



Conservation Areas staff prioritize their goals for the CAs website.

First Annual CA Unit Professional Development Week

On December 7-11, the Conservation Areas Unit hosted their first annual Professional Development Week. Half day sessions were organized each day for staff. The goal was to concentrate on those items that we talk about but never find time to focus on, complete required training and, of course, have fun!

The week started at Wildwood Conservation Area with a session called “Everyone is Connected -- Connect your Business to Everyone.” This session, facilitated by Steve Sauder, focused on the increased use of websites for marketing as well as a review of our 2009 customer survey results.

“Snow Readings 101” was the Tuesday session, facilitated by the “Water Marks” (Mark Helsten and Mark Shifflett). CA staff learned the importance of the sampling they do and how the results are applied to calculating run off predictions, as part of forecasting floods. It was also an opportunity to ask questions about the process and any changes from previous years. Staff then toured the snow reading route along the South Thames, and identified the 2010 sample sites.

On Wednesday, the Superintendents met with Karen Wilkie to complete the 2010-11 insurance updates for AON, while the Assistant Superintendents visited the north part of the watershed and toured Glengowan, Motherwell and other UTRCA properties where staff assist with operations.

Day four was a mandatory health and safety training day focusing on the Ministry of Transportation’s “Book 7.” This document applies to all staff who work on or along roadways. The training, which is required by the Ministry of Labour, outlined how to safely undertake activities in this area.

Friday’s session entailed completing an online training course regarding the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Staff provided feedback on the week, and indicated that they enjoyed the topics as well as the new approach, and would like to continue with a similar program for 2010.

Contact: Jennifer Howley, Coordinator, Conservation Areas Unit

Thinking of Others at Christmas

In mid-December, UTRCA staff were touched by local media reports of long line-ups for those waiting patiently for Christmas gift donations for family members. While the Salvation Army and other support organizations were doing an incredible job of trying to meet the demands of those in need, they were acknowledging that the supply of gifts and other items was insufficient to keep up with the record number of people seeking assistance.

Upper Thames staff were encouraged to “dig deeper” to make donations to the Salvation Army’s Christmas gift program, in addition to the generous donations already made toward the Christmas food hamper program, winter coat drive and the United Way. Within one week, we were able to deliver three GIANT bags filled with toys and other gifts to the Salvation Army’s “Centre of Hope” on Wellington Street in London for subsequent delivery to those in need. This was truly a remarkable effort and served as another glowing example of how UTRCA staff are a kind and caring bunch!

Contact: Mark Snowsell, Regulations Officer



Staff posing proudly with one of three large bags of gifts bound for delivery to the Salvation Army before Christmas.

Report Cards in Manitoba

Karen Maaskant gave a presentation at a conference held in Brandon, Manitoba on December 7-9. The conference was hosted by Manitoba Stewardship (the provincial ministry) and the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association.

Karen's presentation was part of a session themed "Creating a Watershed Culture." She spoke about the watershed report card program developed by Ontario's Conservation Authorities, and the UTRCA's community-based watershed strategy work.

There was a lot of interest in the Authorities' reporting and in the UTRCA's targeted watershed approach.

An informative conference and warm Manitoba hospitality made up for the frigid temperatures in Brandon, which dropped to -40° C that week. Travel and conference costs were covered by Manitoba Stewardship.

Contact: Karen Maaskant, Water Quality Specialist

Species of the Month Wood Frog (*Rana sylvatica*)

The wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*) ranges further north than any other amphibian in North America, persisting north of the Arctic Circle in parts of Nunavut, the Northwest and Yukon Territories, and Alaska. While reptiles and amphibians are not generally associated with ice and snow, this species is able to cope with northern life, having some unique adaptations to withstand extreme conditions, short seasons and varied habitats.

Like all reptiles and amphibians, the wood frog must seek protection during the winter, by hiding in mostly frost-free places and entering a state of reduced metabolic function. However, the wood frog can withstand actual freezing for limited periods, using



Adult wood frogs vary in colour from light to dark brown, bronze and orange.

cryoprotectant chemicals that prevent its body from completely freezing. Wood frogs are commonly found seemingly frozen in snow or ice in early winter or during sudden freezes in early spring. When thawed, the frog slowly raises its heart rate and returns to normal activity, apparently unaffected by the potentially life-threatening ordeal. Excessively low temperatures or long durations of freezing can still harm this frog, but the anti-freeze-like chemicals it produces give it an advantage over many other species in northern latitudes.

In southern Ontario, wood frogs are most commonly associated with woodland habitats, where they are one of the earliest spring breeders along ephemeral pools and other wetlands.

The female wood frog lays egg masses under water, usually attached to branches or leaves. Tadpoles hatch and later transform into froglets within the same season.



In transition: This wood frog "froglet" emerges from its watery nursery.

At a body length of 3.5-8 cm, the wood is a small to medium sized species. The frog's dorsal (back) colour varies from dark brown, light brown, bronze to orange. A dark mask stretches from the tip of its nose, along either side of the head, through the eyes to its shoulders. The upper lip has a white line along it.



The mask extends through the eye to the shoulder.

The prominent dorsolateral ridges (two ridges that run along its back) often appear darker or lighter than the surrounding skin. Varying amounts of dark mottling may be apparent along the back and sides. The belly may be solid white, or have grey mottling.

A similar species, the chorus frog, is smaller, has toe pads and does not have dorsolateral ridges.

Depending on the quality of the habitat, wood frogs can be found in high densities, though many populations appear to have declined due to habitat loss, road mortality and pollution. In March and April, even while snow is still on the ground, its awkward, duck-like frog calls can be heard, letting locals know spring weather is right around the corner.

Wood frogs are an indicator of environmental health. To learn more about frog monitoring programs and what you can do to help, visit www.naturewatch.ca/english/frogwatch/on
Contact: Scott Gillingwater, Species at Risk Biologist



Above: The dorsolateral ridges run lengthwise along the body.

Southwest Agricultural Conference

The UTRCA participated in the 17th Annual Southwest Agricultural Conference, held at the University of Guelph's Ridgetown Campus on January 6-7. The event attracted more than 2500 farmers.

Staff gave a presentation, entitled "Rills, Gullies & Washouts," at three different sessions. The sessions were all well attended, which suggests that farmers across Ontario continue to be very interested in protecting their land from water-related erosion. The final session was also broadcast live on the Web.

Contact: Brad Glasman, Coordinator, Conservation Services

Student Studies: Hands-on H₂O

Thanks to generous funding from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, over 400 students from 14 classes were able to participate in curriculum-based water oriented programs at sites throughout the Upper Thames watershed.

In September, six grade four classes visited Sifton Bog, an Environmentally Significant Area in London. This wetland is the most southerly bog in all of Canada and students were fascinated to learn first hand about its importance. Through interactive activities, the students discovered some of the animals residing in the open water area of the bog, the specialized bog vegetation and their adaptations, and how wetlands function to help reduce flooding, provide habitat, and improve water quality.

A follow-up visit to each class at their school by UTRCA education staff built on what the students learned on the field trips. The in-class activities focused on the relationship between wetlands and groundwater, and other important wetland functions. For many of these students, this experience was the highlight of their school year.



Secondary school students gather water quality data on a chilly October day.

A month later, secondary students taking science or geography participated in the Watershed Report Card Education Program. Two hour field trips were held at sites along Medway Creek, Oxbow Creek, Stoney Creek and Halls Creek. Students collected water quality data through water chemistry evaluation, carrying out stream habitat assessments, and studying benthic macroinvertebrates that they collected in the stream riffles. These results, along with map analysis done back at the school in a follow-up session, enabled the students to create environmental report cards for their watersheds.

This advanced program on watershed health sparked an interest in many of the students and led to interesting discussions on their environmental concerns and future career goals.

Contact: Joanna John, Community Education Specialist



Children see how groundwater can be contaminated by our everyday activities.

Promoting the Children's Water Festival

The London-Middlesex Children's Water Festival will be in the spotlight on Wednesday, January 27 from 1:30-3:00 pm at the Greenway Pollution Control Centre, in London. Local students will be participating in activity stations from the Festival, and touring the facility.

The Water Festival will be held at Fanshawe Conservation Area and Fanshawe Pioneer Village on May 18 - 21. Over 3,000 grade 3, 4 and 5 students from London, Middlesex and area are expected to participate. The children, their teachers and parent volunteers will learn all about water – how to protect it, people's attitudes towards it, and technology and science that focus on it.

Maintaining healthy streams, lakes and aquifers is vital for everyone's health and enjoyment, and for the future development of our communities. Educating children about water and the environment is the first step to doing this.

To learn more, visit www.childrenswaterfestival.ca
 Contact: *Linda Smith, Water Festival Coordinator*



Learning through action: these children are clearly enjoying their time at the Water Festival!

Saving Money and the Environment

Trees Ontario is hosting a free workshop for landowners, focusing on Ontario's 50 Million Trees Program, the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program and other subsidy programs, as well as tree planting techniques. The event is organized in partnership Trees Ontario, the Ontario Forestry Association, and the Ausable Bayfield, Upper Thames River and St. Clair Region Conservation Authorities.

The workshop will take place on Wednesday, February 17 at the Ilderton Community Centre, from 7-9 pm. Landowners can register by calling 1-877-646-1193 or online at www.treesontario.ca/landownerworkshops.

Contact: *John Enright, Forester*

On the Agenda

The following items will be presented at the UTRCA Board of Directors meeting on January 26th, 2010. Board meeting minutes are posted at www.thamesriver.on.ca; click on "Downloads."

- Tier III Water Budget Report and Presentation
- Administration and Enforcement - Section 28 Report
- 2010 Education Program Fees
- 2010 Conservation Area Fees
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 - Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
- Flood Control Staff Capacity Report
- Soil Erosion Control Report
- Building Committee Update
- Fanshawe Pioneer Village Update
- Other Business (Including Chair and General Managers' Comments) - 2010 Board of Director Meeting Locations

Contact: *Susan Shivas, Executive Assistant*

Upcoming Events

- Go to www.thamesriver.on.ca for more upcoming events.
- February 4 - Exhibitor, UWO All Campus Job Expo
 - February 10 - Exhibitor, Fanshawe College Career Fair
 - February 16 - UTRCA Annual Meeting, Forest City National Golf Club
 - February 17 - Trees Ontario Landowner Tree Planting Workshop, Ilderton