



SPRING 2013

The GRAND

Annual Report

Environmental news for the residents of the Grand River watershed • Distribution 210,000 copies

Healthy fish, healthy water

By Janet Baine

GRCA Communications Specialist

For the past couple of decades, the fish in the Grand River watershed have had an unlikely set of buddies — anglers.

Local anglers have played a vital role in developing and implementing an award-winning strategy to help fish. Called the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan, it was released 15 years ago with the goal of making this a grand place to be a fish. It includes “42 best bets” — high priority projects to improve the fishery — and many of these have been done or are well underway.

The benefits of the work carried out under the fish plan extend well beyond anglers and fish. It has brought benefits to other

Healthy fishery pays off with environmental and economic benefits

recreational river users, families, business owners and the local economy. Most important, a healthy and diverse fishery reflects a healthy environment.

Among anglers, this watershed has a national and international reputation, attracting lots of visitors. Rick Kustich, a fly fishing writer and photographer from New York State, has fished all around the Great Lakes and pulled many steelhead (rainbow trout) out of the Grand River. He has written about them in his books, including the new *Advanced Fly Fishing for Great Lakes Steelhead*.

‘A joy to fish’

“The Grand River is a joy to fish,” he writes. “The Grand’s run of steelhead is entirely naturally reproduced and is living proof that wild steelhead can flourish in the Great Lakes region when given access to high-quality



New York State fishing expert Rick Kustich with a steelhead caught in the Grand River.

spawning and rearing water.”

Steelhead returned to the Grand in the 1980s, so angling traditions for this species are just getting established, but the area stands out as attracting fishermen that are respectful of the fish and the fishery, he says.

To most, anglers may look idle as they wait for a fish to bite. But

many develop an intimate understanding of river biology that goes well beyond the fish. They know the diet of the fish and see the strong link between fish and habitat. When they notice fish are not where they should be, anglers often put down their rods and take action.

In the rivers and streams, there

are now more gurgling riffles that are important to fish life cycles.

On shore, more trees line waterways and more garbage bins stand at the river access points.

And there are more fish almost everywhere. There are established populations of walleye, brown

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FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT PLAN



Annual report

It may have been a hot, dry year but the GRCA and its partners got a lot accomplished in 2012

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Watershed heroes

The GRCA honours those who are working to make the watershed a healthier place.

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New life at old dam site

Many groups have come together to revitalize the Taquanyah Conservation Area near Cayuga.

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The GRCA

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A Message From the Chair



Jane Mitchell
Chair

It's no secret that over 75 years ago, the Grand was a sewer that flooded in the late winter and dried up in the summer. Fishing was something done in the pristine Northern lakes, not an urban river like the Grand.

What a difference decades of continuing determination have made.

In the middle of May, I watched as volunteers released young trout below the Conestogo Dam to augment one of the best brown trout fisheries in North America.

The Upper Grand reach, which comes before the large urban centres of Waterloo Region and Guelph and the Exceptional Waters section, between Paris and Brantford, have received national and international recognition for the quality of the fishing.

A Message From the CAO



Joe Farwell
Chief Administrative Officer

This year we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Grand River Fisheries Management plan. It's a good time to pause and reflect on what we value about our rivers and streams. One thing that comes to mind is that our rivers support a healthy and diverse fish population.

Many times I've paddled along the river, finding anglers knee deep in the water casting their lines, or parents on the banks teaching their children to bait a hook and drop it in the river.

The richness of the fishery is a credit to work done in the 15 years since the Grand River Fishery Management Plan was adopted. Since then, the committee implementing the plan has won the National Recreational Fisheries Award.

The GRCA and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources co-chaired the implementation committee and worked with angling, nature and other groups to come up with this unique fisheries master plan.

The plan had to cross political boundaries, meaning the feds, the province, municipalities and organizations had to drop any turf wars and cooperate, a rarity in Canada and the world.

Public meetings where local needs were taken into account and the volunteer work of many individuals in many organizations brought forth a plan that worked. Five years ago, another set of public meetings took a fresh look at the plan and its "best bets" for continuing improvement of the Grand watershed fisheries.

The revived fisheries of the Grand River show that working together, we can save our environment.

While they are there, I hope they are learning to appreciate the special piece of nature they have so close to home.

The Grand River watershed is home to cities and towns with almost one million people and it is extensively farmed. We sometimes refer to it as a "working river." Even so, through the efforts of our watershed municipalities in upgrading sewage treatment plants, and the work of the watershed farmers in adopting best environmental farming practices, we have a thriving fish community in the river.

Conditions in the river have improved over the last several decades, and there is room for this to continue. At the GRCA, it is our hope that years from now the Grand River will still be a place where people want to paddle their canoes, stroll along the banks, and take their kids down to the stream bank to try their luck with a hook and line.

Who speaks for you?

The municipality where you live appoints one or more representatives to the GRCA board to oversee the budget and activities of the conservation authority.

Townships of Amaranth, East Garafraxa, Melancthon, Southgate; Town of Grand Valley: Tom Nevills

Townships of Mapleton and Wellington North: Pat Salter

Township of Centre Wellington: Joanne Ross-Zuj

Town of Erin, Townships of Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch: John Brennan

Regional Municipality of Waterloo (Cambridge, Kitchener, North Dumfries, Waterloo, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich): Les Armstrong, Todd Cowan, Jan d'Ailly (GRCA 2nd vice-chair), Rob Deutschmann, Jean Haalboom, Ross Kelterborn, Geoff Lorentz, Claudette Millar, Jane Mitchell (GRCA chair), Warren Stauch

City of Guelph: Bob Bell, Maggie Laidlaw

Municipality of North Perth, Township of Perth East: George Wicke

Regional Municipality of Halton (Halton Hills and Milton): Barry Lee

City of Hamilton: Jeanette Jamieson

County of Oxford (Blandford-Blenheim, East Zorra-Tavistock, Norwich): Bruce Banbury

City of Brantford: Robert Hillier, Vic Prendergast (GRCA 1st vice-chair)

County of Brant: Brian Coleman, Steve Schmitt

Haldimand and Norfolk Counties: Lorne Boyko, Fred Morison

Fish plan partnership pays off

Continued from Page 1
trout and pike. Bass, once absent from the central Grand River, grow to trophy-size.

People are taking advantage of the healthier fishery. There are catch-and-release bass derbies up and down the river. Busloads of paddlers come for the thrill of a day-long canoe trip and use river access points put there as a result of the fish plan. Teenagers are becoming stewards of the rivers and anglers hold many education-

the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and had just returned from a two-year stint with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

"It was more than exciting. It was a complete and utter breath of fresh air and so invigorating," recalls Yerex. "The animosity between user groups and government agencies was all dispensed with. People left their baggage at the door and focused on what was best for the river."

"For this reason, the fish plan speaks for the fish in a way that no single agency can."

Warren Yerex



The fish plan speaks for the fish in a way that no single agency can.



al events to share their knowledge of river biology and recreation.

The presence of fish also increases biodiversity by bringing other species, such as eagles, which fly high above the river, searching for a fish to take back to a nest to feed their young.

"For an angler, it starts with the fish, and opens a whole new world," says Jack Imhof, national biologist with Trout Unlimited Canada and a member of the fish plan committee. "Many people are divorced from the environment and they don't have a clue that the fish in the river are telling us whether the river is working. Fish are an early warning sign to let us know how and where the river isn't working."

When the stars aligned

"I think about fish 24 hours a day. Just ask my wife," admits Warren Yerex, retired supervisor of aquatic resources at the GRCA and co-chair of the fish plan for 15 years.

"My hobby became a career and my career took on a life of its own," says Yerex who still volunteers on the fish plan's technical committee.

He says the stars aligned in 1995 to bring about the creation of the fish plan. He worked at the GRCA, had worked closely with

asked by the two lead organizations — the GRCA and MNR — what they wanted to see in the fish plan.

In return, the anglers were generous. They shared their best kept secrets about favourite fishing spots and saw the common interests of people along different parts of the river.

Verified information

Some of what they said surprised agency biologists, who later verified this information and found out the anglers were bang on. Anglers knew a great deal about the river, the water quality and changes that would benefit fish. Local universities and the Six Nations also helped develop the plan.

"It worked so well. There was buy-in from outside groups because the process was very open," explains Steve May, a fish plan volunteer and the former fish plan coordinator. "The collaboration was effective because of the open style. A volunteer from a small group had a voice at fish plan meetings."

MNR went out on a limb by creating a fish plan based on the natural watershed and not political boundaries. It was the first time this approach had been taken in Ontario. The plan covers

the 11,000 km of waterways in an area the size of Prince Edward Island. The document is over 300 pages, includes a thorough review of the status of the fish resource. It sets out fish community objectives for each section of the river system.

The fish plan includes a section about the process used to develop and implement the plan. That has since been used to develop fish plans for the Toronto Region and Credit River watersheds.

Projects completed

For the 15 years since 1998, groups and organizations have been plugging away with work projects, raising money and awareness and building links among people and organizations dedicated to making the Grand a more hospitable habitat.

Many projects have been completed, such as creating a coldwater trout fishery in the Conestogo River below the Conestogo Dam, setting up trout sanctuaries, special regulations for bass and trout and developing recovery plans for all species at risk. (Read more Pages 4 and 5)

The fish plan is the guiding document for managing the fish habitat and is important to protecting the environmental health of the Grand River watershed. An implementation committee and



Steve May with a bass caught in the Grand River near Brantford.

many sub-committees represent more than a dozen organizations.

"All the millions spent on wastewater treatment, storm water management, road design, development design, environmental assessments — all of this impacts the fish and the river. It all comes down to the fish and the invertebrates that live in the water and ties into the fish plan," Yerex says.

While the task of ensuring the waterways support many species of fish may seem impossible, the plan breaks out bite-sized oppor-

tunities for improvement in each subwatershed.

"Small river projects add up to significant results," May explains.

There have been so many projects and so many successes that in 2009, the fish plan implementation committee went to Ottawa to receive a National Recreational Fisheries Award from Fisheries and Oceans Canada on behalf of all the groups. This was a proud moment, because it is the top award in Canada that a recreational fishing organization can receive.



With the National Recreational Fisheries Award at Parliament Hill are committee members (from left): Art Timmerman, Steve May, Andrea Doherty, Al Murray, Larry Mellors, Mark Hartley, Tom MacDougall, Felix Barbetti, Warren Yerex and Archie McLarty. Absent were Jack Imhof, Silvia D'Amelio and Bill Murch.

Bright future for fishery but challenges remain

There's a bright future ahead for the Grand River fishery and the fish plan, but it's going to take continuing commitment from the participants.

"I see the river having huge potential. It is on the map for recreational fishing, you can see the results. There are species in the upper Grand that weren't there before. I see it as having the potential to become one of the best fishing resources in the world," says Steve May, a longtime member of the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan Implementation Committee.

But it's a challenge maintaining momentum, says long-time co-chair, Warren Yerec, a former aquatics supervisor with the GRCA.

The plan got underway in 1995 — a time of fiscal constraint for all levels of government and the GRCA. But whether it can survive the current round of cuts remains to be seen.

Tighter budgets

"Agency budgets that provide the money to get work done is disappearing from the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans and the Ministry of Natural Resources, which have suffered substantial cuts, while the GRCA's budget has also been trimmed," Yerec says.

The fish plan implementation committee is now co-chaired by Al Murray from MNR and Robert Messier from the GRCA.

"There is pride in what has been knocked off the list of projects and the plan is moving forward," Messier says. "The key people who put the plan together are still involved out of passion and interest. There are internal and external pressures on the water and land. We can't stand still, we can't rest on our laurels."

He notes that the fish plan has been integrated into the development review process for the GRCA and municipalities. The new Water Management Plan update has gone to great lengths to recognize ecosystem needs when setting objectives and targets for the future.



Messier: 'Pride in the projects'

"The people that put the fish plan together 15 years ago are still involved. But there aren't so many younger people prepared to step in and take the reins," Yerec says. So if you are an angler, there has never been a better time to join a fishing organization and come out to work days to help improve the fisheries.

Consider the fish

Everyone needs to consider the fish in the projects they undertake — whether they are paddlers, hikers, cyclists or other recreational adventurers who enjoy the river areas. Businesses within the private sector can also consider the value of aquatic restoration in the work that they do and donations they make. The Grand River Conservation Foundation is designating funds for work on the Grand River fisheries, and these donations help continue this work.

Most important, they'd like everyone to become connected with the river system and the fish. Get to know your rivers and the aquatic life they support. The better we all understand and value what we have, the better prepared we will be to protect it.



Some people use the Grand as a garbage dump so cleanup days help to get rid of debris and improve the habitat for fish. This shows the results of a cleanup in the Exceptional Waters reach in Brantford.

Trout stocking success story

The Ministry of Natural Resources and volunteers put 40,000 brown trout into the Grand River watershed each year.

Brown trout are not a native fish species, but they have adapted well to conditions in the Grand and Conestogo rivers. This is especially true below the two biggest dams — Conestogo and Shand. The trout fishery in the Conestogo River was one of the 42 best bets suggested by the fish plan.

"Some projects, such as stocking, are best led by the citizens and that is really impressive," says Robert Messier, current co-chair of the implementation committee. In the beginning, stocking was led by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Now groups such as Friend of the Grand River organize the volunteers, knock on doors and get permission ahead of time to go



Volunteers play a big role in stocking brown trout in the Grand and Conestogo rivers.

onto land to stock the fish.

Now, organizers of the stocking "don't really have to do anything but bring the fish," says Messier. The fish are still provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Programs combine fun and education

Local fish enthusiasts encourage ethical fishing, river stewardship and respect for the life within the river by holding many events. Education and communications strategies are embedded in every aspect of the fish plan.

Events include Take a Kid

Fishing Day at Belwood Lake in May, Grand Opportunities Day June 4 at Belwood Lake, the Grand River Spey Clave at Bean Park in Paris Sept. 14 and 15 and Youth Outdoors Day at the Luther Marsh Wildlife Management Area on Sept. 14.

Fish Plan partners

Brant Rod and Gun Club
Brantford Steelheaders
Environment Canada
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Friends of the Grand River
GRCA
Ministry of Natural Resources (Lake Erie Assessment Unit & Guelph District office)
Muskies Canada
Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
Ontario Steelheaders
Trout Unlimited Canada
Six Nations
University of Waterloo

Fish tales



These articles highlight some signature accomplishments of the fish plan over its 15-year history.

A comprehensive list is being published later this year and will be posted online at

www.grandriver.ca.

This is also where you will find the complete fish plan, updates and a listing of sample projects and much more.

'Catch-and-release' gives fish a chance to fight another day

New fishing regulations introduced in the Exceptional Waters stretch of the Grand River between Paris and Brantford will help to ensure it remains an angler's paradise.

This stretch became a catch-and-release area for all gamefish species including bass.

It takes 20 years for a bass to grow to 20 inches, so these regulations have brought trophy-sized bass back to the central Grand and kept them there.

"It was unheard of in Ontario to have special regulations for species like smallmouth bass at the time, but I was happy to see these fish and this fishery protected," says Ken Collins, an Elora-based fishing guide.

"With the regulations in place, I



Kiss it goodbye

have seen the number and size of the fish in this area increase steadily. It is a super place to share with people from around the world and a true example of what a quality fishery we can produce when we set a goal of managing for success."

There are now catch and release bass derbies in different sections of the watershed where fish are caught and then sent back to the river for many more spawning seasons.

Other regulations implemented through the fish plan have helped protect northern pike, walleye and trout when they are spawning.

In addition to helping anglers, it's also good for osprey and giving them more to hunt.



Volunteers help about 500 to 1,000 walleye make the trip over the Dunnville Dam each year to reach their spawning grounds.

Walleye becoming a big fish along the Grand River

Walleye are the most sought after fish in Ontario and their range in the Grand River is expanding.

The Ministry of Natural Resources has been working to help walleye (also called pickerel in some areas) flourish in suitable areas of the watershed. The Grand River strain of walleye has been stocked in Conestogo Lake and are now self-sustaining. In 2012, about 16 per cent of all fish caught in the reservoir were walleye.

Expanding range

The Grand River strain of walleye is also becoming established in Belwood Lake through an unauthorized introduction probably around 2000. Almost six per cent of the fish captured in the reservoir were walleye in 2012. These fish have migrated downstream from both the reservoirs and are finding suitable habitat at several locations in the Conestogo and Grand rivers. Anglers have reported catching them as far downstream as Cambridge.

Closer to Lake Erie, volunteers help capture 500 to 1,000 walleye

each spring and release them above the Dunnville Dam to allow them access to quality spawning habitat.

Fish Plan by the numbers

- 93 species of fish in the Grand River watershed
- 11,000 km of waterways
- 500 to 1,000 walleye are moved each year by volunteers at Dunnville
- 6 endangered fish species
- 42 best bets in the fish plan
- 1 National Fisheries and Oceans award
- \$5 million worth of programs, projects and activities generated by the fish plan over 15 years
- 20 or more public access points created
- 40,000 brown trout stocked each year
- Millions of dollars in business activity generated each year by fishing

Rangers tackling Mill Creek

Most people learn best by experiencing, and that is the premise behind the Mill Creek Rangers Program.

Each year a team of 17-year-olds are hired to make improvements to Mill Creek that flows into the Grand at Cambridge.

Over the years, many rangers have found their calling during their summer as a ranger and gone on to environmental careers.



Aquatic biologist Jack Imhof gives an in-stream lesson to Mill Creek Rangers.

A hot dry year across the Grand River watershed

The hot dry weather in 2012 broke records throughout North America and the Grand was no exception. Dry conditions prevailed through the winter, spring and early summer.

By May, most of the watershed had only received half to two-thirds of the long-term average precipitation. The first nine

months of the year were the driest since 1958. Healthy precipitation in the fall and winter helped restore water levels. It's worth noting that the dry year of 2012 was a dramatic swing from 2008, which was one of the wettest since 1947.

Temperatures were above the long-term average from May

2011, which is the longest period above average in the last decade.

This weather causes some real challenges. The GRCA spent less time responding to flood conditions, but there was little water available for the river during the summer. Hydroelectricity production was down and river recreation was affected.



Emerald ash borer taking a toll

The GRCA is faced with removing trees infested with emerald ash borer. Trees can go from very healthy looking to collapsing over a very short time.

Work is underway to get a clear sense of the magnitude of this problem, but the GRCA is anticipating about \$5 million in costs over the next five to 10 years. The GRCA may need to begin removing the damaged trees as early as 2014 and tree removal will likely take a decade or more, as the borer continues to spread throughout the watershed.

The small shiny green insect is native to eastern Asia. It was inadvertently brought to southern Ontario around 2000 and is now a serious threat to forests in eastern North America, including the Grand River watershed.

Tree planting to replace ash trees and restore borer-damaged forests could cost about \$1.5 million. Chemical treatments are not included in this estimate, although this may be helpful. Provincial and federal funding is not currently available for this work and GRCA staff are looking for external funds.



River on display at Plowing Match

About 77,000 visitors had the chance to learn about the Grand River watershed at the International Plowing Match near Roseville in September.

There was a river running through the GRCA's tent and

many interactive displays including an operating stream gauge, a dam, fish from the river and even wetlands.

Staff were on hand to answer questions and explain the displays.

Public safety top priority at GRCA dams

Over the past couple of years, assessments were completed on all 32 of the GRCA-owned dams and changes have been made to improve public safety upstream of these dams.

Each dam was assessed separately based on public safety needs at that location.

The dams all have consistent safety measures such as warning and portage signs.

Booms and buoys are in place above the dams to warn river users of the downstream dangers.

The number of buoys at each dam – between one and five – depends on the width of the river at that location. Where the risk is

higher, booms are installed.

These are installed in early May and removed in mid-October and are intended to warn those arriving in a boat about the hazard.

There are many dams along the waterways that are not owned by the GRCA, so they may not be marked in this way.

Seventeen dams have buoys and 13 of these also have booms.

GRCA had a boat specially made to ensure staff are safe during the installation and removal of buoys in the lower Grand River. This boat has a small crane because the buoys are very heavy.



Restoration specialist Lindsay Campbell shows off some of the new plants along Rest Acres Creek.

Natural areas revitalized

GRCA properties throughout the watershed are being restored and revitalized.

Rest Acres Creek was restored into a small coldwater stream flowing through the Apps' Mill Nature Centre property into Whitemans Creek near Brantford.

Retaining walls that were on the slopes of the creek were removed and the slopes were naturalized, resulting in better fish habitat.

Forty native shrubs were planted to naturalize the stream banks and school children helped to plant ferns, asters, goldenrod and

sedges. This project was supported by SC Johnson and Son Ltd.

The GRCA is working with partners to revitalize the landscape at Conestogo Lake Conservation Area.

In one project, about 40 acres of grassland habitat will be developed. In addition Ducks Unlimited is supporting a project to restore some ponds.

A revitalization project was also undertaken at Taquanyah Conservation Area near Cayuga. (See more on Page 8)



The Conestogo Dam gates were refurbished in 2012 for \$84,000. The dam reduces flood damages and maintains river flows in the summer.



New look for tree program

In 2012 the GRCA planted more than 280,000 under the new brand “Trees for the Grand.”

The GRCA's successful tree planting program has a new name and the new logo. Now called Trees for the Grand, the program offers all the same services as before.

It will continue to partner with local community-based organizations such as Trees for Mapleton, Trees for Woolwich and Wellington Green Legacy.

It will also work with funding organizations including Trees Ontario. Trees for the Grand offers technical and financial assistance to rural landowners throughout the watershed who wish to plant trees.

The goal of the program, which started in 1954, is to have 30 per cent forest cover across the watershed.



From left are Joe Farwell (GRCA CAO); Nick Dinka (GVTA president); Sarah, Sue and Len King; Mike Edwards (Waterloo Cattlemen's Association president); Brad Whitcombe (Friends of Mill Creek president); Jane Mitchell (GRCA chair); Doug Brock (GRCF chair); Rick Ludkin; Dan Potje (TMMC VP administration), Pete Leonard (TMMC manager of environmental engineering); and Rob Messier who received an award on behalf of Ken Rosin who was unable to attend.

Watershed work recognized

The GRCA's top Watershed Honour Roll award for 2012 went to the Grand Valley Trails Association.

The volunteer group established and maintains the 275-km Grand Valley Trail from the mouth of the Grand River at Lake Erie to Alton in the north. The group offers more than 100 hiking events each year.

In addition, six 2012 Watershed Awards were given out. They

went to:

- Master bird bander Rick Ludkin who operates a bird banding station at Ruthven National Historic Site, Cayuga.
- The Waterloo Cattlemen's Association for fencing 37 km of watercourses in Wellesley Township and planting 20,000 trees
- Friends of Mill Creek, for rehabilitation work along Mill Creek and sponsorship of the Mill Creek

Rangers program.

- Len and Sue King for planting 50,000 trees on their property south of Brantford.
- Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada for its environmental sustainability program and its support for GRCA projects.
- Ken Rosin for developing several wetlands and planting trees on property near the headwaters of the Grand River.

Modest increase in residents' share of budget

Residents of the Grand River watershed are being asked to each contribute about 30 cents more to cover the cost of the environmental protection work planned by the Grand River Conservation Authority in 2013.

The GRCA board approved a 2013 budget in February calling for total expenditures of \$30.7 million. The board is made up of 26 members appointed by the municipalities in the Grand River watershed.

About \$10.5 million, or one-third of the budget, comes from the municipalities of the watershed which collect the money from residents through property taxes or water bills. The municipal share of the budget is up three

per cent from 2012. The municipal share works out to about \$10.35 per person this year compared to \$10.05 in 2012.

The GRCA budget covers the cost of programs that protect water quality, reduce flood damages, preserve and improve natural areas, support responsible development and provide outdoor recreation and environmental education.

Spending down

The overall 2013 budget is actually down about \$2 million from 2012. Much of the drop is linked to reductions in provincial grants to the GRCA. Government grants total about \$4.7 million, or 15 per cent of the budget, which is down from \$7.2 million from last year.

The provincial annual operating grant was cut eight per cent to \$871,000.

In addition, there was an expected reduction in provincial grants for the drinking water source protection program. In 2012 the province contributed about \$2.6 million to the cost of completing the source protection plan which wrapped up at the end of the year. In 2013 the province will contribute an expected \$650,000 for some follow-up work and to begin preparing for implementation of the plan once it is approved by the province.

On the other hand, the province provided \$950,000 over three years to develop a water management plan to address

flooding, water supply and water quality issues over the coming decades. The GRCA is working with municipalities, the province, the federal government, First Nations and others to develop the plan which is expected later this year.

About 46 per cent of the GRCA's revenues – about \$14.2 million – comes from self-generated revenues such as camping fees, park admissions, hydro generation, donations and other sources.

Despite the budget restraint, the GRCA is pushing ahead with several projects to improve the environment, reduce flood damages and protect water supplies. The provincial government con-

tributes about half of the cost of work on dikes and dams, although confirmation of its commitment is expected in the spring.

Key projects

- Drimmie Dam Reconstruction (Elora) — \$1.15 million
- Luther Dam repairs (Grand Valley) — \$425,000
- Conestogo Dam spillway design (Glen Allan) — \$100,000.
- Cambridge Dike safety study — \$50,000.
- Conestogo Lake Conservation Area wetland project (Glen Allan) — \$110,000
- Luther Marsh forest and grassland habitat (Grand Valley) Improvements at Taquanyah Conservation Area (Cayuga)



The Grand River Conservation Foundation

New life for old dam site

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

It took a decade and a lot of work, but Mill Creek near Cayuga has finally been restored to a coldwater stream surround by a landscape of ponds, wetlands and Carolinian woodlands.

Perseverance has paid off for the organizations that have worked together to restore the former site of the Taquanyah Reservoir and one of the few coldwater streams in the Southern Grand River watershed.

The Grand River Conservation Foundation helped to bring together the partners and the \$250,000 needed for the project on the GRCA property, which is also home to the Taquanyah Nature Centre.

The project also brought together the GRCF and the Six Nations of the Grand River who

Former Taquanyah reservoir site has been restored to a green, natural place

were key participants. Six Nations, through their Eco-Centre, received a \$125,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to cover part of the costs and also helped develop the plans to ensure their needs were met.

Mill Creek is just a few kilometres long, but it is at the heart of the Taquanyah project.

The Grand River Fish Management Plan says that removing small dams, such as Taquanyah, is a good way to improve fish habitat. Dams raise water temperature, contribute to poor water quality and block fish migration.

For several decades, the dam on Mill Creek created a reservoir that local people came to like. But the reservoir held warm, sluggish water that was suitable only for carp.

Supported removal

When local residents learned the dam was damaging aquatic life and the problem would get worse with time, they decided to support removal of the dam. The input and passion, as epitomized by the members of Habitat Haldimand, inspired the new view of Taquanyah.

Dam removal was completed in 2005, leaving an empty, moon-scape terrain where the reservoir floor used to be. Once the dam was removed, the water temperature in Mill Creek dropped by about 8C.

Between 2005 and 2012 the land was rehabilitated to create



Ron and Nancy Clark, long-time supporters of the GRCF, were major contributors to the Taquanyah project.

many different types of habitat. More than 10,000 trees and shrubs will transform parts of the property back into a Carolinian forest. Other plantings provide a buffer between the creek and the land. Volunteers with Habitat Haldimand worked extensively with landowners in the area to plant trees and shrubs along the creek on their properties. They have added fencing to keep livestock out of the water.

The next step will be finding out if trout from the Grand River can be stocked in the little creek.

"We couldn't have done this without the help of the Grand River Conservation Foundation," says Warren Yerex, retired GRCA supervisor of aquatic resources.

He remembers a meeting where Ron Clark, a GRCA board member from Haldimand County, said he and his wife Nancy would provide substantial funding for this project as long as matching funds were found.

The Trillium Foundation grant

helped cover the cost of four wetland features and earthen dykes that were designed by Ducks Unlimited Canada. A \$25,000 grant also came from the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund to complete the project in 2012. Along the way, Habitat Haldimand, Shell Environmental Fund and Wetland Habitat Fund also contributed.

"To me this is a great new space for people in Haldimand County," Sara Wilbur, executive director of the Grand River Conservation Foundation says. "The project took on a life of its own and there was great momentum as many partners created a unique conservation hub for the community. It is free to visit and a tremendous value for kids and families – there is nothing like it in the area."

By this fall, new interpretive signs will be added along the trails. An event to reopen Taquanyah and celebrate the 40th anniversary of the nature centre will take place this fall.

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For almost 50 years, the Grand River Conservation Foundation has improved our quality of life by enriching the natural values of the Grand River watershed and encouraging people to enjoy, and to learn from, the great outdoors.

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Checking a wetland at Taquanyah.