



8 Annual Report

President's Message

The past year has been "event full" at the Conservancy. Ron Reid announced in early 2009 his decision to step down as Executive Director.

A Transition Committee was put in place and spent considerable time advertising the position, then poring over a surprising number of applications.



The field was narrowed to six, and Mark Bisset was the unanimous choice, joining the Staff Team on June 1st. Over the summer months, planning was underway for a new fall event, a Bike Rally that attracted 57 participants and had good coverage by The Packet and Times and The A Channel.

When individuals and families visit to enjoy our trail system they have no idea (unless they are members, and many are!) of the magnitude and breadth of the activity that occurs within the "little house" aka the office. We owe a debt of gratitude to Mark Bisset, Executive Director, Gayle Carlyle, Outreach Coordinator, Kyra Howes, Stewardship Coordinator and Kristin Field, Conservation Assistant, for the exceptional part that each one contributes to make The Couchiching Conservancy a leader in Land Trusts in the province.

As well we appreciate our members and volunteers who work tirelessly on our Conservancy-owned properties as well as those we manage for other organizations. We thank Omer and Mary Mick who were Volunteer Coordinators for many years and have retired this year, and welcome to that position Betty Forward. You will hear from Betty in 2010 as we get back onto our properties in the spring.

The Community Foundation of Orillia became a new partner this year and joined forces with Conservancy members to enter a team in the Dragonboat Festival. There was lots of enthusiasm and plans for a repeat in 2010.

Many thanks to every one. Isabelle Thiess President of the Board

The Couchiching Conservancy Board 2009

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Ingrid VanderMarel, Vice-President	835-2289
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Bob Sullivan	325-8775
Mark Bisset, Executive Director	326-1620
Kyra Howes, Stewardship Coordinator	326-4643
Gayle Carlyle, Outreach Coordinator	326-1620
Kristen Field, Conservation Assistant	326-4643

The Couchiching Conservancy is a non-profit organization, ncorporated in 1993, and registered as Canadian charity No. 13972 5030 RR 0001



Highlights of 2009

Preserving natural lands

To the south is Ontario's Greenbelt, put in place by the province to protect what is left of ecologically important spaces surrounding the Greater Toronto Area. But what of important natural lands beyond that? In the race between development and conservation in this region, the Couchiching Conservancy remained a stalwart answer to that question in 2009, protecting over 1300 acres.

Notable in 2009 were:

- The donation from Lou and Judy Probst of the 489-acre McGee Creek and Cranberry Lake Wetlands in Carden to the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The property is managed by Couchiching Conservancy.
- The completion of a project in partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada that adds 645 acres of protected area to the Carden Plain with the acquisition of Little Bluestem Alvar. This strategically important property links conservation lands to the Carden Community Centre property.
- The completion of a conservation easement on 100 acres on the Oro Moraine owned by Mack Williams, protecting the results of a lifetime of reforestation and good forestry practices.
- Negotiation of the lease and agreement to purchase of 300 acres in Carden of Wolf Run Alvar, with the deal scheduled to be completed late in 2010.
- The dedication of the 106-acre addition to Alexander Hope Smith Nature Reserve following a partial donation from Stan Hope-Smith in 2008.

These additions put us in a good position to meet our Strategic Plan goal of protecting 10,000 acres by 2013.

Highlights of 2009

- Another 1,334 acres of special natural lands protected
- 9,234 acres now protected by Couchiching Conservancy
- A bigger and better Carden Nature Festival and a new fall cycling event
- Over 400 members and 150 volunteers keep our sails full and our course clear
- Our reserve funds continue to grow for long-term sustainability
- The successful transition to a new Executive Director while retaining the original in a crucial role.
- The prestigious W.W. Gunn Conservation Award went to Ron Reid for a lifetime of outstanding personal service to nature conservation

Stewarding lands of nature

Change was a big part of 2009 with the departure of Ron Reid and the arrival of Mark Bisset as Executive Director of the Couchiching Conservancy.

But after a well-deserved month away, Ron returned in a new and crucial role as Carden Program Coordinator thanks to a generous grant from the Metcalf Foundation. With the scope of Conservancy activities dramatically expanding, Carden has become a complex hive of activity for the organization, both in terms of land acquisition and innovative approaches to stewardship.

Partnerships with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Wildlife Preservation Canada, the federal Habitat Stewardship Program, the provincial Species At Risk Stewardship Fund, the Lake Simcoe Cleanup Fund, and several private landowners created a dynamic year in alvar conservation. Ron will continue through 2010 on a half-time contracted basis. His presence has been invaluable during this period of transition.

Work has continued on major stewardship projects that use cattle as a grassland management tool while fencing them out of sensitive wetlands and alvar habitat. We also made improvements for humans in 2009, opening a 3-kilometre trail into the heart of Cameron Ranch and constructing a bird blind to allow unobtrusive viewing on Windmill Ranch.

There are now 33 properties under Conservancy management. That list includes 15 properties owned by the Conservancy, 7 conservation easements and 11 properties managed by us through partnership agreements with Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Parks and Ontario Heritage Trust. Volunteer property teams assisted extensively in the management of many of these properties.

Management plans were completed on McGee Creek and Cranberry Wetland, Church Woods, Elliott Woods and Waterthrush Woods.

Reaching out to the community

Community support is the key to our success. Like the solid granite and limestone bedrock that provides a stable foundation for our landscape, our supporters provide a secure base for our growth. Our outreach programs this year included:

- The third annual Carden Nature Festival, which provided over 100 field trips and workshops to almost 300 participants.
- Our first ever Conservancy Cycling Adventure on October 4th, with 57 enthusiastic participants who pedaled their way from Orillia to visit 3 Conservancy properties. There was excellent media coverage of the event including a local television report.
- Media partnerships with Orillia *Packet & Times* and *Orillia Today* and the *Lindsay Post*, which provided regular exposure of Conservancy activities to a wide audience.
- Published and launched two field guidebooks; *Species on the Edge* compiled by Conservancy staff member, Kristen Field, and *Alvar Specialty Plants of Central Ontario* by Margo Holt.
- Completion of a major project on species at risk along the Trent Severn Waterway, Waterway Wildlife Project.
- Partnership with The Community Foundation of Orillia and Area to raise money for an endowment fund. The first fundraiser initiative was participation in the Orillia Dragon Boat Festival held on September 26. Our paddling team raised almost \$3,000 for the Conservancy.
- Recruited 30 volunteers to monitor for Golden-winged Warblers (Species at Risk), along the Shield edge to obtain baseline information on local distribution, habitat use and species interactions. Training workshops and volunteer appreciation events were held in the spring.
- Attended meetings at Naturalists clubs Orillia Naturalists Club, Muskoka Field Naturalists, Carden Field Naturalists, Ratepayers/Cottage Associations North Mara Beach Ratepayers Association, Severn River Association of Property Owners, Clearwater Lake Cottage Association. Attended Lindsay Lilac Festival and Orillia Canada Day Festivities with display booth.
- Recruited new Volunteer Coordinator and developed new database system for volunteer information.

Managing a strong sustainable organization

Late 2008 and 2009 proved financially devastating to many organizations, businesses, and individuals, but The Couchiching Conservancy isn't counted among the casualties. In fact, 2009 can be seen as a testament to years of good management, forward-thinking leadership and the loyal support of our members and supporters.

In the worst economic climate seen in decades, the Conservancy emerged from 2009 with additional acres protected, additional reserves and a small surplus. As governments at every level wrestle with enormous deficits



and the private sector strives to recover in the coming year, 2010 may present even more financial challenges. But the Conservancy remains in a strong position to weather the storm:

- Despite ambitious targets, we are well on our way to realizing the goals of the 5-year Strategic Plan after the first year of implementation.
- A full financial audit for our fiscal year (ending October 31) has been prepared by J.R. Booth C.A. Professional Corporation and is available on request.
- Our overall revenues of \$814,916 for 2009 marked a significant increase over 2008 due to acquisitions and an increase in the number of stewardship projects being done in Carden. Our operating costs, which include acquisitions and capital, went up accordingly to \$783,027. At year end, our operating revenues generated a net excess of \$7,122.

Some funds are held for special purposes, determined by board policies. The Acquisition Fund came into play in 2009 when \$9,830 was withdrawn to cover costs associated with the Stan Hope-Smith acquisition. However, the Property Protection Fund, intended to provide ongoing income to help maintain our properties, grew to by \$11,000 to \$164,709. The President's reserve, a cushion for future operating expenses, also grew to \$94,773. Finally, we have created a new Carden Conservation Fund of \$15,300 to assist private landowners with stewardship projects.



Looking ahead to 2010

The Conservancy board has identified several priorities for 2010, including:



- Completing at least one new property acquisition in Carden (Wolf Run Alvar), as well as working toward the completion of key acquisitions in north Severn Township.
- Negotiating two new conservation easements in the region.
- Continuing to implement the recommendations of the Integrated Carden Conservation Strategy to build community bridges through partnerships and advance the cause of conservation.
- Taking a leadership role in the preservation of natural heritage values in the Copeland Forest.
- Enhancing our website and fine-tuning a new electronic newsletter format to reduce paper use and mailing costs.
- Creating a pilot project to engage high school-aged youth in conservation to cultivate future support.
- Building on the success of the Carden Nature Festival and the Conservancy Cycling Adventure.

Our Thanks to Our Supporters

Without the support of our community, and of many individuals and agencies, the Conservancy would not be as successful. We particularly want to gratefully acknowledge the support of **The Ontario Trillium Foundation**, an agency of the Ministry of Culture, which receives annually \$100 million in government funding generated through Ontario's charity casino initiative.

We also received grants during 2009 from

- The George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation
- The Heritage Canada Foundation
- Ontario Heritage Trust
- Ontario Tourism Event Marketing Program
- Bristol-Myers Squibb
- Shell Environmental Fund
- Meridian Credit Union
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
- Ontario Job Connects
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- Community Wellness Fund Casino Rama
- Ontario Land Trust Assistance Program

- Habitat Stewardship Program, Environment Canada
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Wildlife Preservation Canada
- · City of Orillia
- Township of Severn
- RBC Bluewater Fund
- Lake Simcoe Cleanup Fund
- Agriculture Agri Foods Canada
- Evergreen
- Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority
- · Community Fish and Wildlife Involvement Program
- Canadian Heritage

Other organizations are an important source of support for Conservancy operations and projects. During 2009, we received contributions and volunteer support from:

- Sciensational Sssnakes
- Kids for Turtles
- · Orillia Naturalists Club
- Carden Field Naturalists
- Orillia Canada Day Committee
- Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority
- Friends of Wye Marsh
- · Kawartha Naturalists Club
- Durham Region Field Naturalists
- Twin Lakes Conservation Club
- Township of Oro-Medonte
- Sir Sanford Fleming College students
- · Dufferin Aggregates
- West Humber Naturalists Club
- Bell Canada Employee Volunteer Program
- City of Kawartha Lakes
- Orillia District Chamber of Commerce
- Wildlife Preservation Canada

- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Ontario Nature
- Ontario Land Trust Alliance
- Toronto Ornithological Club
- Ontario Stone Sand & Gravel Association
- Ontario Field Ornithologists
- The Orillia Museum of Art and History
- Bruce Stanton Constituency Office
- Garfield Dunlop Constituency Office
- · Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority
- Severn Sound Environmental Association
- Victoria Lands & Waters Stewardship Council
- R.W. Tomlinson Aggregates
- The Miller Group
- Brereton Field Naturalists
- PFRA
- Katimavik

Corporate Support

Many companies across the region have provided services, products, sponsorships, or other assistance to the Conservancy during the past year. We thank them all. We would like to particularly thank our Corporate Members who were major supporters in 2009:

Casino Rama Community Wellness Program Crawford, McKenzie, McLean, Anderson

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Other valuable corporate support was received from:

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The following individuals and groups contributed \$100 or more to the Conservancy and its projects during 2009. The support from all of our donors is greatly appreciated..

Dalrymple Seniors Penetang Horticultural Society

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Abbott, Edwin & Vivien Ackert, Brenan, Joy & John Agnew, Sandy and Lynne Melnyk

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Beaton, Anita Beauregard, Stephen Beck, Gregor Bedford, Patricia Bednarz, Eveyln

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Brenner, Konrad

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Our Volunteers are pricesless: This year has shown once again the talent and dedication of our volunteers who form the core of our organization. Volunteers participate on property management teams, build trails and facilities at Grant's Woods, staff special events, help with fundraising, sit on committees, and do a hundred other useful things.

After several years at the helm, Mary E. Mick retired as our Volunteer Coordinator. We thank Mary for bringing her organizational skills and enthusiasm to the position. Betty Forward is our new Volunteer Coordinator and she welcomes enquiries from anyone wishing to get involved. Please contact the Couchiching Conservancy office at 326-1620 and Betty will get in touch

Among our most active volunteers are our Board Members, who dedicate many hours to overseeing Conservancy affairs as well as often being involved in projects. Our thanks to our 2009 volunteers (and our apologies if we missed anyone):

Ackert, Brenan Agnew, Sandy Allison, Bill Antochin, Liz & Peter Armstrong, Greg Atwood, Harold Babbineau, Rose Ball, Gord & Jane Ballantyne, Robert Bam, Homi Bell, Tassia & John Blair, Gord & Bernice Blogg, Winston Boehnert, Betty and Roy Bowden, Lydia Bowles, Bob, Adam & Elliott

Bowles, Bob, Adam & Ellioti Bowman, Ken Bisset, Sandi and Mark Bray, Bob & Nancy Brenner, Konrad Bromley, Patricia Brown, Jerry & Lorraine Buchanan, Terry & Anne Budge, Ann & Don Bunn, Walter Bushell, Sandra

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Carlyle, Gayle

Carson, Dave

Cayley, Julie

Cooney, Colleen

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Rosebush, Joan & John Ross, Anne & Jamie Rowell, David Russell, Paul Russell, Alex Ruttan, Pamela Scott, Don Shook, Mary-Diane Sinclair, Muriel & Alex Sinclair, Carol Sloley, Jane

Smith, Ken & Judy

Smith, Dennis Smith, Richard & Beverley

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