



# MAITLAND MUSINGS

Volume 8, Issue 1

September 2014

## LOWER MAITLAND STEWARDSHIP GROUP ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

### ***Phragmites australis: Canada's Worst Invasive***

*Karen Alexander, Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation*

One does not have to travel far in southwestern Ontario to come across a stand of invasive *Phragmites australis* (Frag-my-teez). Often referred to as 'Phrag' or 'Phragmites', the tall perennial grass has been expanding across North America since the early 1900's. *Phragmites* appeared on the Lake Huron shoreline in the early 2000's. The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation was the first organization in the County to bring awareness to the issue, and have since conducted studies to determine the extent of the invasion. The Centre works to educate local municipalities and the public about the urgent need to control this invasive species.



Photo by Dr. Janice Gilbert

Figure 1. Rondeau Provincial Park, Lake Erie. This is exactly what the Lake Huron community should work to avoid!

Every year a patch (or stand) of *Phragmites* can expand several meters to quickly crowd out native vegetation and dominate an area. The invasion can expand in two ways; by spreading seeds and by clonal growth. Seed production allows the plant to **spread to new sites**. Stands of *Phragmites* become more **dense** by using 'clonal' reproduction (rhizome (root) growth) under ground. Rhizomes also secrete a toxic chemical into the soil that destroys the structural proteins of neighbouring species (a process called allelopathy) and allows the species to easily dominate the native plant community.

Monoculture (single species) stands of *Phragmites* exert a myriad of negative effects on the local ecology, including a reduction in biodiversity, lower water levels, removal of nutrients from the ecosystem, and loss of animal habitat.

Once a *Phragmites* invasion becomes a monoculture stand, herbicides tend to be the only viable control option. In Canada there is no herbicide available for over water application yet. This is a problem because most *Phragmites* stands grow in or near water.

If a new invasion can be identified early, before the plant establishes a monoculture stand, then the community, or land-

owner, can respond quickly to control the spread using manual control efforts.

A best practice for controlling invasive species is to act quickly before the plant has time to establish.

**"Early detection, rapid response."**

Unfortunately, learning to identify invasive *Phragmites* in its early stages is no walk in the park. North America has a look-a-like native *Phragmites* that we have to be careful not to inadvertently remove. Some distinctive characteristics of invasive *Phragmites* are: larger seed heads, it grows taller than the native species, and will appear as monoculture stands (Figure 1), while the native strain will grow among other wetland species.

### **You can help control the spread...**

Once you've identified invasive *Phragmites*, manual options (such as cutting seed stalks below the soil) can be successful if done right and repeated annually. Remember, the goal is to avoid costly control programs using herbicides *while* managing the spread and growth of the stand.

### **... and you don't have to do it alone!**

The Ontario *Phragmites* Working Group (OPWG) launched a new website on *Phragmites* in Ontario. OPWG is currently putting together resources for manual control efforts and a toolkit to help communities work through the steps required to initiate a control program using herbicides. The OPWG is also working with the Province and other stakeholders to make a water-safe herbicide available for controlling *Phragmites*. OPWG website: ([opwg.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca](http://opwg.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca)).

In the meantime, the best available information on manual control can be found in the Ministry of Natural Resources Best Management Practices document, which is available on the OPWG website.

For more information on *Phragmites* or other invasive species along the Lake Huron shoreline, contact the Coastal Centre by email ([coastalcentre@lakehuron.on.ca](mailto:coastalcentre@lakehuron.on.ca)) or phone (226) 421-3029.

**Want to receive this newsletter electronically?**  
**Please send your e-mail to:**  
**[huronstewardship@gmail.com](mailto:huronstewardship@gmail.com)**

### **Inside this issue:**

<u>LMSG Spring Hike report</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Huron Bioblitz and Ontario Nature Atlas</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Planning as a tool for Sustainability</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Funding for Stewardship Projects</u>	<u>4</u>

## **LMSG Spring Hike at Nature Conservancy of Canada's John and Marylo Graham Nature Reserve**

*Cara Copeland, Nature Conservancy of Canada*

On Saturday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 24 Lower Maitland Stewardship Group members and nature enthusiasts gathered at the Bishop's Road Maitland Trail access point. Cara Copeland, NCC Conservation Biologist and Rachel White, Huron Stewardship Coordinator led the group on an interpretive hike along the Maitland Trail to NCC's John and Marylo Graham Nature Reserve.

The 175 acre property – named to honour the couple's outstanding commitment to conservation in the area – was purchased by NCC in 2008. Its nearly 2 km of Maitland River shoreline, buffered by deciduous forest, provides habitat for many plants and animals including the endangered Queensnake and other species at risk. The forest is part of an important corridor for area-sensitive birds and other wildlife in need of continuous natural cover.



Participants learned about some of the management challenges for the property. Preventing ATV access to the property is an ongoing issue despite clear signage and physical barriers. While they can be a great way to experience the outdoors, ATVs act as vectors for the spread of invasive species such as garlic mustard, which is abundant along many sections of the trail. The group learned how to identify garlic mustard and other invasive species, and what to do if they find it on their own properties.

Once everyone had worked up an appetite, the group headed over to the shaded section of the Maitland Trail on Gina McDonnell's property. Master chefs Bert Dirven and Dan Burns helmed the barbecue.

To learn more about NCC's work and how you can help, visit [www.natureconservancy.ca/ontario](http://www.natureconservancy.ca/ontario) or contact [ontario@natureconservancy.ca](mailto:ontario@natureconservancy.ca).

## **Join us at our next hike!**

**To be held on Saturday, October 4<sup>th</sup> at 80939 Maitland Line (north of Holmesville). The hike will go from 10 AM to noon—rain or shine—followed by a barbecue lunch (by donation).**

**RSVP by October 2<sup>nd</sup> to Rachel White at 519-524-8394 ext. 3286 or [huronstewardship@gmail.com](mailto:huronstewardship@gmail.com).**

## **Huron Bioblitz and the Reptile & Amphibian Atlas**

*Monique Aarts, Huron Stewardship Council  
Elizabeth Milne, Nature Conservancy of Canada*

On Saturday June 7<sup>th</sup>, the Huron Stewardship Council collaborated with Ontario Nature to run the first ever Huron Bioblitz. The goals of the Bioblitz were to learn more about 'herptiles' (reptiles and amphibians) in Huron County, and to show participants the wealth of biodiversity that exists in their own backyards.

Forty-five volunteers (including members of the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group) were guided by fifteen herptile experts from across Ontario into two Huron County woodlots to locate and identify herptiles. Thirteen species were spotted, including two provincially rare snakes: the Milksnake and the Ribbon Snake. In total, 189 sightings of reptiles and amphibians were recorded.

We received positive feedback from participants young and old. Some were very eager to get home and search for critters in their own backyards and submit their findings. Many expressed a new found connection to wildlife in Huron County, some of which they never knew existed, and appreciated the opportunity to be involved with citizen science conservation efforts. By all accounts, events like the Huron Bioblitz bring the community together and inspire people to get out and enjoy nature!

All of the data collected at the Bioblitz was submitted to the Ontario Nature Reptile and Amphibian Atlas. With the user-friendly Ontario Nature website or free smartphone app you too can contribute valuable information about reptile and amphibian populations in the province. By submitting your 'geo-referenced' sightings (meaning you've used your phone or computer to pinpoint the location where the animal was spotted), you can help biologists gather data on species range (the extent of the known habitat) and abundance. This form of citizen science allows anyone in Ontario to contribute to reptile and amphibian conservation efforts.



*Participants submit a Ribbon Snake sighting to the Ontario Nature Atlas (Photo by Devin Sturgeon).*

**Not too sure how to identify snakes or toads?** The Atlas provides a wealth of resources including photos and species descriptions. The Atlas also has species range and frequency data, which show how rare (or abundant) each animal is in your area.

For a second year, the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group is hosting a checkpoint at the upcoming El Camino Maitland - a 49 km hiking event along the length of the Maitland Trail on September 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Last year, the LMSG handed out refreshments at Cherrydale, which is near the end of the first day's 30 km hike. **Look for us again this year!** Local Species at Risk Technicians will also be at a checkpoint early in the hike to show hikers how to submit sightings of reptiles and amphibians they encounter on the trails.

For more information about the El Camino, check out the Maitland Trail Association website ([maitlandtrail.ca](http://maitlandtrail.ca)).



## Planning as a Tool for Environmental Sustainability

I sat down with Monica Walker-Bolton, Planner with the County of Huron to discuss how land use planning contributes to environmental sustainability.

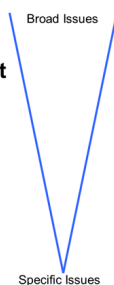
**Rachel White: On a day to day basis how does your work with the County connect to environmental sustainability?**

Monica Walker-Bolton: I provide planning service to the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh and the Municipality of Central Huron. So, my work covers an area that includes both sides of the Maitland River and down to the Bayfield River. As I am sure you can imagine, there are a lot of important natural areas within that land base. On a daily basis I receive inquiries about development proposals and I work on planning applications. The types of planning applications work on most regularly would be zoning by-law amendments and severances. For any inquiry that I receive, there will almost always be an environmental or natural heritage component. I refer to the policies of the Provincial Policy Statement, Huron County Official Plan and local Official Plan to ensure that each planning application is given proper consideration for economic, environmental and social sustainability. My role is to provide a professional planning recommendation to the decision makers on the local Council or on Huron County Council. I also play a role in assisting citizens with navigating the planning process. The challenge of our work is to balance the desires of private landowners to develop their properties against the public interest in preserving natural areas.

**RW: How do the policies that you work with help to ensure environmental sustainability?**

MWB: The Provincial Policy Statement or PPS, the Huron County Official Plan and the local Official Plans provide the policy framework for the planning work that I do. These policies work together in a hierarchy with the PPS at the top and being the most general, and flowing down to the local Official Plan with policies that are more specific to the local area.

- Provincial Policy Statement
- County Official Plan
- Local Official Plan
- Zoning By-law
- Site Plan Control

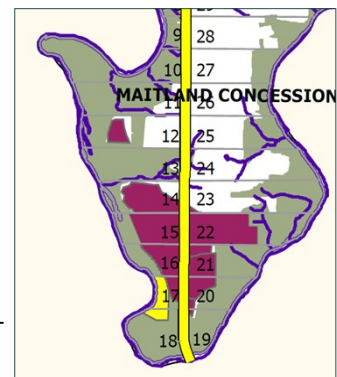


For many development applications there will be considerations related to protecting significant areas of natural heritage like woodlands, to give an example. So, if someone applied for a rezoning to permit a house on a wooded lot we would be considering the impact of that development on the natural heritage feature of the woodland and we would need to ensure that the development could happen without a negative impact to the ecological benefits that the woodland provides. The PPS and the Huron County Official Plan re-

quire that significant woodland be protected, and the local Official Plans provide a definition of what is significant woodland. The applicant will often need to hire an ecologist to perform a study called an Environmental Impact Study to determine if the development can happen without negatively impacting the woodland.

**RW: So I understand now how the local Official Plan provides policies to identify and protect the natural heritage features that exist. How do the policies that you work with promote the enhancement of our natural environment?**

MWB: The policies of the PPS, Huron County Official Plan and local Official Plans all encourage the enhancement of the natural environment. The local Official Plans even include policies to establish targets for increased forest cover. However, this aspect of planning is much more difficult to realize through the existing mechanisms. The policies are fairly good at protecting existing natural areas by directing new development away from areas of natural heritage, or at least requiring no negative impact. However, it is very hard to require developers to do enhancements. In this regard, we rely on landowners to make decisions about their own property to perhaps retire marginal farmland or increase the size of their woodlots through new plantings.



The local Official Plans identify land use designations and provide policies to protect resources and control development.

**RW: In your view, what is the best way for landowners and other concerned citizens to help with preserving and enhancing the natural environment?**

MWB: I would say get involved with the local planning processes, especially the work that is being done around Huron County to review and update the Official Plans. All the Official Plans are required to be updated every 5 years. It is essential to the effectiveness of this process that citizens get involved in helping to craft the vision for these plans. Read your local newspaper and be aware of developments that are happening in your neighbourhood and throughout Huron County. It is important that when development applications are being considered that the voice of citizens is heard along with the voice of the people advocating for a particular development.

The decision makers sometimes need to be reminded that the community wants the natural environment policies to be respected.



## WANT TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN THE LOWER MAITLAND STEWARDSHIP GROUP?

The Lower Maitland River Valley is a landscape worthy of protection. Surrounded by highly productive agricultural land, the valley is deeply incised and features an intact corridor of forest, numerous natural heritage features for fish and wildlife habitat, woodlands, limestone outcroppings, and many other features of interest. To date, the river valley has been relatively untouched by development.

The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group (LMSG) was formed in 1998 and consists of landowners, stakeholders, organization and agency representatives, and individuals interested in protecting and enhancing the valley and its natural features.

The LMSG holds meetings several times a year and invites interested landowners to come out and join the discussions, help plan outings, and stay informed about happenings in the Valley! Meetings are held at the Tourism office in Goderich on the first Thursday of the month and begin at 3:00pm.

**The upcoming meetings are scheduled as follows:**

**March 5, 2015 • June 4, 2015 • Sept. 3, 2015**

**Further, if you would like to be receive additional information about LMSG meetings and activities, please send your email to Rachel at: [huronstewardship@gmail.com](mailto:huronstewardship@gmail.com)**

## INTERESTED IN STEWARDSHIP WORK ON YOUR PROPERTY? FUNDING IS AVAILABLE!

### Huron Clean Water Project

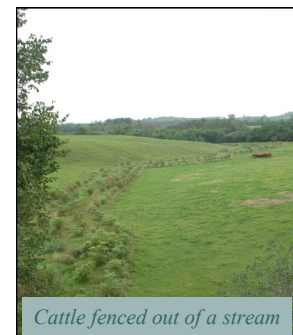
The Huron County Clean Water Project provides financial and technical assistance to county residents to improve and protect water quality in Huron County. The project is funded by the County of Huron and delivered by the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley Conservation Authorities. Funding assistance covers **up to 50% of the costs** of eligible projects and **can be combined with other cost-share programs**.

Keeping bacteria, chemicals, and nutrients out of creeks and rivers protects the health of land, water, and people. The county initiative has provided financial incentives for projects such as windbreak and tree planting, forest management plans and woodlot enhancement, wetland creation, erosion control, stormwater management, fragile land retirement, and community and special projects. See the enclosed brochure for more details!

Huron County residents have completed more than 1,700 projects through the Huron County Clean Water Project.

Contact the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority for more information:

Douglas Hocking, Water Quality Specialist, 519-335-3557 x236; [dhocking@mvca.on.ca](mailto:dhocking@mvca.on.ca)



**Together we can keep the Lower Maitland River's water clean!**