



GRAND Actions

The Grand River watershed newsletter



March/April 2015 • Volume 20, Number 2

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Volunteers from the Middle Grand Chapter of TUC on a wet work day.



Improving the Middle Grand

By Janet Baine

GRCA Communications Specialist

A new group has grown to over 125 members during the last year — all passionately working to improve the middle section of the Grand River.

This area includes the Grand River between Cambridge and Brantford, as well as all the tributaries.

“We are not a social club, we are not a fishing club. We do this to see the river improve,” explains Larry Halyk, a retired stewardship coordinator from the Ministry of Natural Resources. He says he is one of the “three grey-haired founding fathers” of the club, now doing for free what he used to be paid for. The other two are Warren Yerex, the GRCA’s retired supervisor of aquatic resources, and Larry Mellors, a retired tax assessor who has been working on river restoration for 40 years.

“There is a latent demand out there, a lot of people who love the river who want to get

involved and improve it,” Halyk explains. He was impressed by the number of people who really care, and also their diversity and skill level. Now there are 15 people on the executive, including many young trained ecologists and some anglers who already understand the ecological connections between the river, the fish and the community.

The first meeting in March 2014 was a dream come true for the organizers. They had a hard time finding enough chairs for all the people who came to form the Middle Grand Chapter of Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC). Now there have been several successful work days on a variety of sections of the river, with an average of 30 people helping out, tackling some important projects.

The Middle Grand River needs a lot of help, Halyk says. The Nith River, which is a main tributary, especially, has a lot of potential for improvements.

Fifty years ago the water quality was so poor in this area that bass had disappeared from the rivers. After a concerted effort, the bass returned



to the river, but these slow-growing fish are once again disappearing in some areas, such as below the Kitchener wastewater treatment plant at Doon.

River needs lots of help

While the area is heavily populated and the rivers face many challenges, the best asset is the physiography and the abundant groundwater that gushes into the rivers, renewing them.

Despite all the challenges, some tributaries are cold enough to support trout, a cold-water species, and these offer lots of opportunities for improvement.

“We have many young people who are in their 30s and we’re having trouble keeping up with these folks. They tell us they enjoy our experience, but we are getting so much from them and their enthusiasm,” Halyk says. The executive members share the responsibilities, since looking after the river is “not a sprint but a marathon” and they want to keep at it for a long time

They have set out terms of reference and a work plan. They are also collecting data about the rivers. A communications team led by Andy Dietrich is harnessing social media to let people know about the work days and other chapter activities.

“We can’t do it all, and we can’t do it overnight. So we are carefully planning this,” Halyk says.

Everyone is invited to keep an eye on the website and social media for events and to help the members make improvements. The first work day will be tree planting on May 2, and the details of the full slate of events will be posted online as they are finalized.

All three of the founding members of this chapter are also founding members of the committee that created the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan that was first published in 1998. They used the “best bets” that were recommended in the Fisheries Management Plan as the basis for developing their workplan for the Middle Grand restoration and monitoring program.



Larry Halyk caught this steelhead 100 metres below the mouth of Whitemans Creek. It almost certainly was reared in Whitemans, as there is no steelhead stocking program in the Grand River watershed so steelhead are produced via natural reproduction in the Grand and Nith River tributaries. Halyk grew up on a farm in Norfolk County and so the Middle Grand is the area he fished as a boy. He retired from the Ministry of Natural Resources and is now president of the Middle Grand Chapter of TUC.



At a Farm and Food Care conference in March, Hajnal Kovacs was recognized for her work with farmers to develop a drought contingency plan for Whitemans Creek over the past couple of years. Kovacs continues to work for the GRCA and is also on the executive of the Middle Grand Chapter.

In 2009, this plan’s implementation committee received a National Recreational Fisheries Award from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. This was a proud moment, because it is the top award in Canada that a recreational fishing organization can receive.

In addition to interested members of the public, Halyk says the new chapter of TUC would welcome partnerships with groups. They also plan to work with landowners and municipalities.

Information is available at www.tucmiddlegrand.org or [www.twitter.com/TUCMiddleGrand](https://twitter.com/TUCMiddleGrand).

Three TUC chapters

The Middle Grand Chapter is the third chapter of Trout Unlimited Canada in the Grand River Watershed.

While based in Hamilton, the Ted Knott Chapter is doing work on Mill Creek in the southern Grand. The Speed Valley Chapter has been working in Guelph and Wellington County. It is now recruiting executive members, with some work days planned but not scheduled. If you want more info visit www.tucanada.org, or contact Beth Anne Fischer at bafischer.093zf2@tucanada.org.



Photo by Janet Engel

Filsinger Creek in Kitchener is being naturalized to improve wildlife habitat in the city and also improve water quality. This photo was taken when the work was getting underway.

Bringing nature back to a creek in Kitchener

By **Melissa Ryan**
City of Kitchener

Nearly two kilometres of concrete channel along Filsinger Creek in the City of Kitchener is being removed and replaced with a natural, winding stream.

This project reflects how stormwater management has changed over the last several decades. The more recent approach has been to move away from hardened engineering approaches where possible, and bring nature back to streams.

For instance, during the 1970s, engineers wanted to get rid of stormwater runoff (essentially rainfall that falls on hard surfaces and flows towards creeks and other bodies of water) as quickly as possible, to reduce flooding. Strategies to do this included building concrete channels.

Over time, engineers recognized that water quality should also be a deciding factor when solving stormwater problems. More recently, the natural environment and



Melissa Ryan

WHAT'S HAPPENING

impacts on fish and wildlife habitat also play a more significant role when dealing with stormwater.

In 2012, the City of Kitchener completed work to rehabilitate Victoria Park Lake. This included removing 50,000 tonnes of sediment that had built up in the lake and also making it deeper. The changes were recommended to improve water quality and reduce sediment in the lake.

As a continuation of this work, the next phase of this project has involved removing the concrete channel upstream in Filsinger Park and replacing it with a winding creek. Most of this construction was completed in the fall of 2014, with additional work north of Victoria Street taking place this winter and spring.

Replacing the concrete channel with a naturalized channel will reduce the sediment (soil and grit that is picked up as rainfall flows over roads and land) and keep it from being washed into Victoria Park Lake. The goal for stormwater is to slow it down, soak it up and keep it clean.

Rocks and logs have been placed in the new creek. Some deeper pools also help slow the flow of water and enhance the habitat for fish.

Lots of calculations went into this work by the city's consultants, Stantec. The city was able to use tree debris from the December 2013 ice storm in this project, burying it into the river banks. Vegetation takes time to grow, so the branches from the ice storm will help stabilize the banks until new vegetation has time to grow and mature. This is also a good way to use materials from the ice storm that caused so much damage to the trees across the city.

With more greenery and a winding and natural creek, fish will have an improved habitat and the water quality moving towards Victoria Park Lake will be enhanced. The work being done at Filsinger Park is one of the first of this type in Kitchener. Once the project is complete, residents can expect a naturalized creek, improvements to wildlife habitat and a more visually appealing park.

The park that the community knows and loves will be improved as a result of this project. It will still incorporate trails, a creek and open spaces for residents to enjoy once the work is done. The three pedestrian bridges associated with this project have all been replaced.

More information on the Filsinger Park naturalization project is found at www.kitchener.ca/filsinger.

Melissa Ryan is the design and construction project manager for the City of Kitchener. Kitchener is a leader in this type of project which is part of the Grand River Water Management Plan. Kitchener staff participate in the inter-agency Stormwater Management Working Group, a collaborative forum to advance implementation of stormwater best practices and the Grand River Watershed Water Management Plan. This stream restoration project addresses many goals relating to water quality and quantity, and aquatic habitat.



Bird Studies Canada nets GRCA award

Through Bird Studies Canada, hundreds of volunteers within the Grand River watershed provide top-notch scientific data that is used by organizations such as the GRCA.

The data helps the GRCA understand what birds need to thrive and then make changes on the landscape. It also helps enhance some natural areas that are essential to rare and endangered birds.

Hundreds of people within the Grand River watershed are contributing their bird observations to science through programs that have been set up by BSC. While this is a national charitable organization, it does lots of work locally and is the recipient of a 2014 Grand River Watershed Award.

"The long-term information on birds and amphibians is used extensively by the GRCA and our partners to identify and protect our watershed heritage," said Robert Messier, GRCA ecologist. "This information has helped to protect wetland areas and woodlands and make Luther Marsh a nationally recognized Important Bird Area."

The mission of BSC is to conserve wild birds of Canada through sound science, on-the-ground actions, innovative partnerships, public engagement and science-based advocacy.

Data from BSC's volunteer surveys and targeted research is used to identify

significant population changes and help direct conservation planning.

The BSC programs in the Grand River watershed include:

Baillie Birdathon: Dozens of citizen scientists from the Grand have raised several thousand dollars over the years to further bird research and conservation through this event each May.

Breeding Bird Atlas: About 100 people have contributed 2,000 hours to document changes in all breeding bird species throughout the Grand between the early 1980s and early 2000s.

Breeding Bird Survey: Forty locations have been surveyed each year over the past 40 years in the Grand, providing some of the best estimates of breeding bird population changes in the watershed.

Canadian Migration Monitoring Network: BSC coordinates vital migratory bird research among 25 bird observatories across the country, including the Grand's Haldimand Bird Observatory at Ruthven.

Christmas Bird Count: Hundreds of participants have spent nearly 3,700 hours counting wintering birds at seven locations throughout the watershed over the past 40 years.

eBird Canada: Over 307,000 observations of 312 species of birds have been submitted online by 723 people since 2002. This

information is priceless for monitoring distribution and abundance of species.

Great Backyard Bird Count: In 2014, checklists were submitted from about 200 locations within the Grand between November and April.

Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program: Over the last 20 years, more than 100 observers have conducted bird and frog surveys at 170 locations throughout the watershed, allowing Bird Studies Canada to calculate various indicators of wetland ecosystem health for the Grand.

IBA Canada: Bird Studies Canada uses sound science to conserve, monitor and raise awareness of the Luther Marsh Important Bird Area (IBA).

Ontario Bank Swallow Project: Volunteers have made 383 observations of 4,000 individuals of this threatened species throughout the watershed since 2002.

Ontario SwiftWatch, Project Feeder Watch and Project Nest Watch: All three of these programs have been underway to have volunteers monitor birds, contributing to understanding the distribution and abundance of birds in the Grand.

Southern Ontario Bald Eagle Monitoring Project: Dozens of volunteers have monitored nine eagle nests in the Grand since the mid-1990s.

Motus Towers: The GRCA is hosting two electronic monitoring towers — one at Luther Marsh and the other at Guelph Lake. The towers monitor the movement of birds and bats that have been outfitted with tracking devices. This is part of an international research program to study routes and staging, and is the newest BSC program in this watershed.



Participants in the Great Backyard Bird Count

May 1 awards deadline

Please consider nominating someone you know for a 2015 Watershed Award from the Grand River Conservation Authority.

The deadline is fast approaching and there are many deserving candidates across the watershed. Anyone can make a nomination

An application form with full details is available on the GRCA website at www.grandriver.ca.awards.



Grab a spade and plant a tree

It's time to grab a spade, your kids and join a tree planting event near you.

The GRCA and its many partners have finalized the details for spring tree planting events. These take place in communities across the watershed and people of all ages are invited to join in. The list of locations, dates and times is below, but the full details are available online at

www.grandriver.ca/events.

New Forest in the City Tree Planting,

Brantford, April 19, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Brant County Tree Planting, Green Lane Sports Complex, Paris, April 25, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Rotary Forest/Earth Week Tree Planting, Guelph Lake Conservation Area, April 25, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Cambridge Stewardship/Urban Forest Plan Kick-off, Dumfries Conservation Area, Cambridge, April 30, 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Waterloo Earth Day, Westmount Sportsfield and Environmental Reserve, Waterloo, May 2, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Forests Ontario Community Tree Planting, Snyders Flats, Bloomingdale, May 2, 10 a.m. to noon.

Hugh Guthrie Park Tree Planting, Guelph, May 2, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Upper Grand Trailway Spring Cleanup and Tree Plant Day, Grand Valley, May 2, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., followed by lunch.

O'Connor Lane Park Planting, south Guelph, May 9, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Silvercreek Park Tree Plant, Guelph, May 11, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Guelph's poetic heritage and proposed green hub

A famous Guelph poet and a proposed green hub were among the topics highlighted at the annual Heritage Day Workshop and Celebration held in Guelph in February.

Local historian and author Hugh Brewster presented the career and life of Lt. Col. John McCrae (1872-1918) who wrote *In Flanders Fields* 100 years ago. Written on May 3, 1915, McCrae's famous poem is a tribute to his fellow soldiers in WWI and has become the remembrance banner of the Great War throughout most of the world.

Funds were privately raised for two statues of McCrae that will be unveiled this year — the first in Ottawa on May 3 and the second on June 15 in front of the Guelph Civic Museum. The sculpture is the work of Wellesley's Ruth Abernethy, who has risen to international acclaim for her work. She also created the Glenn Gould sculpture that is in front of the CBC in Toronto. Another initiative has been distributing packets of poppy seeds throughout Guelph so there will be more iconic crimson flowers in gardens in June.

The workshop also highlighted the past and proposed future of the Guelph

HERITAGE RIVER

Reformatory Lands.

A group in Guelph would like to see this area become the Yorklands Green Hub, which would be a "self-sustaining education, demonstration and research hub." Currently the buildings are mostly vacant, and the initiative brings together businesses, organizations, and people of all ages and interests — to learn, work, share and innovate, with the common purpose of being engaged stewards of the land, food and water.

About 120 people joined the Heritage Working Group along with the local arrangements committee in the City of Guelph to celebrate the 18th Heritage Day workshop themed *Timeline/Waterline: Grand Culture at the Confluence*.

The event was held at the John McCrae Royal Canadian Legion in Guelph.

The Heritage Day Workshop is held in a different part of the watershed each year. It is hosted by the Heritage Working Group of The Grand Strategy.



Two larger-than-life statues of poet John McCrae are being created by Wellesley sculptor Ruth Abernethy — one will be placed in Guelph and the other in Ottawa. The statue was one of the topics at the Heritage Day Workshop that took place in Guelph.

20 years of successful water festivals

A trickle of information in the right hands can result in a torrential change across the watershed.

"Mom, I need to turn off the tap when I'm brushing my teeth to save water," a nine-year-old says, or "Dad, we should take oil to the hazardous waste depot, because the storm sewer drain is only for rain."

Children's water festivals have been underway along the Grand River for 20 years — teaching kids about water and helping to change attitudes.

The Grand River Conservation Authority is a proud partner in three children's water festivals: The Waterloo Wellington Children's Groundwater Festival, the Brantford/Brant Children's Water Festival and, most recently, the Haldimand Children's Water Festival.

Busloads of school children come with their class to the festivals, where they learn through many water-related activities.

The festivals bring together the expertise of educators, water quality specialists, community volunteers, conservation groups and government to provide thousands of local students with the opportunity to discover the value of water.

Over the past 20 years, the Waterloo

Wellington festival has educated 80,000 Grade 2 to 5 students at Doon Heritage Village and the Waterloo Region Museum in Kitchener.

The Water Festival may be one reason that per capita water consumption has dropped significantly over the past 20 years. In Waterloo Region, it has dropped 25 per cent (from 260 to 195 litres per day) and in Guelph by 30 per cent (from 236 to 167 litres per day). Water consumption is well under the Canadian average for both these municipalities.

The festival was among the first children's water festivals in the province when it started in 1996 and it was the first in this watershed.

The festival was started by local hydrogeologist Peter Gray and very shortly the Grand River Conservation Foundation and GRCA joined the initiative. There are now 27 children's water festivals across the province.

This year the festival takes place May 25 to 29, thanks to donors and hundreds of volunteers. All 5,000 spots have been filled and there are 15 schools on the waiting list, so demand for the program remains high.

GRAND RIVER CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

"The relative emphasis on water conservation has been dropping, because we have had success in that area, and now we emphasize changing attitudes and awareness of water as a finite resource," says Susan Reid, who has coordinated this festival for the past 13 years.

This year the festival is bringing "Happy Camper" Kevin Callan to the Waterloo Region Museum on April 16 at 7 p.m. as a fundraiser for the festival. Tickets are \$10.

Brantford/Brant now 10 years

The annual Brantford/Brant Children's Water Festival debuted in 2006 and will take place May 12 to 14 at Mohawk Park in Brantford for students from Brant County, Brantford and Six Nations.

This festival is exclusively for Grade 4 students and about 15,000 have attended this event through the years. As with other water festivals, high school students volunteer during the day.

"This has been a tremendous opportunity for our students to demonstrate leadership and passion for environmental stewardship and watershed education," says Catherine Mills Dailey, a geography teacher at Pauline Johnson Collegiate. Her students have volunteered since the festival started. "We train the students to run one of the activities. The students find the activities to be fun and engaging, not only for the elementary students but for themselves as well."

Newest water festival

The newest festival in this watershed started in 2014 in the southern Grand River. About 400 students attended the Haldimand Children's Water Festival at Taquanyah Nature Centre as a pilot project. The dates are not yet set, but this festival was also a success and is expected to grow to accommodate 500 students when it takes place again this September.



Last year's Haldimand Children's Water Festival was a success. It is the third such festival in the watershed.



A stuffed ruffed grouse was put into the osprey nest when the webcam was being installed to help get the camera angle right. The osprey are expected back to the nest soon.

Bird's-eye view on an osprey nest

A web camera is set to provide a real-time view of a young osprey family that is expected to take up residence near the gatehouse at Belwood Lake Park east of Fergus.

At the time of printing, the osprey had not yet come to Ontario. The camera is set and a webpage will allow the images to be viewed at www.grandriver.ca/osprey.

The nest has been used by the pair for several years already and has already received a lot of notice by those who pass by the area regularly.

The camera will now allow people to watch as the osprey settle into their nest, lay some eggs and raise a new brood of chicks. The video feed will stream live through YouTube and will remain active until the birds leave in the fall.

This is fully funded by donations. Donors have each provided \$1,000 for the project — Friends of the Grand River, Elora-Cataract Trailway Association, Belwood Lake Cottagers Association, TD Friends of the Environment Fund and the Grand River Conservation Foundation, which also collected the donations.

Grand River Tree Service also helped to get this project off the ground by donating their truck and staff time to install the camera.

This is the GRCA's first wildlifecam. There

are also two rivercams — one at West Montrose and the second at Brantford for those who want to keep an eye on the Grand at these locations.

Osprey facts

- It is the female osprey who chooses her mate, based on the location and quality of the male's nest.
- Ospreys are large brown and white raptors that have long, narrow wings and a white head with a prominent dark eye streak.
- They feed almost exclusively on fish, which they catch by plunging into the water feet first.
- Osprey numbers declined between 1940 and 1970 as a result of eggshell thinning and egg mortality, which has been linked to DDT and other compounds used in pesticides and herbicides.
- After DDT was banned in 1972, osprey populations rebounded and the species is now secure within the Great Lakes region.
- Traditionally they nested in white pine trees, large dead trees near lakes and rivers, or in standing, dead timber in flooded wetlands.
- As the landscape was altered by people, nesting sites became scarce. However, they thrive on artificial structures similar to hydro poles like the one at Belwood Lake.

New logo for Foundation

The Grand River Conservation Foundation dates back 50 years to April 12, 1965.

As of April, the GRCF has a new logo, pictured below. The update will help prepare for the next 50 years, at a time when protecting our natural world has never been more important. The new logo continues themes of water, land and trees, with a new modern twist.

The Foundation has raised \$11 million over the years. Some projects, such as the children's water festivals are big and grow through the years. Others, like the webcam on the osprey nest are small and happen in a flash — but could grow too.

Both are examples of how the Foundation works with the GRCA to raise funds for projects that are outside of the GRCA budget.



NOW AVAILABLE

Grand River book launch

Wood engraver Gerard Brender à Brandis and writer Marianne Brandis launch their book, *The Grand River, Dundalk to Lake Erie*, Friday, May 29, 7 p.m. at Preston Library, Cambridge.

Their book is a collaboration that documents the ecological, social and historical significance of this Canadian Heritage River.

The Grand River, winding for nearly 300 kilometres through southwestern Ontario, is a Heritage River, its watershed rich in prehistoric, historical and contemporary features. It is important in the history of First Peoples, and the story of European settlement along its banks is a microcosm of that in Canada as a whole. The watershed contains many treasures, such as the Carolinian Forest, excellent farmland, the spectacular Elora Gorge and a wealth of historic architecture.



This woodcut entitled Field Sloping to the Grand River is one of 30 featured in a book about the Grand that will be launched at the Preston Library on May 29.

THE GRAND CALENDAR

Ocean Bound Exhibit

This exhibit is taking place until to May 10 at the Waterloo Region Museum in Kitchener. It explores the science of watersheds and aquatic animals with local information specific to the Grand River. GRCA communications manager Dave Schultz will speak on Monday, April 20, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. as part of the speaker series.

Shimano Take a Kid Fishing

Kids 8 to 14 and their parents can learn fishing techniques from the pros on Saturday, May 2, at Belwood Lake. Space is limited to 120 kids in the morning and afternoon sessions. Preregistration is required by sending first and last name to belwoodlakepark@grandriver.ca.

GRCA Annual Tree Sale

Friday May 8, 8 a.m. to noon, at GRCA Headquarters, 400 Clyde Rd, Cambridge. Cancelled orders, trees not picked up and nursery overruns are part of this annual sale. The sale is first come, first served and line-ups start early. The more popular trees sell out quickly but there are always trees throughout the sale. Payment can be made by cash or cheque only. A list of available trees will be posted online before the sale.

Grand Opportunities Fly Fishing Forum

Saturday, June 6, Belwood Lake Conservation Area, Fergus. A day of on-river seminars and many related events about fly fishing sponsored by Friends of the Grand River. This is a great way to learn more and meet other anglers. www.flyfishontario.ca.

Dumfries Kitefest

Sunday, June 7 noon to 3 p.m. at Dumfries Conservation Area, Cambridge. The 19th annual festival features kite flying demonstrations that include parachuting, teddy bears, kite making workshops and a chance to hike the trails to see the arboretum. Bring your own picnic and lawn chair to this free event.

Check www.windclimbers.ca

2 Rivers Festival

Celebrate the Speed and Eramosa rivers in Guelph June 10 to June 14 with many free river-related events in Guelph.

The events showcase local rivers, their ecology and their importance in local culture. Events appeal to a wide range of age groups, abilities and interests. The 2Rivers Cleanup takes place Saturday, June 13, 9 a.m. to noon. www.2riversfestival.org.

Far more than that, the Grand is both uniquely itself and also typical of many of the planet's rivers in the challenges it faces: issues of water management, farmland versus urban development, exploitation of natural resources and restoration of a polluted environment.

In the images and words of two artists, *The Grand River, Dundalk to Lake Erie* explores the river's history, beginning with its formation after the end of the last Ice Age. The book gives insight into the private life of a river — the dialogue of land and water — as well as the ways in which a river interacts with humans, vegetation, wildlife, weather and the planet.

It will be available in bookstores and publisher Porcupine's Quill in Erin.

About Grand Actions:

This newsletter is produced bi-monthly by the Grand River Conservation Authority.

More information:

Current and back issues as well as complete subscription information is available online at www.grandriver.ca/GrandActions.

Submission deadlines:

The 15th of February, April, June, August, October and December. Submissions may be edited for length or style. Photos and event information is also welcome. We do our best to publish items, but we are not able to guarantee publication.

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