

Background

The impetus for the Watershed Trust's formation came from the Blue Mountain Watershed Conference held in May of 1993. The Hon. David Crombie, P.C. was the keynote speaker. The purpose of the conference was **“To develop awareness and promote partnerships that are required in order to successfully implement watershed planning in the Blue Mountain watersheds”**.

The Blue Mountain Watershed Trust Foundation (Watershed Trust), Ontario's first watershed trust, was founded in 1994. Two landowner meetings in 1994 led to the formation of the Blue Mountain Watershed Trust Foundation (Watershed Trust), the first watershed trust in the Province of Ontario. The Watershed Trust is now an independent grass-roots organization. We are an all-volunteer organization supported by donations and fundraising; we do not receive funding from any level of government. The Watershed Trust was incorporated in 1995 and is a Registered Charity (#89079 8259 RR 0001). We currently have over 150 members.

Our area of interest is composed of independent watersheds that originate in the Niagara Escarpment, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Biosphere Reserve. The major watersheds drain directly into Georgian Bay and include Silver Creek, Black Ash Creek, Townline Creek, Pretty River, Batteaux River, Indian Brook and the Beaver River. Bounded by the Georgian Bay shoreline to the north and the highlands of the Niagara Escarpment to the south, our area of interest totals approximately 50,000 hectares.

The Watershed Trust's watershed boasts a unique and diverse natural environment. It supports a wide array of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife while attracting visitors and new permanent residents to a region that is much cherished by local residents for its natural beauty. It is also the source of the Amabel Aquifer, a source of pure water for this area and population centres to the south. Because of this unique natural environment and geographic location, the watershed is under great pressure to support increased recreational, urban, extractive and rural activities. Since it is part of a World Biosphere Reserve and because of its social, economic and ecological value, the Watershed Trust is committed to ensuring the continued environmental health and integrity of our watershed.

The Amabel Dolostone of the Escarpment is a source of high-quality aggregate which is used for roads, buildings and other infrastructure in this area and the ever-growing Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This has led to two recent applications for two below-the-water-table open pit aggregate mines in the area. The Watershed Trust has concerns for their effect on the woodlands and wetlands which provide habitat for many species, including some which are Threatened or Endangered. The Watershed Trust has opposed these applications in support of local citizens' groups.

Achievements 1995-present:

- We have assisted in the planting of over 260,000 trees from 1995 to 2006 in partnership with the Nottawasaga Valley (NVCA) and Grey Sauble (GSCA) Conservation Authorities. In 2010, 2011 and 2012, local high school students and volunteers planted trees along the Black Ash Creek in Collingwood.
- We have hosted annual fund-raising/membership drive dinners from 1996 to 2001. In 1995, to direct the efforts of our programs, our “Natural Heritage Systems Plan” was prepared with financial assistance from the Percy R. Gardiner Foundation. In April 1999, we organized “Sustaining Our Water Resources”, a one-day conference with funding from the TD-Canada Trust Friends of The Environment Foundation. This was one of the catalysts for the \$300,000 A-E-M-O-T Groundwater Management Study funded by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, we undertook 45 water quality improvement projects in the Beaver River watershed with the “in-kind” contributions of material, equipment time and labour from landowners. Total cash funding of \$200,000 came from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, EcoAction Canada and the Trillium Foundation.

In 2005, 2006 and 2007 we held the “Blue Mountains Wetlands Festival” in Collingwood’s Harbourview Park. This music festival celebrated the Silver Creek Wetland and raised public awareness of the importance of wetlands. The events were a great success, supported by free performances by local musicians and sponsored by many local businesses.

Silver Creek Wetland:

- o Since 1988, the Nature League has been crusading to save the Silver Creek Wetland, one of the last remaining provincially significant coastal wetlands on the shores of southern Georgian Bay. Without the League’s untiring efforts, the outcome may have been lost. The Watershed Trust, with the League’s support, continues the struggle to protect and preserve the wetland. A golf course in the Wetland was proposed in 2001. The Watershed Trust successfully lobbied the Town of Collingwood to enact an Interim Control By-law to protect the Wetland until their new Official Plan was approved. The Town successfully defended their position at an Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing in 2002. The Watershed Trust spoke in support of the Town at the hearing.
 - o In 2004, the Town passed the Zoning By-law which prohibits golf courses in wetlands.
 - o In 2005, the landowner challenge to the Town’s By-law was before the OMB. The Watershed Trust again supported the Town at the OMB hearings and we continue to urge the Town to take action to permanently protect the wetland. We pledged to raise up to \$100,000 for preservation of the Wetland.
 - o In 2006 at the OMB hearing, the Watershed Trust raised the issue of the Spotted Turtle, an endangered species that was found in the Wetland.
 - o In May 2006, we held the “SOS – Save Our Silver” fundraising dinner and silent auction which raised over \$20,000.
 - o From 2006 to 2009, efforts to have the Town expropriate the wetland came to no successful conclusion.
 - o In 2010, the mortgage holder moved to take possession of the land, and the Town announced they were going to negotiate to protect the Wetland.
 - o However, in 2011, the owner secured new financing. We are asking the Town to resume negotiations for gaining title to the environmentally-significant portion of the Wetland.
 - o In 2012 we developed our “SCW – A Vision for the Future” plan to permanently protect the Wetland by securing it into conservationist ownership.
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- Castle Glen is another development proposal which we opposed. The plan is to construct over 1,100 residences and a commercial retail development on the slope of the Niagara Escarpment above Collingwood. The Watershed Trust participated in two OMB hearings, but the proposal was approved with safeguards proposed by The Blue Mountains. A study was done to gain permission to construct a water system for the first phase. We submitted comments on the original study and the 2011 update. However, the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) has approved the Permit to Take Water (PTTW).
 - We have been involved in several other developments in the area, such as Windfall, Craigleith Village Community, DelZotto Nottawa and Havens Brophy’s Lane, reviewing the proposals, attending public meetings and submitting comments. We have recommended improvements in environmental protection which have been supported by the review agencies in most cases.
 - We are also very concerned with the Huntingwood Trails proposal in the west end of Collingwood as the Silver Creek bi-sects the property. In January 2013 we obtained OMB permission as a “Special Participant” to present an environmental expert witness. We will be making our presentation at the October 2013 hearing.
 - For the past three years, in partnership with the NVCA and GSCA, we have monitored water quality in Townline Creek and have reviewed reports with landowners and suggested some actions that would improve water quality.
 - In the spring of 2012 we monitored the water quality downstream of six area golf courses and sent the results to the golf courses, the MOE, the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Council and local municipalities and CA’s.

- We have communicated our concerns to the MOE and Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) regarding the permitted use of some Class 9 pesticides/herbicides for which there is no test to determine their presence downstream of golf courses.
- We hosted the “Dan Hill in Collingwood” fundraising concert in October 2011 which netted over \$4,000 for our campaign to protect the Silver Creek Wetland. • We have actively participated in the land use planning process, both on a local level and at the provincial level. We have attended workshops and submitted comments on local Official Plan reviews. At the provincial level, we have attended workshops and commented on the Greenbelt Act, the Places to Grow Act, and OMB reform. We met with the Environmental Land Tribunal of Ontario in the fall of 2010 and our dialogue continues with them regarding improvements to the OMB member recruitment process.
- We were a member of a committee reviewing the Town of Collingwood’s Natural Heritage System Plan which was prepared by the NVCA. We are urging other local municipalities to take this approach. The benefits are cost savings for the municipality (fewer appeals) less ambiguity for developers and the preservation of important natural areas.