

# 2021

# AMBASSADOR TRAINING MANUAL



**THANK YOU** for helping to share the importance of local land conservation within your community.

## AMBASSADOR ROLE

As an ambassador, you have the important role of engaging others in the Conservancy's work and spreading awareness of local land conservation. Through attending public events, helping to host Passport to Nature webinars, phone calls to supporters, trail engagement, and more you have the ability to inspire others to take action to protect important wild places in the region.

As part of The Couchiching Conservancy's mandate, we aim to *encourage and foster an understanding and awareness of the natural environment*. As an ambassador, you have the opportunity to help us achieve this!

***Due to the pandemic, some of the ambassador jobs have changed for 2021. Your safety and the safety of our community is most important to us. As a result, we have altered the ambassador program and volunteer guidelines to ensure we are following the necessary protocols as outlined by the Provincial Government.***

## 2021 RESPONSIBILITIES

- Assist with phone calls to supporters to engage them in the Conservancy's work
  - o Invite supporters to Annual General Meetings, GTA events, etc.
- Answering questions about The Couchiching Conservancy and promote our work
  - o Provide information about membership, volunteer opportunities, and campaigns
- Helping to host Passport to Nature webinars
- Garbage clean ups
- Sharing our social media posts online
- Assisting with Wine Club
  - o Sorting wine orders and helping with contactless pick up

**When it is safe to interact with the public in person:**

- Engaging the public on the trail (Trail Ambassadors)
- Represent the Conservancy at public events
  - o Fairs, Downtown Orillia events, farmers' markets
- Setting up and taking down the booth; ensure adequate materials are available and on display
- Assist as needed at other Conservancy events (Annual General Meeting, Fundraising, etc.)

## COMMITMENT

Without you, The Couchiching Conservancy would not be able to reach out to so many people and create a community of like-minded supporters who want to protect natural spaces in the region. Due to this importance we are hoping that you can commit to the following:

- Minimum of one job a year
- Attend one ambassador training session or watch an ambassador training video
- Read the monthly e-newsletter

## SAFETY GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW DURING THE PANDEMIC

We will be following all restrictions that are in place at any given time. Your safety is our top priority so we ask that you adhere to the following rules when we engage with the public:

- If you are feeling ill, please stay at home.
- If you are going to a monitoring site/event with your partner who is not from the same household, please drive separately.
- Please wear masks when volunteering. If you do not own a mask, let us know and we will provide you with one.
- Please stay at least 6 feet (we'd be more comfortable with 12 feet) from your partner and anyone you encounter.
- Please do not share equipment (pencils, recording devices, etc.)
- Please wear your citizen science/ambassador badge, and print off this "[Volunteers at Work](#)" sign and put it on the dash of your car and carry an extra copy with you. We can also print off the sign for pickup if needed



Your safety, and the safety of the public, are far more important than your monitoring visit. If at any time you feel the need to turn around and go home, please do not hesitate to do so.

## ENGAGEMENT TIPS FOR PUBLIC EVENTS

- Introduce yourself and mention you are a volunteer with the Conservancy
- Get the conversation started by asking them open-ended questions like;
  - Do you have an interest in protecting nature in the region?
  - Did you know there is a local land trust?
  - Do you enjoy spending time in nature?
  - Ask them if they have ever visited a Nature Reserve and if they know that it is owned and managed by a land trust
  - Important to have a two-way conversation
    - Sometimes it is easy to get carried away and chat about all the opportunities we have and talk at the person instead of talking with them
    - It is important to let them to do a lot of the talking and for us to listen. This allows us to build more of a relationship with the individual

Once the individual is at the booth, how do you keep them interested?

- Focus on their interests
  - People are more likely to care about the work we do if it relates to them
  - By connecting our work to their interests, they can see themselves in the organization
- Stick to one small ask
  - Suggesting one way they can get involved (e.g. become a member) avoids them from feeling overwhelmed



- Keeping the ask small and simple avoids the individual from feeling like they must commit to a lot of things right away
- Base the one simple ask on their interests
- Story telling
  - Story telling is a powerful tool in developing relationships with individuals
  - If you volunteer with the Conservancy or are involved in in some way, tell your own story and talk about experiences you have had
  - People relate to stories and it helps them visualize the importance of the issue you are talking about
- Let them know the importance of their support
  - Share how their support is making a difference in their community
  - Use your volunteer experience to share how you are protecting local lands
  - Share how they can experience the good the organization is doing, rather than just telling them about it
- Don't feel like you need to put a time limit on your conversation
  - If someone seems interested in the work we do, take your time and feel free to extend the conversation with the individual, even if it's long.

## PHONE CALL BEST PRACTICES

- Best to call the individual twice before leaving a message
- Response rate is best on weekday evenings
- If a number is out of service, try emailing them
- Leaving voicemails
  - Say your name clearly at the beginning of the message
  - Repeat your name at the end of the message
  - Say the call back number twice, and slowly



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Q: What does The Couchiching Conservancy do?

**A:** The Couchiching Conservancy is a non-profit, non-government land trust that protects the natural features of the Couchiching Severn Region for future generations. The organization was founded in 1993 by passionate nature lovers looking to make a difference in their community.

### Q: What is a Land Trust?

**A:** A land trust is an organization whose goal is to work with people to protect and manage ecologically sensitive land for future generations.

### Mission Statement:

1. To preserve, protect, restore and improve the natural environment of the Couchiching-Severn region.

2. To encourage and foster an understanding and awareness of the natural environment and its value in enhancing our quality of life.
3. To acquire, maintain and preserve lands or interests in lands of ecological, recreational, scientific, scenic, heritage or open space value.
4. To promote and undertake research and data collection on the natural environment and to distribute the findings to the public.

#### Q: How big of an area does the Couchiching Conservancy Cover?

A: The Couchiching Conservancy protects and manages over 50 Nature Reserves- a total of over 13, 500 acres!

#### Q: Does The Couchiching Conservancy have an office?

A: Yes! The office is located at Grants Woods. This 52-acre property has a network of 4km of walking trails with connecting footbridges and interpretive stations. The property is open to the public year round, no charge, and has off road parking and composting toilets (closed in 2021 due to the pandemic). The office was renovated in 2015/2016 and now has solar panels and a geothermal well!

#### Q: How old is Grant's Woods?

A: Grant's Woods was originally owned by the Grant family from 1909-2002. They built a quaint farmhouse, surrounded by 52 acres of old growth forest. The Grant family had a strong connection with the forest, and acted as guardians of the land. Through their ownership of the property, there was little impact on the forest and as a result some of the trees are over 200 years old.

As time passed, the property was passed onto the Grant brothers, Bill and Jack. In 2002, after Jack passed away, Bill contacted The Couchiching Conservancy and donated the property. The old farmhouse is now the conservancy's main office.

There are many remnants of the farm that can still be seen today, such as the Fargo truck which is located just after the bridge on the Trillium trail.

#### Q: How do you look after all these Nature Reserves?

A: Our Conserved Lands Manager and our incredible team of volunteers help monitor the Nature Reserve. Our Volunteer Land Stewards are assigned to our Nature Reserves and visit them 2-4 times a year. Our Citizen Science volunteers collect data that provide important information on water quality and species on these Nature Reserves.

A Property Management Plan is created for each property and updated every 5 years, with new strategic actions for better protection, recovery and enhancement of the property.

### Q: Does your organization follow certain standards and practices?

A: Yes! The Couchiching Conservancy is guided by our strategic plan- a vision of what we want to achieve over the next 5 years. It includes a list of goals and objectives that we aim to achieve over the 5-year period. We also follow the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices to ensure we better our practices as a land trust and organization as a whole.

### Q: Are the Nature Reserves open to the public?

A: We have many Nature Reserves that are open to the public and have footpaths- Some include:

- Grant's Woods
- The Church Woods
- Elliott Woods
- T.C. Agnew Reserve
- Alexander Hope Smith Nature Reserve
- Little Bluestem
- Prairie Smoke Alvar
- Cameron Ranch
- Ron Reid Nature Reserve
- Adams Nature Reserve

Some of the Nature Reserves are not open to the public because they are either isolated or have ecologically sensitive lands.

### Q: How is The Couchiching Conservancy funded?

A: The Conservancy is a membership-based organization and receives contributions and donations from its members, monthly givers, and supporters. To support specific projects, the Conservancy will seek donations and grants from foundations and the provincial and federal government. Our goal is to diversify our funding sources to maintain independence and long-term sustainability.

### Q: Do you have events or activities that the public can attend?

A: Yes! We host a variety of free events throughout the year. Our Passport to Nature program offers around 20 free events from May-February. The events are a combination of webinars and in person events are led by knowledgeable staff and volunteers. Topics range from hiking, snowshoeing, birding and more.

### Q: How do you determine what properties need to be protected?

A: The Conservancy has priority regions and actively seeks Nature Reserves within these regions. The individual Nature Reserves may be donated, acquired through purchase following a fundraising campaign, or acquired through partnerships with other organizations (such as Ontario Heritage Trust, Ontario Parks or the Nature Conservancy of Canada). The Conservancy also holds Conservation Easements on private properties. These

easements are donated by the owners of the property with mutually agreed upon restrictions. The easements are registered on the title of the properties. Ownership remains with the landowner and the easement stays with the property once it is sold.

**Q: Do you do anything else besides protect land?**

**A:** Yes, we are also involved with sharing information on conservation and the importance of protecting wildlife in our area. We have partnered with other organizations and government agencies to conduct biological inventories, gather information on Species at Risk, and coordinate habitat enhancement projects.

**Q: What uses are generally prohibited on the Nature Reserves?**

**A:**

Off leash dogs Foraging ATVs/off-road vehicles Feeding wildlife Paintball Mountain biking Shelters and stands	Hunting Trapping Swimming Camping Collection of material such as picking wildflowers, removal of wood, fossils, etc.
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**Q: Do you have employees or is the organization run by volunteers?**

**A:** The Conservancy has a mix of paid staff and volunteers. Currently, there are six full-time employees and four contractors. University and college students sometimes supplement our paid staff during the field season. However, the Conservancy could not function without volunteers. Each property in our care is monitored by a team of volunteers, overseen by staff. There are hundreds of volunteers registered with the Conservancy, including a governing board of ten.

**Q: What is a Member? How do I become one?**

**A:** Memberships are a very affordable way to take a direct role in protecting natural heritage in your community. As a member, you receive our monthly e-newsletters, gain voting rights at our Annual General Meetings, provide important funds for the work we do. Most importantly, you gain a lasting relationship with the wilderness of the area and with a community of passionate individuals dedicated to protecting our natural heritage. It's \$40 for an individual membership and \$60 for a family. Memberships are 12 months.

**Q: What is the role of a volunteer? How can I become one?**

**A:** Volunteering is a great way to gain hands-on experience and learn about the health of your surrounding environment. Volunteers play an extremely important role in connecting the public with conservation efforts

and gathering data that is used to understand the Nature Reserves we protect. We still have some volunteer positions to fill and are recruiting ambassadors now!

**Q: Do you get involved with politics?**

**A:** No, the Conservancy does not get involved in lobbying or political activity. The Conservancy has sought to bring about change through “third way thinking” rather than using an adversarial or advocacy approach. From time to time, the Conservancy may provide information to a government or community organization involved in an environmental issue. As well, the Conservancy may be able to help provide a solution to an environmental issue through development of a conservation easement (such as Scout Valley in Orillia) or out-right acquisition of threatened lands.

**Q: What uses are generally permitted on the Nature Reserves?**

**A:**

Nature appreciation Photography Hiking	Cross country skiing Snowshoeing Birdwatching
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Other uses that are considered on a case-by-case basis:

On leash dogs Fishing Geocaching Large group visits with a responsible leader Picnicking	Erecting nest boxes or nesting platforms Feeding birds Research Educational field trips Seed collection
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**Q: What is The Heartwood Fund?**

**A:** The Couchiching Conservancy’s responsibility to future generations includes ensuring the sustainability of our efforts. Our past presidents have come together to create the Heartwood Fund – a “forever” fund, a protected endowment whose income is dedicated to supporting the core of the organization. For more information on the Heartwood Fund, please visit <http://couchichingconserv.ca/donate/heartwood-fund/>.

**Q: Why is protecting land important?**

**A:** We believe that protecting the natural land in our region is vitally important. Not only does it provide crucial habitat for plants and animals, it’s also a valuable part of a healthy community.



Within our most recent acquisition strategy, we are working to build corridors of wilderness throughout the Black River Wildlands region and the Carden Alvar. The creation of wildlife corridors has become more urgent in the face of a rapidly changing climate. *These are the bridges for species to move.* Corridors reduce fragmentation, which has a big impact on species survival. A UN report that concludes a million species are threatened with extinction, and the fact that many Canadian provinces could become ‘climate refuges’ for animals heading north to escape rising temperatures. We are working towards creating the starting point of the wildest spaces left in Ontario.

The Couchiching Conservancy is supported by individuals like you – people who want to ensure that special natural places are safeguarded for the future.

## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONSERVANCY

Previous e-newsletter: <https://conta.cc/3sG3Xfu>

Events: <http://couchichingconserv.ca/about-us/events-calendar/>

In the Field section: <http://couchichingconserv.ca/2021/03/31/notes-from-the-field-spring-2021/>

Passport to Nature: <http://couchichingconserv.ca/about-us/events-calendar/passport-to-nature/>

Annual Report and Financial Reports: <http://couchichingconserv.ca/about-us/annual-reports-and-financial-documents/>

Strategic Plan: <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.37/p94.9ac.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CC-2020-Strategic-Plan-Jan-1-2020-FINAL.pdf?time=1618413220>

Nature Reserves & Easements: <http://couchichingconserv.ca/what-we-do/properties/>

*All of the above links can be found on the Ambassador Page on the Conservancy website.*

## FIELD DAY CHECK LIST

- ✓ Check the Ambassador Page for updated volunteer opportunities
- ✓ Partner’s phone number/email
- ✓ Re-read invitation/instructions to make sure you have no questions about the time or place of arrival
- ✓ Reporting back sheet
- ✓ Do you have all equipment you need, tent, table, bin?
- ✓ Return all materials and Reporting Back Sheet to the office

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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