

Durham Conservation / Green Door Alliance Newsletter
May 2008

This newsletter updates members on recent activities of the Durham Conservation Association, (DCA), and its sister organization the Green Door Alliance, (GDA).

Pursuing partial or full amalgamation of the DCA and the GDA

GDA and the DCA executive committees have met and decided to begin the process of at least partial amalgamation. Fully maintaining two organizations is time consuming and complicates the ability to access capabilities across organizations.

The DCA has membership and is very active on many fronts but lacks charitable status. The GDA has a long history of accomplishment and has charitable status and a website but has become less active over the past few years. Both organizations share many Directors and share as well the same broad objectives. GDA directors Lorne Almack and Bill Wilder were prime catalysts in setting up the DCA with Bill Wilder becoming the DCA's founding President.

While the objectives have been similar their focus particularly in recent years has differed somewhat. The GDA has been more policy and research focused and more involved with the Federal and Provincial land holdings and Pickering issues; DCA has been more involved in private and public land stewardship; and land acquisition and trails, and has been more Uxbridge focused.

The planned first step would be for the GDA Board to expand their Board and executive Committee to include all DCA executive Committee members. Following this a decision would be made within the next year around whether to fully amalgamate.

Building organizational capacity / applying for Trillium funding

In addition to partially or more fully amalgamating the GDA and DCA, the DCA is also evaluating the action required to build the organization and place it on a more sustainable basis. Like most small not for profit organizations DCA is very reliant on a hand full of individuals. DCA has achieved a great deal in the past few years and has been involved across a variety of fronts spreading its resources even more thinly.

To date DCA has been entirely volunteer. However we are currently evaluating how we might create a permanent part time 'executive Director' position to focus on building membership and supporting our efforts on a variety of fronts. We are having discussions with Trillium around possible funding support to assist us in making this transition and will likely make a formal application for support later this year.

DCA's past success in implementing the Uxbridge Naturally plan aimed at natural area protection and trails has been the result of a close partnership with the TRCA and the township. Strategies for strengthening the DCA need to build on this partnership.

Uxbridge Naturally Plans

The Township and conservationists under the umbrella of *Uxbridge Naturally*, together with Conservation Authorities and many other partners have developed and are well advanced in implementing a countryside plan for the southern part of the township. The *Uxbridge Naturally* plan is primarily focused on the development and enhancement of a trail and natural heritage system linking communities and public conservation lands, and encouraging land stewardship initiatives on both privately and publicly held lands. Plans have also focused on implementing a network of trails and nature corridors within the Town with links to the countryside network.

Another key element in the plan is the establishment of links beyond Uxbridge's borders to Scugog in the east, Whitchurch-Stouffville to the west; and in particular to Pickering and Toronto through the Federal Green Space lands; the east and west Duffin and the Rouge Corridor and Park.

In 2007 Ontario Nature presented a Greenway excellence award to *Uxbridge Naturally*. As reported in the autumn issue of their magazine 'On Nature' their Executive Director stated " If communities across Ontario demonstrated the same amount of enthusiasm, innovation and creativity towards trails and natural spaces, generations of Ontarians would be able to enjoy their environment"

Over the past year DCA has been involved in initiating and financially supporting the addition of two additional trail corridor connects. A number of other very promising opportunities are currently being pursued and negotiated by ourselves and/or our township and TRCA partners.

A key element in the *Uxbridge Naturally* plan is the development of a Management Plan for the more than 1300 acres that came into Provincial ownership in 2007, as a result of an agreement between the Province and the former Gan Eden developer to exchange Provincially owned lands in Seaton for the 'Tanenbaum lands' in Uxbridge.

We are hopeful that an agreement can be struck in the near future between the Province, the Township and the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority on how best to structure a public process to develop a management plan for the lands, and link them to the surrounding natural heritage/trail network.

DCA members are also very active on the Township's Town Trail Committee chaired by John McCutcheon. A full compliment of Trail Captains are energetically maintaining and completing the connections between all 9 urban trails. The "Cedar Trail" will connect the new communities including Butternut to the existing South Balsam trail and Highway 47; and at highway 47, an extension of the Wooden sticks trail will provide a link to the Glens development.

A number of projects are planned in the Countryside Preserve including a vehicle and trail bridge over the brook on the access trail leading to the Preserve; an accessibility trail; additional information kiosks; and a provision for horse trailer parking at the Wagg road trail entrance of the Regional Forest which accesses the Preserve.

Furthermore in the near future a picturesque trail in the valley lands beside the main arm of the Uxbridge Brook will connect the Maple Bridge, Barton and Trans Canada Trails to the Kennedy House conservation lands which the Township is in the process of acquiring.

TRCA lands

In close partnership with TRCA staff, DCA members and many other volunteers are pursuing the following priorities on the 4,000 acre TRCA land holdings in the Glen Major area in 2008.

- In 2007 the major priority was to largely finish making major changes to the trail network. A number of 'trail builds' were held with the enthusiastic support of many volunteers. Additional km. of sustainable trails were built; other trails were closed. New signage, trail maps and other approaches to making the trails easier to follow were introduced.

A few outstanding issues remain in 2008. Agreement has been finalized with the Glen Major fishing club to open a trail largely constructed last year near the eastern boundary of their lands in order to spread use in an area where the TRCA lands are narrow and offer little choice. A number of other trails changes are planned for Walker Woods in 2008 with one trail opening; another closing and yet another significantly rerouted to make it more sustainable. Plans for trail changes in parts of Glen Major will also be developed with implementation likely in 2009.

In 2008 as well, preliminary planning will begin on trail and access alternatives in the 250 acre Wilder Forest and Wildlife tract and the contiguous 130 acres to the north. As reported last year this TRCA acquisition of 250 acres west of concession 6 and some 3.5 km. south of Durham 21 in the fall of 2006 was made possible by a very generous donation by DCA founding President Bill Wilder and his wife Billie of more than \$1million.

- During the latter part of 2008 and 2009 the Management Plan for the entire East Duffin headwaters area completed in 2000, will be updated and extended to include the above mentioned additions. Further to this, efforts are being made to more fully integrate the TRCA's Dagmar lands into the overall stewardship and trail framework
- A major effort is being made in 2008 to better control invasive species on TRCA and adjacent lands. The invasive species being targeted are buckthorn, dog strangling vine, and garlic mustard, and pose real threats to biodiversity,

forest regeneration, and soil chemistry. DCA has donated \$20,000 to hiring professional contractors to spray Dog strangling vine in June, garlic mustard in the fall, and cut and treat buckthorn stumps at other times. The TRCA is matching this effort. In addition TRCA and DCA are promoting volunteer efforts to identify infestations; pull garlic mustard this spring; cut dog strangling vine etc.

Fund Raising/DCA Trust

As noted in past newsletters the DCA, in partnership the township, and the TRCA, under the umbrella of *Uxbridge Naturally*, is actively supporting plans to acquire strategic land parcels that bulk up natural areas already in public ownership. We are also supporting efforts to obtain trail and natural heritage linkages that connect public land holdings and communities in the southern part of the township and North Pickering.

DCA members have been active on the TRCA's stewardship committee which they set up to engage the local community in the management and maintenance of their properties. Over the past number of years we have seen the need for targeted financial support for specific programs and initiatives. There is much to be done to properly care for these properties and often budget constraints limit the Authority's capacity to act in a timely fashion.

Last year we decided to act and approached the TRCA to discuss how we could help with land stewardship and property acquisition initiatives. As a result we decided to establish the DCA Trust which would hold funds donated by individuals and corporations that would be used to assist the TRCA to fund specific initiatives identified by the DCA executive. The Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto, the TRCA's fund raising arm, has set up and is administering the trust on our behalf. All capital donated and interest earned will be applied to work on the ground and not to any administration costs or other overheads.

Since inception DCA members have donated more than \$163,000 to the DCA Trust. The Trust when combined with the Buckles Trust also held by the Conservation Foundation, and John and Pat McCucheon's family Foundation's donation to assist in the rehabilitation of the Timber's Pit property represent a total of almost \$350,000.

In 2007 more than \$60,000 of this total has been taken from the DCA Trust as well as the other two funds mentioned above, in support of acquiring specific trail connects and supporting pit restoration. These funds give us the resources we need to help the TRCA with stewardship initiatives on their properties and strategic property acquisitions that are consistent with our trail development and natural heritage plans.

DCA is very grateful for the generous support that we have had from so many members. These funding resources have been critical to our successes to date and will be equally important in the months and years ahead. The funds also give us the leverage to attract matching funds for specific initiatives from Foundations, government agencies and private donors. Anyone interested in supporting this initiative should contact Michael Tucker at 905 649 2876.

Aggregate issues

There are many very large aggregate holdings in the township with tremendous opportunity to bulk up existing conservation lands and add additional natural heritage and trail corridors as these pits are exhausted; licenses are cancelled; and rehabilitation has taken place.

DCA members were involved a decade or so ago in raising funds to assist the TRCA to acquire the Timbers pit. Much effort has gone into restoration since that time, but much further need to be done. Starting last year the TRCA in partnership with the Ontario Sand Stone and Gravel Association and the McCutcheon Family Foundation completed year one of a three year plan to further rehabilitate and beautify these lands. The intent is to turn it into a 'living classroom' to not only positively impact the lands themselves but stimulate the use of best practices elsewhere.

An extensive workshop is being held May 30 between key aggregate association company members, senior MNR, township and TRCA representatives as well as DCA members to explore results achieved, suggestions for improvement, and ways in which all partners can work towards furthering these efforts.

More broadly, the industry is coming under scrutiny by the Ontario's Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller. In his recent report the Commissioner has raised a number of concerns. He states that "*Pits and quarries are allowed almost anywhere in Ontario under certain conditions.*" He goes on to point out that there is very little land that is off limits within the Niagara escarpment; the Moraine Plan allows new pits and quarries in all but the most protective zone and have indicated that even this restriction will be re-examined in the first review of the Plan; and the Green Belt Plan allows pits and quarries in all areas except for provincially significant wetlands, and some woodlands and endangered species habitat.

Pit operators have often used the argument that Pits should be given high priority not only because of the need for material close to the demand but also because extraction is an interim use and therefore environmental impacts shouldn't raise the same concerns.

However as the Commissioner baldly states "*Pits and quarries are not an interim use*". The Greenbelt Task Force on aggregates he points "*noted that most existing quarries in the Greenbelt Plan area are more than 50 years old. Adding the years needed to complete the necessary rehabilitation, land use for a quarry could be unavailable for any other uses for many decades. It has been observed that "no reasonable person could consider this length of time an' interim' land use". Another reason to challenge the concept of an "interim land use" is that sites are rarely returned to their original condition*"

Another knowledgeable individual has pointed out to us that Ontario is the only jurisdiction in North America with no limits on pit life.

This is an opportune time to push for positive change. The Moraine Plan will be coming up for revision over the next five years

We plan to work with pit owners, MNR and our twp. and CA partners to identify and promote high priority environmental and trail opportunities and develop a clearer vision for what the area might look like as more and more pits are exhausted. The major operators LaFarge, Miller and Giordano have all been helpful and supportive of our past efforts.

In order to achieve greater success we need not only the continued support of individual operators, we also need increased support from the Ministry of Natural Resources. There needs, for example, to be greater incentive for operators to move ahead more quickly with extraction, rehabilitation, and surrender of the license.

Pickering Airport and Federal Green Space issues

In 2007 Transport Canada awarded the GTAA with a contract to undertake a needs analysis study of Pickering. This needs analysis is expected to be completed in 2008. Transport Canada tells us they will then do a due diligence review following which the GTAA analysis and the Transport Canada review will be made public and the federal government will decide whether they wish to proceed with the possible airport development process or put it on the shelf. If they decide to proceed the next step in the process would be a full public environmental assessment which would likely take another 2-3 years.

Neither the terms of reference of the needs analysis nor the nature of Transport Canada's planned subsequent review has been made public. And since the GTAA has been a long standing proponent of proceeding with the Pickering airport there is absolutely no doubt the GTAA's analysis will conclude Pickering is necessary. As Richard Koroscil the President of Hamilton Airport stated in a speech earlier this year "*The Pickering idea has come back again and the GTAA is busy working out how to make it happen... Having the GTAA study the need for Pickering is what we call letting the fox mind the hen house.*"

We have absolutely no expectation that the review being undertaken will be objective. However we continue to feel that any objective review would conclude that given the massive expansion at Pearson; and the ability over time to further increase its capacity; and the ability of Hamilton to act as a reliever, that another airport is not needed in the foreseeable future. As Richard Korascil also stated in his speech before considering building Pickering, "*Why don't we maximize what we already have first.*"

In view of the impact of air travel on global warming the following excerpt from our news letter a year ago also bears repeating.

Global warming concerns will also form a critical element in any such environmental assessment process. World wide, carbon dioxide emissions from aircraft are growing faster than any other form of green house emissions. George Montbiot in his recent book 'Heat' feels that particularly since unlike other areas of energy consumption, there are no substantial fixes to existing aircraft technology that will significantly reduce carbon emissions, "unless something is done to stop this growth, aviation will overwhelm all the cuts we manage to make elsewhere." Flying he states "dwarfs any other impact a single person can exert". According to the U.K. Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, the carbon emissions per air passenger mile while half the average carbon emission per auto traveler mile, has to be multiplied by the huge distances traveled by air. Not only that, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change estimates that when one considers all the gas and particle emissions in the upper atmosphere, the warming effect of air travel could be 2.7 times that of the carbon dioxide alone!

Presently there is no international agreement on allocating carbon emissions from international flights. Thus the U.K. can commit to cutting carbon emissions 60% by 2050 without even considering it – a stance Monbiot characterizes as a "remarkable evasion". I assume Canada would try to do the same. However there seems absolutely no doubt that as climate concerns intensify, air passenger and cargo travel won't be given the same free ride. If the true costs of air travel including carbon emissions were passed on to users, current demand forecasts on which the feasibility of Pickering is based, would be reduced.

And as climate concerns increase, additional action to cap air travel emissions may also be required. The next few decades are not the time when Canada should be contemplating further capacity increases at Pickering – increases which inevitably help stimulate demand and significantly further impair Canada's ability to be a good global steward.

Along with other local regional and national groups we continue to oppose the airport. We will also continue to oppose an Environmental Assessment because of our strong belief that even if one were able to obtain a small amount of intervenor funding, given the billfold of the proponent – the GTAA - such a process would not create anything even remotely approaching a level playing field.

In addition, over the past number of years we have also pressed government first to create the 7200 acre Federal Green Space lands and now to expand them significantly to at least include all of the Federal lands falling within the Provincial Greenbelt.

We are also urging the Federal Government to become good stewards, and consider governance alternatives to achieving this. They must stop considering the Pickering lands as if an airport was inevitable and the only issue worthy of consideration, and start viewing these prime food and valley lands as a tremendous public asset in which food land, environment, and community heritage all need to be protected and fostered.

With respect to trails, we reported a year ago that the TRCA has entered into a management agreement with Transport Canada to manage a small block of land at the north end of Green Space lands. We have been very involved with the TRCA, the Oak Ridges Trail

Association and other partners in opening a small trail network. A parking access point has been constructed and a trail corridor has been acquired across private lands linking the Federal Green Space Lands to the TRCA's Goodwood tract and the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. This entire section should be opened over the next year.

Hopefully this is the first small step in creating an off road trail connection within a much enhanced natural heritage corridor linking the trails on the Moraine to Seaton, the Rouge Park, and Toronto itself.

Urban Growth Management issues

Over the past number of years the Province has introduced many changes – most of them positive - to the Provincial planning framework as it relates to land use decisions. This includes the Moraine and Greenbelt Plans; revisions to the Provincial Policy statement and the Planning Act, and the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Of them all, the Growth Plan is by an order of magnitude the most difficult to implement. The jury is still out on how successful it will ultimately be.

Durham is currently working its way through a planning process aimed at bringing the Region's Official Plan into conformity with the Provincial Growth Plan Policies. A Phase 1 and 2 Report was produced in December of 2007 followed by a public comment period and two subsequent reports – one which compiled the public comments; the other outlining three alternative growth scenarios. In the first the majority of growth will be concentrated in Pickering with a secondary focus in Oshawa/Whitby and to a lesser extent Clarington. A second scenario focuses growth on the central urban core of the Region, while the third scenario reinforces existing communities across the region.

A consultants report evaluating these options and making a recommendation will be produced in late May with public comment occurring over the summer. It will likely be sometime in 2009 that the Regional Official Plan is brought into conformity with Provincial policies.

We understand that the Region feels it will be able to meet Provincial policies including those for intensification. However the bad news is that even after meeting Provincial intensification targets the report will conclude that extensive greenfield within existing urban area boundaries, will not be sufficient to accommodate Durham's population and employment forecasts to the year 2031 and that further significant urban area expansion will be required before that date. If the option concentrating growth in Pickering were followed, we understand all of Pickering's 'whitebelt' land, (non greenbelt) north of Greenwood, in the very sensitive Carruthers creek watershed, would become urbanized.

We find this a very concerning result. Discussion papers produced years ago by the Region suggested that with some intensification the current urban boundary would have been able to accommodate the planned growth. We will be trying over the next few months to participate more closely in the ongoing public process and develop a clearer sense for what has changed; what it says about Provincial policies; and what can be done about it.