



the Grand Strategy:

Ten Year Review
invitation to participate
background
issues
partners in action
the vision
how to participate
Grand Actions
newsletter

What's Inside:

SNOW JOB

Caring for your Creek

MILESTONES

Heritage Planners Meet

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Gilbert Creek Study

Humber River Designation

Can We Meet Water
Demands?

Welcome Home 797

Nature Conservancy of
Canada

Grand River Environment
Centre

Byng Island Pool

NOW AVAILABLE

Tread Lightly! for
Snowmobilers

LOOK WHO'S TAKING ACTION

Bruce Graham

GRCA Special Recognition
Awards

Stephanie Barber

Stewardship Councils

Six Nations Eco-Centre

DID YOU KNOW?

GRAND ACTIONS
CALENDAR

Let's Hear From You

January 2000

SNOW JOB

by **Dan Schneider**, GRCA

It's a frigid January morning. John Bartlett, the GRCA's water resources technician, hunches against a biting wind as he crunches across crusty snow. He selects his spot and pulls out a long tube, a Montrose snow sampler. Rolling his hands back and forth he saws the tube through snow until it bites into soil.

At this point he can measure snow depth, but this has little meaning to a water manager. Fallen snow can range from being nearly as dense as water to being so light and air-filled that ten centimetres of snow melt to less than one centimetre of water. So it's the weight, not the depth of snow that he is concerned about. Weight is related to the snow's density and, by weighing the snow, Bartlett can determine the water equivalent of the snow, or how much water it would produce if melted.

Carefully, he pulls the sampler out, complete with a plug of snow, and weighs it. The sampler's tube is sized so that each ounce of collected snow is equivalent to one inch of water.

Bartlett is standing at a snow course, one of twelve selected sites in the Grand River watershed where snow pack information is collected twice each month during the snow season. On the same day that GRCA staff are out measuring snow, water technicians throughout Ontario are doing the same at a total of 150 snow course stations. All information collected is forwarded to the Ministry of Natural Resources in Sault Ste. Marie, where Ontario-wide maps of snow cover are generated

The data collected from snow courses is vital in determining how much melted snow can be expected to run off into our rivers. This is useful for predicting flood risk and for operating reservoirs. "It's like an accounting system," says Dwight Boyd, senior water resources engineer at the GRCA. "We ask ourselves if there is enough snow "in the bank" to fill our reservoirs in the spring, which then allows us to increase river levels during summer's low-flow period." Allowing reservoirs to fill also helps to reduce flooding during rapid melts.

The most recent widespread flood in our watershed occurred in April, 1975, when rapid snowmelt was accompanied and followed by heavy rain. This rapid runoff from open areas like farm fields and cities is a classic cause of flooding. But "deep snow is not always an indication of future flooding," continues Boyd. Snow levels can be reduced by sublimation, a process in which snow bypasses the melting stage and is changed directly into atmospheric water vapour. Even deep snow may undergo a slow spring melt, allowing manageable spring water levels, or ground beneath the snow may be unfrozen and permit much percolation of the melted snow. Forests are an ally in reducing floods, since they shade snow and prolong the spring melting period.

Snowfall in our watershed varies remarkably with location. The north and west region, including the town of Arthur, is on the fringes of the London to Owen Sound snowbelt and receives an average of over 250 cm of snow annually. Snowfall drops dramatically to the south and east, with about 150 cm falling in Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge and only about 100 cm at Dunnville near the mouth of the Grand River. Those dreaming of a white Christmas have an 80 percent chance in Monticello, near Arthur, while chances drop to 60 percent farther south in Brantford.

But no matter where it falls, snow is an important part of our watershed's hydrology. Winter's white blanket can help us by melting to fill reservoirs; it can also transform into destructive spring floods. Collecting snow course data gives the GRCA's staff information to make important water management decisions.

Caring for Your Creek

by Liz Leedham

From the modern estate home, the lush, immaculately-mowed lawn sweeps unimpeded down to the edges of the small creek. What's wrong with this picture? For many, not much, and some of us may even feel a little envious. For the health of the small creek, this scene can be a recipe for disaster. Without a buffer of deep-rooted shrubs or trees to protect the stream, water quality becomes degraded and all but the most pollution-tolerant fish and water wildlife are seriously affected. Bank vegetation also shades the creek, keeping the water cool and able to hold more oxygen. Shrubs overhanging the bank provide a shady, safe resting area for fish.

Roots of shrubs and other vegetation provide anchors to hold soil in place and reduce the amount of soil and sediment washing into a stream. An overload of sediment in a stream can smother the gravel stream bed where fish feed and spawn. Nutrients from lawn chemicals may be introduced with the eroded soil. Extra nutrients cause heavy algae growth which uses up oxygen in the water and produces an unhealthy, smelly mess when it decays.

While the water quality suffers as banks are undercut or worn away, the land owner is also losing small pieces of property. The damage is not limited to that particular

property. Small streams contribute to rivers and the accumulation of sediment in the system causes water quality problems far downstream.

Our preference for lawns and groomed landscapes may have its roots in the centuries-old emulation of wealthy European landowners who could afford to keep land out of agricultural production, cleared for the long, open vistas, and closely grazed by private deer herds. Urban spread and the increasing number of properties adjacent to small streams calls for more awareness of the environmental impacts of our usual gardening habits.

Can we have our cake and eat it too? There are ways we can improve water quality in our backyard stream and still enjoy an attractive backyard. A three-metre buffer strip of deep-rooted native shrubs will stabilize fragile banks and can be trimmed if a preferred view is obstructed. Even a narrower buffer is better than nothing. Allowing grasses and wildflowers to grow between the shrubs provides an effective filter for fertilizers or pesticides that wash from the lawn. Native plants withstand harsh regional conditions and drought better than many non-native species, and require less maintenance. Other benefits of a plant buffer include more songbirds and butterflies in your yard. The more diverse the plantings, the more diverse the wildlife they will attract. With less grass to mow, you can spend more time in the lawn chair admiring the scenery and feeling good about protecting the environment!

Garden chemicals applied near a stream often end up in the water with a heavy rainstorm or snow melt, and should be used sparingly, if at all. Use slow-release products, follow the manufacturer's instructions, and avoid spraying in the stream buffer zone. The use of natural pesticides and plantings is becoming more popular with gardeners. Fertilizer use can be reduced by mulching lawn clippings and leaving them on the lawn.

Unfortunately, backyard streams are sometimes used as a dumping ground for yard and household waste. Children's sandboxes and swings, compost piles and sheds, may be relegated to the end of the yard, close to the stream. Space occupied by these facilities is space that is unavailable for stream buffer vegetation. Grass clippings and leaves, dumped into a stream, cause increased nutrients, decreased oxygen, and eventually an unhealthy stream. Here, the householder must make a clear choice, hopefully for a healthier environment.

Many gardeners may be simply unaware of the long term impacts of some of their gardening practices. One or two neighbours working to improve water quality at the end of their yard may infect others with the "environmental" bug! Information is available on suitable buffer plantings and other aspects of stream protection at the GRCA Conservation Action Centre at (519) 621-2761, or by email at conservationaction@grandriver.ca

MILESTONES

Heritage Planners Meet

On December 7, 1999, a meeting was held with planners and officials from municipalities in the Grand River watershed who have responsibilities or interest in conservation and cultural or human heritage. So far as is known, this was the first meeting of its kind held in the watershed. The meeting was organized by the University of Waterloo Heritage Resources Centre (HRC) for the Grand Strategy Heritage Working Group. Representatives from the City of Brantford, Brant County, City of Waterloo, Waterloo Region, City of Cambridge, Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, and the Heritage Working Group were present.

The participants discussed responses to a questionnaire on heritage planning which HRC distributed to municipalities before the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to learn what heritage policies and practices were used by municipalities in the watershed. This exchange of information will benefit the municipalities, the Heritage Working Group, and the GRCA, who are interested in developing more integrated planning for the human heritage of the Grand River watershed.

Topics such as Heritage Conservation Districts, GIS systems, economic incentives, technical assistance and capacity building were considered. All participants thought the meeting was valuable as a basis for cooperation and improved planning and that future meetings should be held. They also agreed that the questionnaire, responses and other materials should be distributed to attendees and other concerned persons. HRC was asked to follow up and try to get questionnaire responses and other information from the municipalities which had not been able to complete this work or attend the meeting. This would provide a more complete picture of the state of heritage planning in the municipalities and the watershed. A summary of this meeting will be presented at the Heritage Day Workshop in February.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Gilbert Creek Study

Tiny streams affect bigger rivers and eventually the lakes they drain into. The way we use the land in the drainage areas of little streams has a cumulative effect on the whole Grand River watershed and ultimately on our own health and well-being.

To help us understand how we affect watershed health, subwatershed studies are carried out on the drainage areas of smaller tributaries of the Grand. This is an important ecosystem-based approach to community planning. All aspects of the subwatershed system are studied, including the geology of the land, the streams, wetlands, forests, groundwater resources, and the present land uses. Many growing communities use subwatershed study information to make important decisions on future development and the protection of natural resources within their jurisdictions.

Gilbert Creek is a small, cold-water tributary of the Grand River near Paris, with a drainage basin of about 456 ha. Although most of the area is agricultural, some areas in the

Town of Paris may be developed for residential use in the future. Gilbert Creek subwatershed was identified as environmentally sensitive and worth protecting. Before more development could take place, a study was needed to ensure that the existing natural features could be protected.

The study showed that this small watershed contains some remarkable features, including a healthy brook trout population, which is a rarity in southwestern Ontario. Other special features include a Provincially Significant Wetland, remnant oak savanna habitats, hardwood forests and numerous groundwater discharge areas. One shallow groundwater system supplies approximately 70% of the drinking water for the Town of Paris.

The Gilbert Creek subwatershed study is now complete and a management plan is being developed by Planning and Engineering Initiatives Ltd., Kitchener. Other partners in the study were the GRCA and Kelly Brant Homes, Ltd., of Brantford, the major funding partner.

Public input was an important part of the study, with comments solicited from residents of the area and also from review agencies like the GRCA, the Ministry of the Environment and the County of Brant. The work that was undertaken for Gilbert Creek is one small but vital part of the big picture of protecting and improving the health of the whole Grand River watershed.

Humber River Designation

On September 24, 1999 the Humber River was officially designated a Canadian Heritage River. The plaque unveiling took place at a special public event at Etienne Brul?? Park in the City of Toronto. The Humber River is the 26th river in Canada and the 6th river in Ontario to be included in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. The designation is based on the river's outstanding human heritage and recreation values and the significant contribution it made to the development of the country.

Can We Meet Water Demands?

Recreational Water Demands: Can and Should They Be Met? is the theme of a meeting of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, Ontario Chapter on February 8, 2000. A knowledgeable and interesting panel of speakers will address several questions including:

How much do golf courses and ski hills really affect our water supply?

What are the issues for water-based recreation and their conflicts with current management?

How much do recreational activities dependent on water contribute to the provincial or regional economy?

What water conservation strategies can or should be employed for recreational activities?

Can planning and management address the demands of recreationalists?

The meeting will be held at the Monora Pavilion, just north of Orangeville, off Highway #10. Turn west between the Mazda and Volkswagen dealerships. All are welcome! Please preregister with Pam Joosse, (519) 767-1217 or e-mail

pjoosse@uoguelph.ca The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. with registration between 9:00 and 9:30 a.m.

Welcome Home 797

It was a big day for an old friend. On July 29, 1999, after a long and eventful trip from the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, Maine, passenger car 797 arrived at the Halton County Radial Railway Museum in Milton.

Number 797 was built at the Preston Car and Coach Company in Preston and is the only Canadian Pacific (CP) electric line passenger car known to exist. From 1915 to 1955, it carried passengers on the CP-owned Lake Erie and Northern rail line, alongside the Grand River, from Galt to Brantford

Funds for the car's return were raised by the Ontario Electric Railway Historical Association and volunteers from the Museum (see Grand Actions, May 1998). Donations are now being sought to restore the car to its original condition. The body is in good shape, and most of the original fixtures are available. Even the CPR decals are still visible on the car. Cosmetic work is estimated to cost about \$15,000, and will begin as soon as funds are available. Volunteers hope that the car will be operational in five years. If you would like to help, donations can be sent to the 797 Fund, at the Halton County Radial Railway Museum.

When the museum reopens this year on May 6, visitors can say hello to 797, and take a ride on a similar radial car, such as the London and Port Stanley, Number 8. For information about the Museum, call (519) 856-9802. Email: [**streetcar@hcry.org**](mailto:streetcar@hcry.org)

Nature Conservancy of Canada

The Ontario Regional office of the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has moved from Toronto to downtown Guelph. The NCC is the only national charity dedicated to the creation of nature preserves and the conservation of ecologically significant lands, and places of special beauty and educational interest, through outright purchase, donations and conservation agreements.

The NCC's Ontario regional office works to protect ecologically significant lands throughout Ontario with properties as far north as Thunder Bay and as far south as Middle Island. NCC staff are pleased to be located in the Grand River watershed and look forward to meeting and partnering with many local groups. To contact NCC, please call (519) 826-0068 or visit 121 Wyndham St. N, Unit 202-204 Guelph Ontario, N1K 4E9.

Grand River Environment Centre

Imagine one place where you can see trout and other species of fish, walk in lush greenery even in the winter, and visit wildflower and wildlife gardens. This is the dream of the Elora Centre for Environmental Excellence and other volunteer partners. They hope to create the Grand River Environment Centre in Elora, as part of the Project 2000 for

Centre Wellington (see Grand Actions, July 1998).

The Friends of the Grand River will operate a fish hatchery; an educational program will provide students with a hands-on environmental learning experience; and the environmental greenhouse will be a living example of a natural purification system.

If you want more information about these plans, or want to be part of the dream by becoming a sponsor, contact the Elora Centre for Environmental Excellence at (519) 846-8396, or email ecce@web.net. For information about the Grand Hatchery, contact Friends of the Grand at (519) 843-3102 or email fogr@mgl.ca.

Byng Island Pool

The lazy days of summer may seem a distant dream, but workers are busy this winter building a new ?? million dollar pool at the Byng Island Conservation Area in Dunnville. Both Byng Island and Brant Park pools were over 25 years old, and required complete replacement. Both pools rank among the ten largest pools in Ontario, at over 1 acre in area.

The new Brant Park pool was opened in June 1999. The new Byng Island pool will keep its popular diving tower, and is scheduled to open this summer. Funding for pool replacement, and other capital projects in GRCA Conservation Areas comes from park operation revenues and no provincial grants or municipal levies are used for their operation or facility improvement costs.

Over 1.1 million people visited the 12 Grand River Conservation Areas in 1999, with record revenues of of \$4.3 million. It is estimated that local communities receive up to three times that amount in spin-off tourism dollars spent by camping and day-use visitors. For more information about GRCA parks, contact Brenda Armstrong at (519) 621-2761.

NOW AVAILABLE

Tread Lightly! for Snowmobilers

Snowmobilers can learn eco-friendly principles of trail riding in a new booklet now available from Tread Lightly! Canada. The 16-page publication, Tread Lightly!s Canada Guide to Responsible Snowmobiling, covers trail riding and etiquette, as well as trip preparation, clothing, and other facets of snowmobiling. Individual copies are \$2 from Tread Lightly! Canada, P. O Box 22049, Westmount Stn. Waterloo ON N2L 6J7.

The booklet is published with the assistance of three major snowmobile manufacturers, Arctic Cat, Bombardier and Yamaha. Other available Tread Lightly! manuals include guides for mountain bikers, ATV and four-wheelers, and a high school student level Science Manual.

Tread Lightly! Canada is a non-profit, internationally affiliated organization. Their mission is to help educate outdoor recreationalists, and promote responsible recreation and outdoor leisure pursuits. Anyone donating \$20 receives

three booklets of their choice and a Tread Lightly! Canada pin. For more information call Bert Coates at (519) 575-0661, or (519) 886-4763.

WHO'S TAKING ACTION?

Bruce Graham

Bruce Graham, Superintendent of the GRCA's Burford Tree Nursery, was recently honoured with a Conservancy Award by the Township of Burford Heritage and Tourism Committee. The award, presented on November 25th, recognizes Bruce and the GRCA's establishment of a replica pioneer building and log cabin - known locally as the Chestnut Museum - at the Burford Nursery.

The award certificate states that the log cabin "graces the lands surveyed by Augustus Jones in 1792". The log cabin and museum was established to show members of the public visiting the Nursery what living accommodations were like in pioneer days, and to display artifacts made from Chestnut wood. The American Chestnut is a species of Carolinian tree, earlier threatened by the Chestnut blight. It is being reintroduced to Ontario through the Burford Tree Nursery program.

GRCA Special Recognition Awards

Each year, GRCA recognizes people who have made a significant contribution to the Grand River watershed. At a Cambridge ceremony, the 1999 Special Recognition Awards were presented to:

David Lamble, Fergus ?? one of a small group of Master Bird Banders in Canada, David has banded 60,000 birds since he began this important environmental monitoring work.

Linda Risacher Copp, Elora ?? an accomplished batik artist, Linda has completed a series of 30 batik landscapes from Luther Marsh to Port Maitland at Lake Erie, currently on display at Glenhyrst Art Gallery in Brantford.

Stewart Cressman, Petersburg ?? a leader in the farming community, Stewart has carried out extensive conservation farming and is a participant in the Rural Water Quality Program within the Region of Waterloo.

Bob McMullen, Cambridge ?? affectionately known as "The Trail Guy", Bob is a driving force behind the development of the extensive trail system in Cambridge.

Ilse Kraemer, Brantford ?? a member of the Grand River Heritage Mines Society and the Brantford Northwest Community Park Group, Ilse successfully lobbied to preserve the oak savannah and rare perched fen in the Northwest Industrial Area.

Dan Crumb-McKay, Dunnville ?? a well known local environmentalist, Dan is involved in a number of environmental and tourism projects in the southern watershed area.

Howard Cranston of Ancaster also received a GRCA Honour Roll Citation for his life-long commitment to conservation and agricultural affairs.

Stephanie Barber

The Sonneck House, at 108 Queen Street in Kitchener, has long been a part of the Kitchener's history. Built in 1877 for Judge Anthony Lacourse, it became the family home of Louis Jacob Breithaupt from 1883 to 1939. Breithaupt, a well-known political figure in Kitchener, named the house "Sonneck", which means "sunny corner" in German. It became an apartment building, an art gallery and eventually fell into disrepair. Demolition was threatened, but a permit was refused and alternatives were sought to preserve the home.

Since 1988, Stephanie Barber of Waterloo, then a grade 9 student, has been interested in the home and researched its history. Stephanie developed a keen interest in the house and monitored its condition and changes of ownership. She joined Heritage Kitchener (LACAC) in 1990 as an observer. In 1998, after the demolition permit was rejected, Stephanie went from being an admirer to an advocate for its preservation and started a public awareness campaign. This included newspaper editorials, photo displays at several locations, and meeting with the current owners to discuss the urgency of protecting Sonneck House. The good news for Sonneck House is that it has been purchased and there are plans to return it to a family home and bed and breakfast.

After her 1999 graduation from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Waterloo. Stephanie is pursuing a career in heritage planning

Stewardship Councils

Stewardship Councils were started in 1995 under the auspices of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The program was initiated in response to changes in relationships between landowners, government and groups with an interest in caring for the land.

Coordinators were hired to help with establishing the Councils, and eleven Councils were formed in the Grand River watershed. Once a Council is established, the coordinator takes direction from the members, with only a "loose" connection to the Ministry.

The Councils consist of community members and represent a broad spectrum of interests. The councils are encouraged to foster private land stewardship; provide a forum to influence and encourage community involvement; and find partners and local funding to carry out local projects. A small amount of seed money is available from the province for these projects, but most of the hard work and initiative comes from dedicated bands of volunteers who are willing to take that extra step for the environmental health of their community.

The list of participants and projects is too large to publish in this newsletter, but we appreciate and salute the hard-working Stewardship Council members and Coordinators in the Grand River watershed.

For information about the Stewardship Council and their activities in your area, contact the Provincial Stewardship Forum at (705) 755-3287, or email jim.fought@mnr.gov.on.ca or contact the GRCA Conservation Action Centre at

(519) 621-2763, ext. 270.

Six Nations Eco-Centre

The Six Nations Eco-Centre, Ohsweken, is a resource centre for the Six Nations schools and community. The Centre was originally established in 1993 in response to a series of public meetings focussing on the resolution of land use confrontations and improving understanding and tolerance. Since then, the scope of the centre has expanded considerably. It now includes the Six Nations Forestry Department, the Six Nations Wildlife Management Office, and the Assembly of First Nations Eagle Project, all of which share a common concern for environmental protection.

Environmental education is an important part of the work at the Centre, reaching classrooms and public forums, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The Centre supports Six Nations schools in their participation in a "seedling" project where trees are grown at the schools from seeds. The seedlings are cared for at the GRCA Burford Tree Nursery and later returned to the schools ready for planting. The Centre also works with and advises many other agencies and community groups in the area.

Other projects include an ongoing contribution to the Canadian Wildlife Service in areas of endangered species and related legislation; and providing an information and resource centre for hunters and trappers regarding rules, rights, and policy changes and firearm safety training.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The word climate comes from a Greek word clima, defined as the slope of the earth from the equator to the poles.
- Chionophobia means fear of snow.
- The Inuit have 30 words for snow.
- Regular snow measurement began in our watershed in the late 18th century to provide information for horse-drawn sleigh transportation. Today, it is of more interest to skiers and snowmobilers.
- On December 29th, 1794, Peter Fidler, a Hudson's Bay Company employee and one of the first weather observers in Canada, recorded that Holland gin freezes solid at -17?? F, English brandy at -25?? F, and rum at -31?? F (-27?? C, -32?? C and -35?? C, respectively).
- Snowflakes are made of many snow crystals that have stuck together.
Snowflakes need something to form around. At the centre of each flake is a minute piece of dust.
- Snow crystals form six-sided shapes because of the way the two hydrogen and one oxygen atoms that form a water molecule attach to the hydrogen atoms of other water molecules.
Snow appears white because the innumerable tiny surfaces of snow crystals efficiently reflect most of the sunlight.
- The greatest snowfall in the Grand River watershed was recorded in 1950, at 61cm in Cambridge.
- Canada spends about \$700 million per year on snow removal.
The ski season at Chicopee, Kitchener, in 1995-1996 began on December 8th and continued until March 31st.
- A blizzard is a fierce storm of intensely cold wind, laden with fine blinding snow mostly, or entirely, picked up from the ground.

- Winter storms and excessive cold claim more than 100 lives every year in Canada, more than the combined toll from hurricanes, tornadoes, flood, extreme heat and lightning.
- Packed snow begins to squeak underfoot at about -15?? C. At about -18?? C, it squeaks with a distinct hollow sound.
- Walking a kilometre (.62 mile) through 15 cm (6 inches) of snow takes as much effort as walking two kilometres on bare ground.
- Sound waves are readily absorbed at the surface of a layer of fresh, fluffy snow. When the snow surface becomes smooth and hard as it ages, the surface will actually help reflect sound waves and sounds may be clearer and travel farther.
- If it's snowing hard enough that you can't use your high beams while driving because the flakes in the air reflect the light back into your eyes, you can figure the snow is accumulating at a rate of about an 2.5 cm per hour.
- Fresh, uncompacted snow is 90-95 percent trapped air. Since the air can barely move, heat transfer is greatly reduced, making snow an excellent insulator.
- 25 cm (10 inches) of fresh snow is approximately equal to a 150 cm (6 inch) layer of fibreglass insulation with an insulation R-value of R-18.

GRAND ACTIONS CALENDAR

Soil and Water Conservation Society, Ontario Chapter meeting, on February 8, 2000, at 9:30 a.m., Monora Pavilion, north of Orangeville. Preregister with Pam Joosse, (519) 767-1217 or e-mail pjoosse@uoguelph.ca

Heritage Day Workshop, Monday, February 21, 2000, Cambridge. On Heritage Day, the Grand Strategy Heritage Working Group is again hosting an exciting and informative workshop. This year, the theme is River Towns: Building on our Grand Heritage. The workshop is sponsored by the City of Cambridge and the GRCA, and will be held at the Cambridge Arts Theatre in Cambridge. Discussions will focus on the opportunities that we have to develop and promote the Grand River and its outstanding heritage as the living, vibrant heart of our communities.

For more information or to register for the workshop, please contact Brenda Sims at the City of Cambridge by February 16, 2000. Phone: (519) 740-4650 ext. 4649 Fax: (519) 622-6184. Email simsb@city.cambridge.on.ca

For more information about **The Grand Strategy**

contact Barbara Veale
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For newsletter enquiries or submissions
contact the Editor, Liz Leedham, c/o **Barbara Veale** at the above
address.

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