

Newsletter to GDA Members and Volunteers November 2019

This year has been wonderfully productive. Many people contributed generously in many ways so this newsletter is directed to both members and volunteers. We want to celebrate our achievements and say thank you to everyone who has helped.

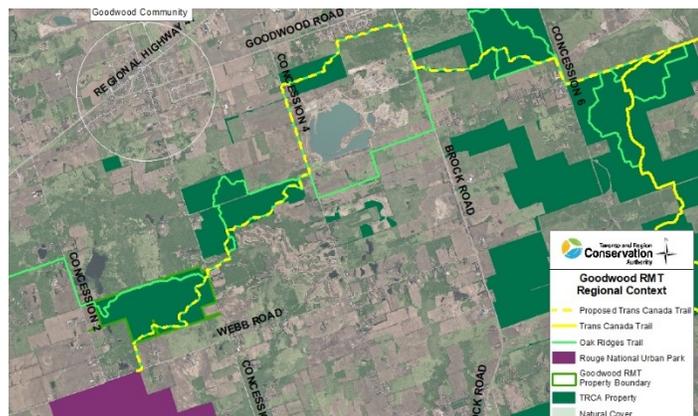
Trail Maintenance Agreement: 2019 marked our second year with a formal agreement with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to help maintain the trails on the 1400+ hectares/100+ kms of trails which are called East Duffins Headwaters properties. What a year it has been - from the launch of a new fundraising campaign, to new achievements in trail maintenance and to generous donations, the formal agreement has opened the door to many successful projects.

Chainsaw workshop: This Fall, GDA sponsored a one day chainsaw safety workshop which was delivered by the Ontario Parks Association. GDA covered the training fees and hosted the workshop locally in exchange for volunteer assistance when help is needed. Representatives from GDA, Durham Mountain Biking Association, Oak Ridges Trail Association, Uxbridge Town Trails and a few neighbours to the trails stepped forward to participate and have since been helping when a call goes out for trails to be cleared. In addition to increasing our pool of trained talent, most participants invested in better quality safety gear to take the course, and afterwards reported that the course sharpened their safety game.

Our agreement with the TRCA permits use of a chainsaw to remove trees which have fallen across the trail. Regular trail users let us know of locations of trees which have blocked the trails. This is particularly important after a big storm. If you see trees down blocking the trails please email Ranald.mckay@gmail.com and a message will go out to our pool of trained chainsaw volunteers. Usually the fallen trees are taken care of within a few days to a week by whomever is able to get to that location soonest. This helps keep the trails passable and safe for all users.



TransCanada Trail Project: This summer GDA partnered with TRCA and TransCanada Trail Foundation to add a new spur to The Great Trail, connecting Uxbridge, south to the Durham Forest, Walker Woods and westward with the new Rouge National Urban Park. In addition to committing \$14,000 to the project, GDA volunteers contributed many hours, braving heat, insects and poison ivy, to install trail marker posts and large sign boards.



Boardwalk Replacement: From October 14 to 28, a long section of boardwalk deep in the Glen Major forest was replaced by a more sustainable trail. The project involved detailed planning, many partners much sweat and muscle, and huge donations of time. Lafarge donated a generous amount of gravel to re-surface the trail. Uxbridge Horseman's Association donated funds, expertise and equipment, DMBA pitched in with funds, trail-building expertise and equipment, and volunteers for GDA, for UHA and for DMBA stepped in again and again for a project which was larger than most of us had anticipated. The Second Wedge Brewing Company helped us celebrate at the end of the project. A special thank you to David Walker of UHA for coordinating and for his endless tractor trips. The trail we have built is now open and can be enjoyed by a much wider range of users – by hikers, skiers, cyclists and horseback riders.



A huge, huge thank you to everyone who has stepped forward – some of you travel from far beyond Uxbridge to help. Some of you come every day, some only once but on days where your presence is critical. All of you have donated energy and good cheer. In total this year, GDA volunteers have contributed **470 hours** of their time, and removed **32** fallen trees. The great thing about volunteering for projects such as these is getting to spend time in the forest, getting to know the fabulous Uxbridge area trails better, and getting to know other people who love being outside as much as you do.

Mobile Giving Campaign

You may have noticed some signs in the forest, placed at every entrance to the trails. Through a partnership with the Mobile Giving Foundation, we embarked on a fundraising campaign that allows trail users to text donations directly to us for use for trail maintenance. From September 15 to November 30th we have been able to reach a whole new sector of donors by asking trail users to text a one-time \$10 donation to GDA.

Our goal was to raise funds AND awareness about the continued efforts and responsibilities of GDA and our partners (DMBA, UHA and ORTA) for the upkeep of the trails in the area where the signs were posted. In addition to a small, steady stream of daily donations we received many expressions of gratitude for the trails and our work on trail maintenance. A number of trail users also sought us out through our website as well and have made larger financial donations.



Part of the success of this campaign was due to new board member Susan Fleming's expertise in communications. She organized a photo shoot of trail users and trail maintenance teams to appear on the signage. Many thanks to those who participated in the photo shoot – to the Willoughby, McKay, and Fisher families, to Tom Hawks, and to photographer John Mitchel. A generous donation from past president Michael Tucker paid for the costs of developing this campaign. We now have polished-looking materials we can use to run future campaigns.

Partnerships Whether it is a result of working together on projects in the forest, of formal trail maintenance agreements, the chainsaw workshop, our mobile giving campaign, or simply the passage of time, stronger partnerships

have developed between DMBA, UHA, ORTA, and GDA. All organizations have generously shared their expertise, equipment and volunteer time towards projects which benefit all trail users. This fall, DMBA and UHA and their members also gave generous financial donations to GDA towards current and future maintenance projects. We are humbled that these groups and individuals chose to bestow this honour upon us. It was unexpected, but so gratefully accepted as a recognition of the importance of these trails, and the power of working together for the common good.

Take a Load Off

Watch for new benches to appear at favourite viewing sites. Ian Gillespie of Highwood Farm donated beautiful local wood, milled on his nearby property. Ranald McKay, our TRCA liaison, developed a prototype, seen here with new board member and volunteer extraordinaire Rob Ferguson. The early snowfall has for the time being halted efforts to distribute benches to various locations but look for them next Spring.



More Generous Benefactors

Earlier this year a substantial donation from one long time GDA member subsidized the costs of routine maintenance such as grass cutting throughout the East Duffins Headwaters lands. TRCA, the owner and manager of these lands, is increasingly challenged to fund these basic maintenance tasks and we are deeply grateful for this benefactor's assistance to keep the trails accessible for all to enjoy. These lands are the largest of the land holdings maintained by TRCA, there are more than 100 km of trails to mow, and adequate funding to keep the trails passable and safe for an ever-increasing number of users is a challenge.

GDA, DMBA, UHA and ORTA work in close partnership with TRCA to find creative and intelligent ways to stretch scarce funds as far as possible. Ranald McKay is the local liaison between TRCA and the community. He dedicates countless hours to identifying, coordinating and implementing the projects and tasks needed to keep the trails open and safe. Thank you Ranald! We also appreciate the dedicated work of TRCA staff to support local efforts, to contribute materials and staff time where ever possible, source grants to help support trail work, and smooth the way for projects to proceed.

Maps The final map in our printed map series of the south Uxbridge trail is going to print this coming week and will be ready before Christmas. As mentioned in our last newsletter, this last segment has been more challenging for Chrismar, professional mapmakers based in Uxbridge, because of the complex mixture of unmarked trails, land leases, construction of new trails, and management by different organizations. The complete set will be available locally at Blue Heron Books, or can be ordered on line through Chrismar Mapping at www.chrismar.com

Post Sponsorship Our project to support the installation of new maps throughout Walker Woods, Glen Major, Brock, Wilder, Skyloft and Dagmar tracts of land continues. Check www.greendurham.ca for a list of posts still available to sponsor. This project was originally initiated to cover the costs of navigation maps on posts throughout these properties. We have recouped those costs now, so all funds received through post sponsorships support trail maintenance. When a plaque is purchased, the donor receives a charitable receipt for 100% of the funds donated.

Ongoing Efforts Over the years GDA has worked with partners to add to conservation land holdings, and to create trail and natural heritage linkages which connect these conservation lands to communities. The goal has been to ensure that the forests and natural areas in northeast Pickering, Uxbridge, and the adjacent Greenbelt lands are available for future generations. As the population intensifies to the south, east and west of these lands, this is becoming increasingly important. These lands and forests clean our air, protect sources of clean drinking water, and the trails offer respite from the stresses of urban living. This work is slow, low-profile, and can involve many partners. In some cases it has involved decades of work. A change in government often necessitates a change in approach or a switch to a different project. This work is always underway in the background as we work hard to maintain the local natural spaces we all cherish and from which everyone benefits.

Thank you for joining GDA and adding your voice to these efforts!