



**2016 FINAL REPORT FOR**



**"EXPLORE THE WILD WOODS PROJECT"**



When you walk through the trail head entrance towards the hiking trails at the McGeachie Conservation Area it feels like you are entering an unbelievably amazing place. You can almost feel calmness come over you as your mind and body relaxes. You notice your breathing becomes deep and fresh and your sense of smell awakens with the earthy smells of Mother Nature. Your visual senses explode with sights of wild orchids and pink lady slippers. There are predominant tree species like Hard Maple, Leatherwood, Cedar and Hemlock groves which shelter deer and other animals, Spruce, Balsam, Tamarack, Pine and Red Oak which provides acorns for food for the wildlife such as squirrels, chipmunks, wild turkeys and blue jays. You might get a chance to see a ruffed grouse, a red fox, a white tailed deer, a pileated woodpecker, a yellow-bellied sapsucker, a weasel, a beaver or a river otter. Along the trails you will come across woodpecker holes from a pileated woodpecker searching for grubs in rotten wood in maple trees. During the spring you will encounter vernal pools which are breeding grounds for frogs, toads, salamanders, snails, worms, spiders, water bugs and beetles. There are cedar swamps and beaver marshes to see. The sounds of the Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch and many more song birds will lull you into a world of nature calls. You have entered a world we only dream of while we are at our desks in our urban environment. You have escaped into a vast nature vortex which becomes a virtual classroom that exposes all your senses to what exists in nature.

### **Welcome to the McGeachie Conservation Area!**



Through the generous support of the Ontario Wildlife Foundation (OWF), the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) was able to expand on the hiking trail system at the McGeachie Conservation Area. Since 2012, a diverse trail system has been created for the public to either go for a leisurely stroll through the forest or for the extremist who finds it a rush to hike or bike along steep rocky trails. There was even forethought of having loops from trail to trail allowing hikers to customize the length of their excursion. The construction of the new hiking trail has now veered off of the “Blue” existing leisurely trail and has ventured into 40 acres of rugged untouched wilderness just waiting to be explored. As a result of the goodwill of the Ontario Wildlife Foundation, the CVCA was able to partner with the Norwood District High School Forestry class who made it possible to build the new hiking trail. On Wednesday October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at approximately 9:30am a school bus pulled up to the CVCA Conley Drinkwater cottage on the beautiful Steenburg Lake in the Township of Limerick and dropped off 14 forestry students and their teacher Mike Sherwin. Another high school teacher arrived in a truck full of trail making tools and equipment and a Sir Sandford Fleming College professor also arrived in her car. She was there to utilize the outdoor classroom that the Conservation Area has to offer by holding 4 small work groups during the day for the students to identify and classify the living and non-living components of the specific ecosystems. In addition, the professor taught the students how to navigate through the natural environment and to use a variety of ecosystem inventory techniques.



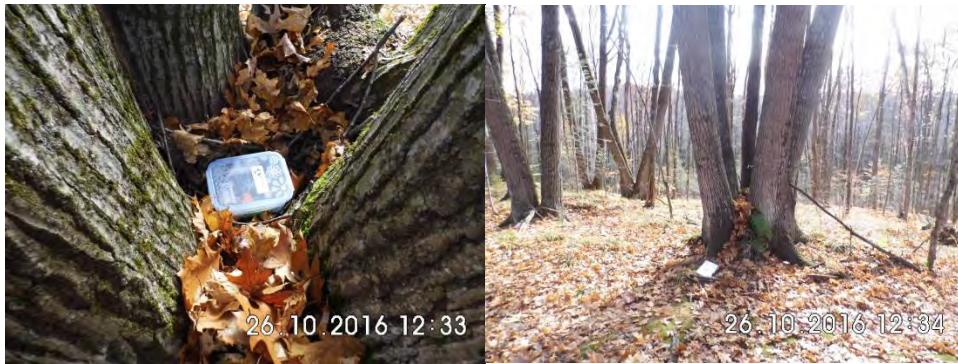
Students gathered around for the Ecosystem Skills Course

With the use of the CVCA's 4x4 Gator ATV and a teacher's 4x4 truck, we managed to transport students, teachers, equipment, coolers and food to the McGeachie CA tail head approximately 1km down the road to meet up with two members of the Friends of McGeachie Committee who also participated and volunteered their time and expertise in this venture. It was a perfect day. The temperature was fairly mild and there was no snow or rain in the forecast. So, with student, teachers, volunteers and equipment we ATV'd and hiked into the forest for about 1km to the start of the new trail. The area for the new trail is leisurely at times with some areas inclined with rugged rocky outcrops. The length of the new trail is approximately 520m or 1,7060' or 1/2km one way going to the edge of the Bass Creek wetlands and swerve along the wetlands a short distance and then will eventually deviate back along another parallel trail to the entrance which was off of the original "Blue" trail.



*Brush needed to be cleared at the start of the new hiking trail*

An intense day of physical work and outdoor learning was had by all. The students were able to put their chainsaw training skills to good work cutting small trees on the new trail. The logs were then used as borders along the side of the trail. Brush was also snipped and clipped and jagged rocks were shovelled out of the ground. The students were able to use their Global Positioning System (GPS) abilities to hide a geocaching box in the forest and the coordinates were recorded on the Geocaching website at <https://www.geocaching.com>. These coordinates were then posted, along with a description of the geocaching box, on the geocaching website for treasure hunters to find. The Oxford dictionary describes geocaching as "the recreational activity of hunting for and finding a hidden object by means of GPS coordinates posted on a website". The cache box contains a log book with pencils and some swag to take with the hope geocachers will also leave a little souvenir for someone else to find.



*The geocaching box hidden in the base of a tree*

Here is what geocacher “kayakers2” had to say about the CVCA cache box. “Wow! What a gorgeous fall day to hike in another very nice Crowe Valley Conservation Property. We haven’t hiked here before & were pleasantly surprised by the extent of the trail system & the variety of habitat, flora & fauna which is well described and documented in the provided brochure. (Well worth a contribution) With the gentle elevation changes it looks like there’s lots of excellent X-Country skiing opportunities....at least to sign post 5. It gets a bit more challenging beyond....planned another hike for that. Signed in....didn’t take anything but left several of Trudy’s finger puppets. Trails would make for an excellent family oriented hike. This is a true Letter Box style cache & a wonderful geocaching experience. One of the best land-based caches we’ve done in awhile. We highly recommend a visit. Thanks to the CVCA for establishing the cache....we need many more of the same.”

At the end of the day we got all packed up, loaded up and transported back to the CVCA cottage just before dark where hot chocolate and a spaghetti dinner awaited some very hungry and weary students. After dinner, they were still eager enough to explore the woods with flashlights and eventually settled down to a camp fire and marshmallows later in the evening and eventually made it to bed at around 10:00pm.



*The CVCA Conley- Drinkwater cottage on the beautiful Steenburg Lake in Limerick Township*

Thursday morning soon arrived and the sleepy students were slowly awakened with the delicious aroma of a bacon and egg breakfast. A hearty breakfast is a beneficial way to start the day for some exceptionally hard working teenagers. After breakfast they promptly packed up their belongings and cleaned up the cottage and were soon back at the trail for the final stretch to complete the new trail before the return school bus came to pick them up at 1:00pm.



The students all gathered together for a final picture at the end of the day

With hard work and dedication from a wonderful group of Norwood High School Forestry students the McGeachie Conservation Area now has a brand new hiking trail. Subsequently, on Tuesday November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, CVCA staff attended the Norwood High School to present the Forestry students with Certificates of Appreciation. During this visit, students were asked if they had any comments to make about the whole experience and some of their comments are as follows:

- “that was the best experience ever”;
- “I just loved sawing up those trees”;
- “we had such a blast at the cottage”;
- “can we build another trail next year”;
- “I saw so many cool things”;

Implementing this new hiking trail will contribute to sustaining the public's health and well-being. Healthy by nature will have a positive impact on our communities. The McGeachie Conservation Area hiking trail system provides a unique opportunity to inspire the public to

challenge themselves on learning about an outdoor wildlife environment, conservation of land, some of the flora and fauna and all the natural rifts and valleys. Stepping outside into nature provides the experience of touching, smelling and hearing all the green space around you. Hiking helps keep you physically and mentally healthy. Thanks to the generosity of OWF for supporting this project, the benefits of getting outside and being one with nature will remain with the local community and the visitors to the McGeachie Conservation Area for many years to come.

Respectfully submitted by,

Lou Young, Project Coordinator



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## PICTURES FROM THE PROJECT

