **Dorchester Mill Pond** (September 25)
- **Hodges Pond**, Woodstock (October 15)
- **Mitchell Lions Park** (October 22)
- **TJ Dolan Natural Area, Stratford** (October 29)
- **Fanshawe Conservation Area** (November 5)

The new commemorative bench at Mitchell Lions Park, with (from left): Mayor Walter McKenzie, UTRCA Chair Alan Dale, and MP John Nater with a family member.

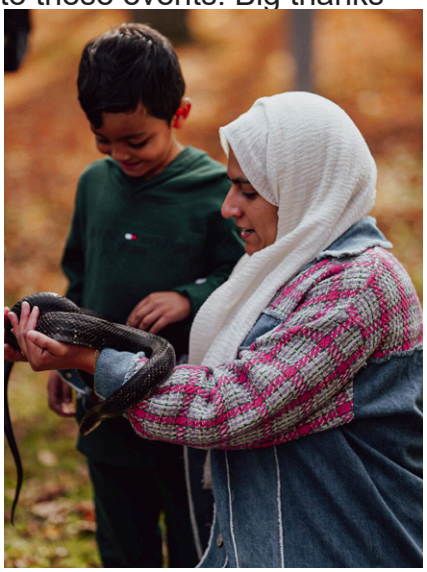
Many amazing community partnerships have been forged from these events with local organizations, businesses, municipalities, Indigenous educators, health units, libraries, local artists, and newcomers to Canada.

From top to bottom: Learning about local fish and stream health; enjoying a beautiful fall day in Stratford's TJ Dolan Natural Area; and UTRCA Chair Alan Dale (at podium) introduces MP Peter Fragiskatos (to his right) at Fanshawe CA.

Most of the CNC events have had 150 to 250 people in attendance, but the most recent event at Fanshawe CA drew more than 1000 participants!

Each event featured hikes and activities focused on the outdoors and wildlife, and involved local organizations, community groups, and artists. Each event also unveiled a permanent commemorative item, such as a bench or accessible picnic table, to commemorate frontline workers' on-going efforts throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thank you to the UTRCA Board members who have come to these events. Big thanks also to the staff team that has organized them, and the other staff members who have given up their Saturdays to work at them.



The live snake shows were a hit with all ages!

Three more in person events are planned for the New Year, as well as some virtual hikes. Contact: Linda Smith, Community Partnerships Specialist

Stream Surveying Season Wraps Up

With cold weather approaching, we are down to the last couple weeks of the 2022 surveying season. The UTRCA field surveyors have had a successful year collecting information on stream depth, shape, and bank heights, while also measuring the size and shape of bridges and culverts. The crew has measured more than 15,000 elevation points and surveyed 400 bridges across our watershed since the season began in early June, and are on pace to collect more than 20,000 points by the end of the season.

We were fortunate to have another excellent crew this year. Ryan Queenan and Will Morrow returned for a second season, while Morgan Walmsley and Robyn Whaley were first timers who hit the ground running. Bailey Arnold joined us for the fall to help us finish the season strong.

The data this crew collected is an integral part of UTRCA flood models and is the first component used to create a new model. A flood model is used to simulate various flows in a river and then determine where a flood could occur along the river. The information collected by the surveyors helps us know how much water could flow through a bridge opening during a flood event and how much water a stream can contain before it starts to spill over its banks.

The information the surveyors collect needs to be accurate and thorough to ensure a good final product and the team endured some tough field conditions while meeting this high standard. Heat, cold, bugs, dense bush – this crew worked in it all!

Contact: Collin Branton, GIS Water Resources Project Specialist

Highlighting Outdoor Learning for our Youngest Students

This fall, 29 kindergarten teachers applied for and received Outdoor Learning Kits from the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) as part of an exciting pilot program centred on outdoor education. The kits are packed with a variety of materials, equipment, and resources that teachers can use to facilitate outdoor learning, including magnifiers, binoculars, bug catchers, environmental books, and much more.

Fanshawe Community Education staff are supporting this primary outreach program and modeling some ways teachers can use the kit items in their schoolyards, by visiting each kindergarten teacher and class three times in the school year to deliver programming geared to the season.

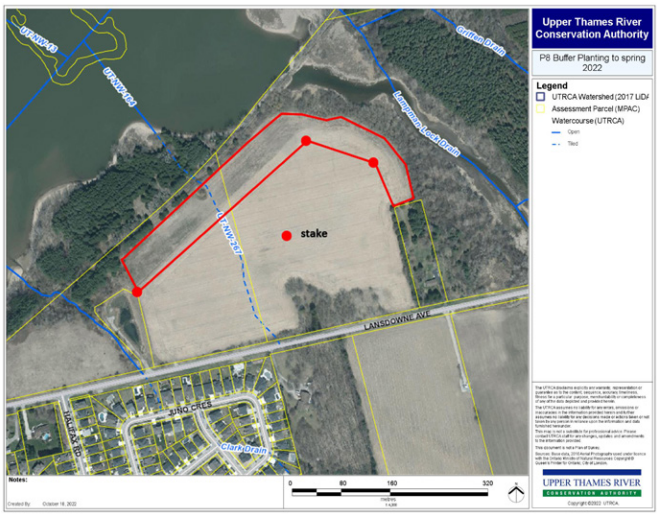
For the fall, staff led activities featuring squirrels, fall colours, and butterflies, with games on nut caching, leaf sorting, and natural symmetry. For the winter and spring visits, staff will highlight new kit items and explore the seasonal changes.

The TVDSB plans to collect teacher feedback on the usefulness of the kit and hopes the kit will be shared among all the kindergarten teachers at each school. This will give more students the chance to enjoy outdoor learning in their schoolyard, in new ways and in all seasons.

Contact: Kim Gilbert or Heather Hawkins Jensen, Community Education Technicians

Treed Buffer Planted on Pittock Conservation Area's South Shore

Pittock Reservoir's south shore has a new treed buffer, planted by UTRCA staff and school students over the past four years. The buffer is approximately 50 metre wide and 600 m long, and flanks Pittock's South Shore Trail and the Lampman-Lock Drain on UTRCA land. The buffer roughly follows the regulation limit, meaning all flood susceptible land is now retired and protected.



Buffering watercourses with native plants helps to filter pollutants in runoff, prevent erosion, and provide wildlife corridors.

In 2019, two local school groups planted the first section of the buffer through the **UTRCA's Communities for Nature program**. In 2020-2022, UTRCA forestry staff machine planted the remainder of the buffer. Staff's family members helped with some of the tree planting during the pandemic.

The species planted include oaks, hickories, White Pine, Sycamore, Tamarack, Black Cherry, and Tulip Tree. In 2021, eight Butternut seedlings were added. The tree survival rate in this light soil has been very good so far. Staff will maintain the site with mowing and spraying for another couple of years until the trees are tall enough to out-compete the weeds.

This project increases the area's biodiversity and assists the UTRCA with its **environmental target** of planting and restoring 1500 hectares of vegetation by 2037. The project was funded by a private donor as well as grants from **Forests Ontario** and the **Clean Water Program**.

Contact: Cathy Quinlan, Terrestrial Biologist

Tree Planting along Medway Creek

Over the course of three mostly sunny, warm October days, hundreds of native trees and shrubs were planted along Medway Creek near 13 Mile Road. Two elementary school classes (Princess Elizabeth Public School and Masonville Public School) and two secondary school classes (Medway High School and H.B. Beal Secondary School) each spent a half day along the creek. The **Friends of Medway Creek** and other community members also enjoyed a sunny Saturday of tree planting.

Funding through Eco-Action and the hard work of all the participants made this project

possible. Thank you to the Friends of Medway Creek, Medway High School Eco-Club, and the other teachers, students, and community members who made this project a success. Contact: Jessica Penz, Water Resources Assistant/Community Partnership Specialist

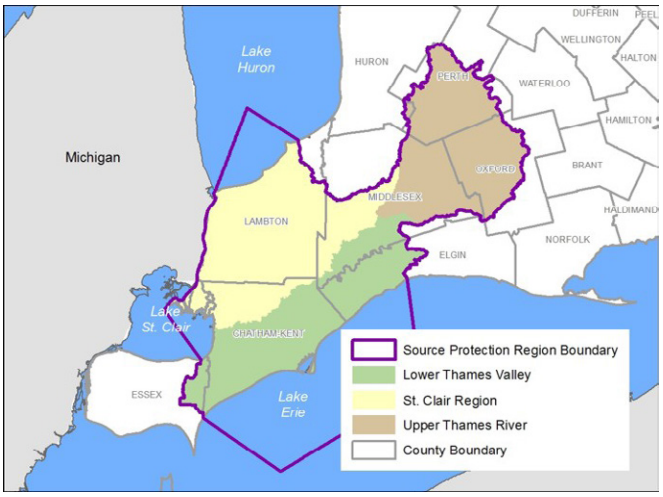
Source Water Protection: the Plan

Water is critical to all aspects of our lives. It's important to ensure there is a safe and reliable source of water for all our uses - now and in the future. The *Clean Water Act (2006)* is part of the Ontario government's commitment to ensure the sustainability of clean, safe drinking water for all Ontarians. The purpose of the Act is to protect sources of municipal drinking water including lakes, rivers, and well water.

Under the *Clean Water Act*, local Source Protection Plans (SPPs) were developed by 19 multi-stakeholder Source Protection Committees across the province. In this area, the Upper Thames River, Lower Thames Valley, and St. Clair Region Conservation Authorities have partnered watersheds together as the **Thames-Sydenham and Region Source Protection Region**.

The local Committee includes members of the general public as well as representatives of municipalities, the aggregate/oil and gas industry, agriculture, and First Nations from across the region. The Conservation Authorities provide administrative and technical support for the Committee.

Local Source Protection Plans contain policies to protect sources of municipal drinking water. The process includes consulting with owners of residential, agricultural, industrial, commercial, and institutional properties located within vulnerable areas, to inform them that activities identified as significant drinking water threats are subject to local SPP policies that regulate or prohibit those activities. Examples of activities that could be considered a "significant threat" in a vulnerable area include septic systems, fuel storage, and application of pesticides.



SPP policies use tools to reduce threats to drinking water. These tools range from voluntary action to prohibiting an activity. Some threats can be reduced through education to encourage different ways of doing things. Some threats are addressed through existing regulatory processes, such as permits and land use planning (e.g., zoning bylaws).

For most existing significant threats, the Committee chose to use a new tool, the Risk Management Plan, which allows the municipality's risk management official and

the landowner to negotiate a risk reduction strategy that satisfies the Source Protection Plan.

When it comes to protecting our drinking water, we need to start at the source. Local source protection plans aim to do just that, with the commitment and cooperation of the communities that rely on municipal drinking water systems.

Contact: Katie Ebel, Source Protection Policy and Risk Management Advisor

Take Our Kids to Work

Take Our Kids to Work Day is a national initiative that allows Grade 9 students to explore the world of work by spending a day with a parent, relative, or friend at their place of employment. On November 2, Jack McNaughton and Sam MacKean, both children of current employees, spent the day working at the UTRCA learning about different aspects of the organization and tasks involved.

Walking the planks: Jack had an awesome day working outside at Sifton Bog Environmentally Significant Area, learning new skills and the importance of protecting nature.

Leading the charges: Sam spent the day at Wildwood CA helping to lead education programs while getting a glimpse into how any topic can be made fun and relevant to taking care of the environment.

Mitchell TD Tree Day

Grade seven and eight students from Mitchell planted 150 trees and shrubs along Whirl Creek on November 9. The project was happily completed on a sunny, mild day, after being delayed twice due to rain and once due to fog.

Students from Mitchell District High School (yes, the 7's and 8's go to the high school).

The native species planted included White Cedar, White Spruce, Serviceberry, Red Oak, Sugar and Red Maples, and Nannyberry. The students also learned about the connection between trees and improved water quality.

Thank you to **TD Tree Days** for funding this project.

Contact: Karen Pugh, Resource Specialist

2022 Watershed Reports Coming Soon

Work on the 2022 edition of the **Upper Thames River Watershed Report Cards** is nearing completion, with an expected launch in early 2023. The report cards are produced every five years and summarize a great deal of environmental information on the health of the 28 subwatersheds within the Upper Thames River watershed.

The new report cards will be similar in content to the 2017 version, with letter grades for surface water quality and forest conditions as well as information on groundwater resources. In addition, there is information on current watershed features, recommended actions, and highlights of progress since the last report cards.

The watershed report cards allow staff to track environmental changes over time and give an indication of program needs in light of current stressors. They also help to track progress towards the UTRCA's **Environmental Targets**.

The report cards are well used by our municipal partners, agency staff, community groups, individuals, educators, and others.

Contact: Cathy Quinlan, Terrestrial Biologist

On the Board Agenda

The next Board of Directors meeting will be held virtually on November 22, 2022. Please visit **Board Agendas and Minutes** for agendas, reports, audio/video links and recordings, and approved minutes.

- 2023 Fees Policy and Fee Schedules
- 2023 Board of Directors Meeting Schedule, Transition, and Orientation Plan
- Omnibus Bill 23: More Homes Built Faster Act
- 2023 Draft Budget Approval
- Administration and Enforcement – Section 28 Status Report

Contact: Michelle Viglianti, Administrative Assistant