

Durham Conservation / Green Door Alliance Newsletter
February 2007

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

TRCA Acquisition within former Pleasure Valley lands

A major 250 acre tract of wooded, hilly, tremendously scenic countryside was added to the TRCA land holding in the fall of 2006. The land is situated on the west side of concession 6, some 10 Km. south of the Town of Uxbridge and 3.5 km south of Durham 21. A very generous donation by DCA founding President and current Board member Bill Wilder and his wife Billie, who had owned the land made this critically important addition to the TRCA holding possible.

The lands directly abut 130 acres acquired by the TRCA in 2005 and are also directly across the road from some 4,000 acres of land already owned by the TRCA in the Glen Major/Walker Woods area.

To quote retired Uxbridge and current TRCA Chair Mayor Gerri Lynn O'Connor, "This is a fantastic addition to our public lands under conservation. The generosity of the Wilders in making these lands available will be appreciated by many generations to come."

The TRCA Stewardship Committee chaired by DCA President Michael Tucker will be working with the TRCA to develop a Management Plan for these areas over the next 1-2 years before the land is opened to the public.

Uxbridge Naturally Plans

Uxbridge Naturally is a partnership of conservationists, the Mayor and the municipality aimed at natural area protection with a particular emphasis on trails. DCA members are core members of this group. Attached is a map of the southern part of Uxbridge Township showing the existing public land base and outlining the *Uxbridge Naturally* plan – a plan that has been approved by Council

The 250 acre addition mentioned above has been a long standing priority. The TRCA is acquiring a link midway between Brock Road and concession 6 between this 250 acres, and TRCA land on the south side of the unopened Webb Road allowance. In addition an agreement between the Glen Major Angling Club and the TRCA will allow an additional north/south trail link across the eastern end of the Fishing Club lands. Without such an agreement all trails heading north in Glen Major have had to flow through a narrow corridor. And while not yet finalized, efforts continue to implement a number of other desired trail connections in a number of areas across the southern end of the township.

As far as the Town Trails are concerned the - the Maple Bridge trail was opened last fall. The developer Mason Homes did a terrific job landscaping, planting trees and constructing foot bridges. The 9th town trail – the Barton trail is scheduled to open in June of 2007. Future priorities include opening a scenic ravine connect between the Maple Bridge and Barton trails at the north-east end of town; opening a further trail near the cemetery; and constructing a bridge across the electrolyte pond leading to a new trail which will access the commercial area along Highway 47.

The 140 acre Uxbridge Countryside Preserve adjacent to the urban area opened in the fall of 2005 has been enormously popular. *Uxbridge Naturally* members continue to work closely with the township and the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority to make further improvements. A portion of the trail crossing private land connecting the Preserve to Elgin Park is also used by snowmobiles and the Heart of Ontario Snowmobile club is the lead organization in partnering with *Uxbridge Naturally*, the township and the Uxbridge Horseman's Association in applying for a Trillium grant which would among other things erect a much needed boardwalk over the stream and upgrade sections of the trail.

Trillium Grant / TRCA lands

Over the past 6 months the \$70,000 Trillium grant DCA received in partnership with the TRCA has been put to good use. DCA members and other volunteers have worked with the TRCA to lay out and construct a whole network of trails between the Brock Road and concession 6. Boardwalk has also been constructed in wet areas in Glen Major.

The funds were also used to build more than 2 km. of 'sustainable' trails. This effort was accomplished over 4 days in two separate weekend events involving some 50 volunteers who worked daily with a contractor and with assistance from trained members of IMBA the International Mountain Biking Association. The volunteers were young and old, families, bike riders, hikers and horseback riders indicative of the wide interest there is in supporting trail efforts in this very special area.

There are still some unfinished tasks that will be completed in the early spring. Trail signage and additional marker posts need to be installed. And a new trail map and guide need to be produced.

Apart from completing the activities specified in the Trillium grant, the TRCA partnership with the Stewardship Committee is planning a number of other activities in 2007. An overall trail plan is being developed; this will involve opening a few new trails; closing some trails and rerouting and rehabbing others. With assistance from DCA Advisory Board member Wendy Dobson, DCA applied to the Toronto Dominion Bank's Friends of the Environment program and have received a generous donation of \$10,000 to further support our sustainable trails initiative in 2007.

The TRCA is also planning a major initiative to further rehabilitate and beautify the Timbers Pit area as well as to greatly improve the trails and add amenities like benches etc. DCA Executive Committee member John McCutcheon's family foundation is providing funding in support of this effort.

Fund Raising

In partnership with *Uxbridge Naturally*, the township, and the TRCA, Durham Conservation has extensive plans to support acquisition of land aimed at bulking up key existing natural areas as well as obtaining key trail and natural heritage linkages connecting public land holdings and communities throughout the southern end of the township and into North Pickering. We would also like to promote better maintenance and rehabilitation of many existing trail sections to make them more sustainable.

These efforts would be greatly aided if we could bring some funds to the table to assist in this effort. Last fall DCA and *Uxbridge Naturally* member Brian Buckles and his wife Jane helped to facilitate the 250 acre addition mentioned earlier by agreeing to purchase two lots from the Wilders and then resell them. Net profits from the sale totaling \$115,000 have been donated to the TRCA to create a fund to be used to support such projects.

Durham Conservation would like to obtain additional donations to replenish these funds and continue to provide the opportunity to attract matching funds from Foundations, Government Agencies and private donors.

Those interested in contributing support would make the charitable donation to the TRCA indicating that the donation be directed to the 'Durham Conservation Fund'. Use of the funds would be initiated by the DCA and require approval by the DCA Executive Committee and the TRCA.

We are currently working out how best to approach DCA members and friends, as well as other members of the community to ask for support in this effort.

Provincial land use issues

Beginning with the introduction of the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan, Provincial Governments have introduced many changes to the Framework governing land use decisions. These include the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe; revisions to the Provincial Policy Statement governing land use decisions; the Greenbelt Plan; and the Provincial action aimed at protecting the Durham Rouge Agricultural Preserve and developing in Seaton. Seaton development is tied to successfully concluding the land swap involving Richmond Hill lands as well as the 1300 acre Tanenbaum holdings in Uxbridge – lands which have been exchanged for land in Seaton. In recent years our organizations have made many representations to the Province on these issues. And while we have suggested changes overall we have generally been supportive of the direction being taken by the Province.

We will be concentrating on the following issues in 2007.

- Particularly with the election of a new government there will be immense pressure on the Province to make changes to the greenbelt boundaries and of particular concern to remove large sections of the Pickering Agricultural Preserve from the greenbelt.

The Region wants a number of areas including the Preserve lands removed from the Greenbelt. Such changes could not be incorporated directly into the Plan because they would be in violation of the Province's Greenbelt Act and Plan, However the Regional Solicitor advised they could be attached to the Official Plan '**as information**', and in early January Regional Planning Committee recommended this action.

Among others we argued strongly against such a move – a move which we felt would encourage speculation and undermine the entire green belt approach. We were delighted when Regional Council defeated this motion at their January 24th meeting and decided instead to take no further action to proceed and merely receive as 'information' the report of the previous council endorsing the removal of areas from the greenbelt. Ideally they would have gone further and rescinded the resolution.

The province remains the key to maintaining the integrity of the Greenbelt. We are attempting to meet with John Tory and his policy advisors to express our concerns, in order to increase our comfort level that all parties support retention of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve in the Greenbelt.

- While we are very supportive of both the Greenbelt Plans and the Moraine Plans we have real concerns about the additional regulation and costs being imposed on landowners. With respect to the Moraine Plan for example, we have had many criticisms of the studies and costs imposed by the TRCA on land owners who wish to build on existing lots even when they wish to build virtually within existing building footprints. Much of this appears to serve little purpose and alienates many who might otherwise support conservation efforts and will over time if not moderated lead to serious backlash.

We are particularly concerned about the impact on farmers. We support the need to protect land from development. Such protection reduces the price a farm owner might receive if the land could be urbanized. However over regulation puts them in an additional bind. They are told they have to move from growing commodities to take advantage of their near urban location to tailor their operations to more niche markets while at the same time being forced to comply with many new regulations, which make any change to their operation very difficult and sometimes impossible to implement. Governments need to offer programs and take other actions that support rather than impede such transition.

- We understand the Province and the Uxbridge developer have reached agreement on the land exchange and the land the developer will receive in Seaton for the 1300 acres of land to be given up in Uxbridge, (see map identifying the Uxbridge lands).

However up to now two court challenges have delayed progress in Seaton. We are delighted that both have been resolved over the past month. On the one challenge First Nations had argued that their statutory right to consultation had not been met. However Ontario Superior Court has sided with the Province and ruled that First nations were adequately consulted during the land exchange process.

In the second case the Supreme Court of Canada ruled it would not grant developer Sylvio De Gasperis who has a significant interest in development in the Pickering Agricultural Preserve as opposed to Seaton, leave to appeal a lower court decision rejecting his contention that the Seaton planning process was flawed and should be halted.

We are now in the process of developing and refining recommendations with respect to the transfer and future administration of the Uxbridge lands.

Pickering Airport and Federal Greenspace issues

Little is happening on the airport front. Transport Canada is currently still reviewing the GTAA draft plan for a cargo/reliever airport but continues to be completely silent on the nature of that review. Until this is complete no decision will be made on whether or not to proceed. We feel any objective review would conclude that given the massive expansion at Pearson and the ability of Hamilton to act as a reliever, that another airport is not needed in the foreseeable future.

The GTAA however would like to first get its foot in the door with a General Aviation Airport to replace Buttonville and Oshawa. With respect to Oshawa, an economic impact study commissioned by Oshawa Council was released in February. “Oshawa airport worth big bucks – Economic impact study surprises councilors” was the way a reporter summed it up. Oshawa Council is now very uncertain whether opening Pickering and closing Oshawa would be beneficial or not and have asked for further study.

General aviation owners and pilots are concerned that the GTAA fails to recognize the value of smaller airports – airports that can serve much of this market segment better than a larger and hugely more expensive facility at Pickering where heavy jet traffic would be mixed with the smaller aircraft. In short General Aviation provides no rationale for building an airport on Federal lands at Pickering.

However if a decision were made to proceed the next step would be a Federal Environmental Assessment which would take another 2-3 years before a final decision was made.

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' makes the case 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, have 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. This enables the U.K. for example to 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.

In making this case we need to build a broader coalition to press for green solutions to these lands. It was the Province of Ontario that stopped the airport in the 1970's by withdrawing infrastructure support. And it was staunch support from David Crombie and many Toronto Council members at that time that helped bring that about. In recent months both the Province and the City of Toronto are treating 'greening' as a critical priority and brainstorming a wide variety of ways of bringing this about. A firm stand in opposition to the Pickering airport at least for the foreseeable future would be an excellent addition to their greening plans.

Along with other local regional and national groups we will continue to press on the airport front. However we also feel it is an opportune time before another federal election to push for more action on the 7200 acre Federal Green Space lands – lands the government committed in 2001 to permanently preserve as green space, regardless of whether an airport was ever built or not.

Government appointed a broadly based stakeholder group, including a member from the GDA, to develop recommendations under the direction of Transport Canada. A Draft Green Space Master Plan was submitted in 2003. It dealt among other things with protecting and enhancing environmental areas and identifying compatible trail and passive recreation opportunities; agricultural management; property management; preservation of cultural heritage; and ongoing project implementation and governance.

In the years that followed Government approved virtually no positive action to implement any of the recommendations or for that matter take any other action to add substance to the Government's initial 2001 announcement.

However beginning in 2006 a couple of positive but small steps are beginning to be taken. Transport Canada has entered into a management agreement with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), covering some 50 acres at the north end of the Federal lands to develop a trail system and have paid for the cost of a small parking lot to provide access. Secondly Transport Canada has begun to fund the first year of a multi year riparian repair plan developed by the TRCA.

We feel there is no reason why both these efforts can't be greatly expanded. The Greenspace lands offer a very exciting opportunity to provide an off road trail connection within a much enhanced natural heritage corridor linking the Moraine to Seaton, the Rouge Park, and Toronto itself. And there is no reason stream rehabilitation efforts and other environmental projects can't be extended well beyond the Greenspace lands. The entire western half of the Federal Airport including the West Duffins corridor, as well as the Mitchell Creek valley land in the northeast corner could not possibly be needed for a future airport even if one was built on the south-eastern portion of the site. Significantly all the lands just mentioned fall within the Provincial Greenbelt. Since the Province would not have taken this step without Federal approval, this is further confirmation that these lands are not needed for possible future airport purposes.

We are urging Government to expand the Green Space lands to include all Federal land falling within the Provincial greenbelt; and significantly extend Management Agreements with the TRCA along with the additional funding to make this vision a short – medium term reality.

Beyond this we will be urging Government to 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. And until the issue can be addressed more broadly building demolitions must be stopped.