



Students busy planting plugs near the pond in Shakespeare CA.

A Wildflower by any other name ...

A grade four class from Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare made short work of planting over 800 plugs of native wildflowers and grasses on June 27, in Shakespeare Conservation Area. The class was interested in learning about native plant ecosystems, the important role the plants have in our environment and the fact that what they were planting would attract native butterflies and birds. One of the keen participants was the granddaughter of former UTRCA Board Member, Murray McTavish.

The students could recite the species list at the end of their two hour event, as they found the names entertaining. The list included species such as Joe-Pye-Weed, Hairy Beardtongue, Canada Anemone, Sky Blue Aster, Black-eyed Susan and Prairie Smoke.

Tallgrass Ontario provided support and the Canadian Fisheries and Wildlife Improvement Program provided funding.

Contact: Karen Pugh, Resource Specialist



From left: UTRCA Conservation Services summer student Sarah Bruggeman, two parent volunteers, and Tallgrass Ontario's Danielle Aulenback.

Stubbe Farm Wetland Project

The UTRCA created a wetland on the Oxford County farm of Dirk and Anna Stubbe in the summer of 2010. The site had been farmed, but presented yearly issues with the consistently wet field.

Since the wetland was created, many native trees, shrubs and aquatic plants have been planted around the pond by both school children and staff. Unusually high water levels this past spring created challenges in getting plant material established, but the site is well on its way to becoming a productive and beautiful wetland.

Funding has been granted through TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Woodstock branch, and the Clean Water Program.

Contact: Brad Glasman, Coordinator, Conservation Services, or Karen Pugh, Resource Specialist



Aquatic plants go into the ground around the new wetland. Trees in the background (photo below) are from previous plantings.



Trout Creek Wildflower Meadow

Students from grades 3 to 5 from Holy Name in St. Marys planted almost 3,000 native wildflower and grass plugs of 21 species just before the end of school in June. Rotarians and staff from the St. Marys Parks Department also participated.

The project was funded by the federal Environment Ministry and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. The day's work added on to an earlier site where aquatic plants were established along the edge of Trout Creek.

School groups and parks department staff also worked in partnership in recent years to create a buffer of native trees and shrubs along the creek through the UTRCA's Communities for Nature program. All of this work has proven to be very successful in helping to establish habitat and food for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, as well as to improve water quality.

Contact: Vanni Azzano, Community Education Specialist, or Karen Pugh, Resource Specialist



These trees were planted along Trout Creek by students as part of the ongoing naturalization efforts.

News from the CAs

Tackle Share Program

In partnership with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, our three conservation areas are offering the "Tackle Share" program. The program introduces novice anglers to fishing and conservation. Thanks to Tackle Share, accessibility to angling equipment is no longer a barrier to those who want to be involved in recreational fishing.



Each park received eight fishing rods, eight fully stocked tackle boxes, and promotional items such as brochures, signs, young angler licenses and, of course, a copy of the 2011 Fishing Ontario Recreational Fishing Regulation Summary to keep on site for reference. Participating anglers simply sign out a rod and tackle box and return it when they are finished.

There are over 100 loaner sites across the province, including libraries, community centres, other conservation authorities, Big Brothers and Big Sisters and Ontario Parks. As of August 1st, we have had approximately 55 visitors take advantage of the program.

OFAH Tackle Share (www.tackleshare.com) originated in 1998 and has become a huge success. We have participated in the past, but changes have been made in the program coordination and in communication between the participating sites and the OFAH.

Within our CAs, we are currently tracking the monthly usage statistics and are required to submit a detailed report at the end of the season (September 21, 2011), including usage and equipment inventory. Each park will then place their order for replacement equipment for 2012.



Above: Students, volunteers and staff plant native wildflowers and grasses next to Trout Creek.

Below: Students plant wildflower plugs. The aquatic plants in the background, next to the creek, were planted in previous years.



A young angler gets a helping hand.

ATTENTION

CAMPFIRE RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE

Campfires are only permitted between 12 noon and 11 pm for COOKING PURPOSES ONLY. Fires must be extinguished immediately after cooking is finished.

To ensure your safety and that of others:

- Do not leave the fire unattended and monitor the size of your fire
- Ensure you have a pail of water nearby to extinguish your fire

UPPER THAMES RIVER
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Hot weather great for some activities but not others!

This summer is shaping up to be one of the warmest and driest on record. Although our customers would rather find something *cool* to do on a hot summer day than have to find something *dry* to do on a wet rainy day, too much heat can affect many aspects of the camping experience.

The extreme dry weather caused the City of London to impose a complete fire ban which included

campfires at Fanshawe CA. This commenced on Saturday, July 16. The County of Perth followed suit on July 19 by imposing fire restrictions on residents including campgrounds. Fires were only permitted for cooking from noon to 11 pm.

Fortunately, rain on July 28-29 brought some relief and both bans ended just in time for roasting marshmallows on the long weekend.

Pittock CA was not affected by fire bans although regular communication between park staff and local authorities assisted staff in preparing if one were to be imposed.

Staff at all the CAs continue to educate our visitors about campfire safety and the importance of not leaving a fire unattended particularly in the dry spell that we were in.

Unfortunately, beach goers on the long weekend did not fare as well. We had to close Wildwood and Pittock CAs for swimming due to high levels of bacteria found in the water through our weekly beach sampling program with local health units. Wildwood's swimming area has been closed since July 19 and Pittock's closed on July 29, affecting anyone wanting to swim in the reservoir over the long weekend. It is anticipated that weekly sampling results will keep both these areas closed until Labour Day, which is what we typically see every year. Fanshawe CA doesn't promote a day use swimming area due to bluegreen algae growths that have caused beach closures by early July in recent years.

Needless to say our three swimming pools, pool life guards and the splash pads, located at Fanshawe and Pittock, saw many visitors keen to beat the heat. By the look of the August weather predictions, these activities will continue!

We know our business best!

Feedback is imperative when it comes to knowing what our customers want and how we can improve their next visit with us. We encourage feedback from our visitors through comment cards, surveys and just simply talking with staff. It is important that this information is used and not lost – comments, both the positive and not so positive, must be heard and considered.

Our staff – particularly those that work with us seasonally – also have some great insight into our business. They are usually the first people that our visitors meet at our gate house upon arrival. Seasonal staff talk with the campers while out collecting garbage, cutting grass and cleaning washrooms. These chats may be casual and in passing or the visitor may have something specific to

discuss with staff. Our seasonal staff are a direct link to further understanding our operations and programs.

Over a two week period, seasonal staff were asked to participate in an electronic survey identifying what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the park where they work, and what challenges and opportunities we, as managers, could be missing. The information gathered will be used in the completion of the CA Business Plan this fall.

Although the survey itself was anonymous, staff were asked to tell their supervisor that they completed it and their name would be entered into a draw for a gift certificate from Canadian Tire, with one winner from each CA. We had 88% participation from full time staff (seven of eight) and 87% from seasonal staff (54 of 62) which is great considering we are at peak season!

Contact: Jennifer Howley, Coordinator, Conservation Areas

Summer Fish Kill



Summer kill can claim many species of fish.

During the summer, a fish needs more oxygen as its metabolism increases due to rising water temperatures. However, this is the time of year when oxygen is the least available in water, due to several factors. Warmer water has less oxygen than cooler water. Warmer water also supports the growth of algae, which can result in algal blooms. Decaying algae and plant material use up the oxygen in the water, thus further reducing the amount of oxygen available for aquatic species. In shallow areas, water evaporates in the warm weather, reducing or even eliminating water available for fish.

Some fish will die when the temperature rises and oxygen decreases, resulting in summer kill. If you notice a large number of dead or dying fish and, especially, if there are concerns regarding the dead fish, contact the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) dedicated toll free phone number to report a fish die-off. The number is 1-866-929-0994 (8:30 am-5:00 pm, Monday-Friday). More information can be obtained from the MNR website under How to Report a Fish Die-Off.

If you find dead fish and there are concerns that the fish did not die from natural causes, the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) has a toll free number to report spills and environmental emergencies. The number is 1-800-268-6060 (24/7). This number

is also listed under Emergency and Important Numbers at the front of your phone book as environmental spill reporting. More information is available on the MOE website under Emergency Management - Spills Action Centre.

If you are uncomfortable with or unable to contact the MNR or MOE directly, you can contact UTRCA (519-451-2800 ext. 510) to notify us of the situation. After confirming the information, we can file an anonymous report on your behalf.

Contact: John Schwindt, Aquatic Biologist, or Cathy Reeves, Aquatic Biology Technician

Species of the Month: Sycamore

The Sycamore is not an easily overlooked tree, mainly because of its interesting mottled bark and its large size – it grows up to 35 m



The Sycamore's distinctive mottled bark and fruit.



(115 ft) tall and 200 cm (78 in) in diameter. It occurs throughout eastern North America but is restricted in Ontario to the Carolinian Zone, so does not grow much farther north than London.

Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) is also known as American Sycamore, American Plane-tree and Buttonball-tree. London Plane-tree is a horticultural cultivar that looks very similar and is often planted in parks and along streets in North America and Europe.

Sycamore trees can be found scattered across our area, mainly on rich bottomlands along rivers and on poorly drained soils. They are common along the North Thames and Thames Rivers and Medway Creek in London and downstream to Chatham. The species tolerates some shade and is quite fast-growing.

The large deciduous leaves have three prominent veins and occur alternately on the stem. They resemble a sugar maple leaf but maple leaves grow opposite to each other along the branch.



The Sycamore's leaf is similar to a Sugar Maple leaf.

The Sycamore's distinctive fruits are solitary, ball-like clumps, 20-35 mm (about 1 inch) across, each hanging at the end of a long stalk. You can see them more clearly in the winter before they disintegrate and are carried in the wind.

The Sycamore's bark is its most unusual and obvious feature. The bark is smooth and brownish but flakes off in large, irregular pieces to expose the olive green or cream-coloured inner bark. This striking mottled effect resembles a hunter's camouflaged jacket.

The UTRCA's Communities for Nature program plants Sycamore trees because it is fast growing and used by wildlife for food and shelter. The fruit are eaten by goldfinches, chickadees and Purple Martins as well as Mallards and Beavers.

This large tree often becomes hollow as it ages, providing shelter for Wood Ducks, Barred Owls, Racoons and opossum. People use the wood for butcher's blocks and some cabinetry and trimming.

Contact: Cathy Quinlan, Terrestrial Ecologist

Upcoming Events

- August 13: Woodstock Rotary Dragon Boat Festival, Pittock CA
- September 13-15: Exhibitor, Outdoor Farm Show, Woodstock
- September 17-18: Doors Open Middlesex, Dorchester Mill Pond
- September 25: Furtney Memorial Forest Dedication, Fanshawe CA
- September 25: St. Marys Memorial Tree Dedication, Wildwood CA

Contact: Steve Sauder, Marketing Specialist

On the Agenda

The following items will be presented at the UTRCA Board of Directors meeting on August 23rd, 2011. Board meeting minutes are posted at www.thamesriver.on.ca; click on "Downloads."

- Administration and Enforcement - Section 28
- Policy Governance Next Steps
- Friends of Ellice Co-Management MOU
- Watershed Conservation Centre Update
- Conservation Ontario Electronic Bulletin

Contact: Susan Shivas, Executive Assistant