

The Couchiching Conservancy



**2016 Annual General Meeting
February 6, 2016**

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. at Odas Park, Orillia with the attendance of around 120 members and guests.

2. Minutes and highlights of the 2015 Annual General Meeting

Secretary Kailin Gratrix briefly highlighted items of note from the 2015 minutes:

She highlight the previous year's financial statements that she herself presented:

Kailin made special reference to the following:

- Statement of financial position, total assets and liabilities compared to last year (pg 4)
- Revenues and expenses (pg 5). Donations are up. We are hurting a bit in terms of grants but have a number of applications in the works.
- Prior period correction with respect to funds held by the Community Foundation of Orillia (pg 16)
- Cash flow (pg 6) – there is a \$15,000 surplus at year end, up from last year

Acquisitions

The 354-acre Ellen Larsen Conservation Easement creates a link between Conservancy land and Queen Elizabeth II Wildlands Park, a transition from Carden Alvar to granite barrens with the Head River between them.

Margot Holt's legacy gift to the Nature Conservancy of Canada provided 100 acres of grassland.

In September the Province upgraded Carden land to create Carden Alvar Provincial Park, which raises the level of protection for the property.

Development and Outreach

Finding money continues to be a challenge but the Conservancy's community profile stays strong. Monthly giving continues to grow and the annual campaign was an improvement over last year.

Our school program, Nature in the Neighbourhood, involved 1,200 kids this past year. Julia Wolst has more education program ideas for 2015.

A donation from Dr. Nancy Ironside supported the greening of Regent Park Public School with native species.

Our second Corn Roast in the Woods brought in \$4000 and our biggest fundraiser, the Carden Challenge brought in over \$22,000. The Carden Nature Festival was small but perfect. It will be a single-day event in 2015.

There were no comments or questions.

Moved by Doug Christie that the minutes of the 2015 Annual General Meeting be approved.

Seconded by Neil Gray. Carried.

3. President's remarks

Margaret commented on the progression the Conservancy has made over the year. She also noted the cohesiveness of the board of director and acknowledged the staff, volunteers and members who have all played an instrumental role in the organization's success.

Mark thanked Margaret for her commitment and hard work as President.

4. Treasurer's report

Treasurer Jack Booth presented the audited financial statements for the period ending October 31, 2015. Jack made special reference to the following:

- Statement of financial position, total assets and liabilities compared to last year (pg 4)
We have accumulated more cash and fixed assets this year, are financially strong and have good operating ratios. We are operating well with very little debt.
- Revenues and expenses (pg 5). Donations have increased this year from 2014. We continue to face difficulties receiving new grants but will continue to push through!
- Cash flow (pg 6) – there is a surplus at year end, up from last year. Overall, we are able to meet our financial obligations.

Moved by Robbie Preston that the Financial Statements for the year ended October 31, 2015 be approved. Seconded by Jane Ball. Carried.

Motion to appoint Hehn Trickey Professional Corporation Chartered Accountants as auditor for the year ending October 31, 2015. Moved by Ken Thomson, seconded by Bruce Stanton. Carried.

5. Past Presidents Council report

Jamie and Anne Ross spoke about the reasons they pledged to the Heartwood Fund. They talked about the growth of the Conservancy over the years and the need to support the organization into the foreseeable future to ensure we keep our promise to protect thousands of acres of land.

Mark asked the Past Presidents in the room to stand and thanked them for their hard work and dedication.

6. Executive Director's report

Renovations

Mark began by summarizing the renovations to the Grant Wood's office. He thanked the staff members for their patience during the seemingly-endless months of renovations. This include

having to use outdoor toilets, working around noise and dust, and the lack of heating. He recognized the following members of the renovations committee:

Ken Thomson for his critical role on the leadership team that managed the renovations.

Kristi McKechnie and Don Scott, who donated hundreds of hours and tens of thousands of dollars to the project. They also helped rally the construction community.

David Homer, held the position as renovations chair and his wife Bonnie. David has championed the re-development for years and its completion will be a testament to his dedication.

Bruce Duncan, our volunteer foreman and Dorthea Hangaard project manager were also key members in the renovation committee.

Carden Nature Festival

Mark discussed one of the big changes the Conservancy has faced over the past year- the conclusion of the Carden Nature festival and a pivot to the New Passport to Nature program. He spoke of the tough decision that the Conservancy faced given the festival's history of the last nine years. He pointed out key challenges such as remoteness, a lack of accommodation and the need for constant novelty. It became difficult to fundraise for the event and to garner public participation.

Passport to Nature

The Passport to Nature events are designed to engage the public across different Conservancy properties. It has taken the best innovations of the festival and incorporated them into a series of events to be held across different regions including the Carden region.

Acquisitions

i) Turnbull Ranch

The Conservancy started off the year by accepting the donation of the Turnbull Ranch from Carolyn and Neil Turnbull, bringing the former easement under our ownership. By the end of the year, we had brought an additional 500 acres under protection through conservation easements and added some very valuable supporters to our community in the owners of the properties. Powered by the provincial Habitat Offsetting program, this donation of land helped us negotiate a restoration contract with a reputable firm which will generate funds for more acquisition. This plan is guided by a strong and ethical Habitat Offsetting policy, created by an ad-hoc committee this year. On Turnbull and other properties, we restored more than 400 acres of degraded grassland habitat, which would have historically been kept open by regular wild fires.

ii) Sue Deadman

Susan Deadman donated an easement on her 100-acre property in the Severn wildlands. The members were presented with a map and description of the property.

Mark recognized Sue for becoming a wonderful ambassador and an active participant with the Conservancy.

iii) Ling Property

Late in the fall the Conservancy held a celebration on the edge of the pond of a 400-acre easement donated to the Conservancy by Philip Ling and Linda Frenette-Ling.

Mark described the features of the Ling property as being a wonderful mosaic of woods, grasslands and wetlands, set on the Carden Plain. He remarked on the property being a tremendous legacy. Mark thanked Philip and Linda for their generosity and devotion to the land.

Mark stated that the Conservancy going forward will continue to lay the groundwork for several more easements and acquisitions in areas of strategic interest, and we hope to have more good news for everyone this time next year.

Stewardship

i) Bluebird Ranch

Key to this restoration was a core of volunteers. Bluebird was the site of the first Habitat Offsetting done by the Conservancy, and we under-estimated the amount of work we were in for.

Next Mark recognized the SARBEX crew for all of their work.

ii) Invasive Species

We focused our attention on two types of plants that pose the biggest threat -- primarily dog-strangling vine on the Carden Plain and Garlic Mustard on four woodland properties. The good news is that on both fronts we are seeing real progress. Not eradication, but control. The bad news is that most of the funding we have had in the last two years for dog-strangling vine control is no longer available. That doesn't mean we'll stop the work, but it will certainly hamper our efforts. Volunteers have played a huge role in controlling these species, and we will need them like never before in the coming year.

iii) Species at Risk

This year we tallied up 38 species at risk currently finding refuge on our properties-- a number that underlines, perhaps more than anything else, the importance of the work in which we are all engaged.

iv) Projects

We have three ongoing research projects underway:

Bobolink banding and monitoring, water quality testing, and a lichen inventory. All of this data informs not only our work, but the work of many others.

Volunteers

We had a high volume of volunteers this year who helped organize this year's Annual General meeting, and we are very thankful to have the unique problem of trying to organize so many volunteers. We improved the recording of volunteer time this year and our records indicate that we logged over 2,400 hours.

Outlook for 2016

We're continuing to build relations with donors in the GTA. We're launching a local initiative called the Conservancy Community Drive -- a program designed to increase support for the organization. And we will continue to encourage monthly giving through a spring campaign. Currently, we have 38 donors now using the monthly giving system.

7. Presentation of gold and silver pins

Bob Sullivan and Margaret Pomeroy presented the gold and silver pins.

8. Election of new board

Mark Bisset presented the slate of nominees for 2016-2017: Margaret Pomeroy, David Homer, Robert Sullivan, Doug Christie, Kailin Gratrix, Jamie Ross, Wendy Lowry, Jack Booth and Pam Fulford. He then asked three times for further nominations from the floor. There were none. Moved by Adam Thomson that the slate of candidates for the 2016-2017 Board of Directors of the Couchiching Conservancy. Seconded by Ken Thomson. Carried.

9. Incoming President's remarks and Recognition of departing board members

Margaret Pomeroy thanked the members for attending the AGM and for all of their support of the Conservancy through their donations, their time and energy on our properties, and for their attendance. Their commitment is appreciated and we could not do what we do without them.

She also acknowledged Mark Bisset as Executive Director, and called for a show of appreciation for staff members Mark Bisset, Tanya Clark, Dorthea Hangaard, Ron Reid, David Hawke, Gay Guthrie, and Kathy Connors.

10. Guest speaker

Doug Christie introduced the guest Speaker Mark Mattson, Lake Ontario Water Keeper. Mark is an environmental lawyer who has spent the last decade building a network of successful community-focused environmental organizations across Canada. Mark spoke of the need to protect and restore water bodies as each generation deserves the right to swimmable, drinkable and fishable water.

11. Wrap-up and adjournment

Moved by Kailin Gratrix that the meeting be adjourned.

