



Freshwater Conservation Canada: Final Report for “Connect and Protect 2024”

Prepared by: Lesley Peterson

Date: January 30, 2026

In August 2024, Freshwater Conservation Canada (formerly Trout Unlimited Canada) was awarded funding in the amount of \$6,000 from the Ontario Wildlife Foundation for the project “Connect and Protect”. The objectives of the project included providing opportunities for racialized community members to participate in nature, gain experience in outdoor activities, and contribute to protecting their local environment.

We are pleased to provide this final report for the project, highlighting the activities and successes of Connect and Protect in Ontario since being awarded this generous gift from Ontario Wildlife Foundation.

Events

September 2024 - Marden Creek in Guelph, ON

In September 2024, Freshwater Conservation Canada hosted a Connect and Protect event along Marden Creek in Guelph, ON. The event brought together four BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) participants, as well representatives from the Guelph BIPOC Gear Library and the Children’s Foundation of Guelph who joined Freshwater Conservation Canada staff for a day of stream restoration and outdoor enjoyment. This event aimed at bringing participants out into nature and giving them the opportunity to participate in protecting their local ecosystems. Helping to facilitate the event, was Demiesha Dennis of Brown Girl Outdoor World who has spent many years as a fishing guide and running community events for the BIPOC community.

The day began by restoring a section of Marden Creek, a coldwater stream that contains a resident population of Brook Trout. A muddy side channel had developed which threatened to widen the creek, leading to elevated water temperatures and excess mud that could smother fish eggs. To address this issue, the participants built a sediment trap to collect the excess mud and rebuild the stream bank. To do this, volunteers packed upcycled Christmas trees, donated by the Children’s Foundation of





Guelph's Trees for Tots program, in the side channel and secured them with wood posts and twine. Over time, the sediment trap will fill with water from the creek and leave behind mud and sediment that will plug this side channel and prevent additional damage to the ecosystem.

Following the restoration work, the group engaged in a discussion around the issues and barriers BIPOC people face when trying to participate in the outdoors, but also strategies to overcome these hurdles. This conversation was facilitated by Demiesha and bolstered by Dionne Daley from BIPOC Gear Library.

Finally, to end the event, Demiesha led the group in a flyfishing lesson in an adjacent field, before moving into the waters of the onsite pond. Growing new outdoor skills, such as flyfishing, can be an important way for folks to get outside and connect with the environment.



Figure 1. Building a sediment trap in the Marden Creek corridor.

August 2025 - Speed River in Guelph, ON

In August 2025, Freshwater Conservation Canada partnered with Colour the Trails to host a Connect and Protect event along the Speed River, along the Guelph to Cambridge hiking trail. Colour the Trails is a Black woman-owned company focused on improving access to the outdoors for BIPOC individuals living in Canada. They host introductions, mentorships, and clinics in outdoor activities to introduce BIPOC adults to new activities and then help them advance further in the outdoor world. They also provide consultation and support to partner organizations working to improve and diversify their communities.

Five participants joined Freshwater Conservation Canada staff and representatives from Colour the Trails to undertake a combination of activities showcasing the connections between land and water and their importance to ecosystems. Activities



included a river clean up, which involved participants wearing chest waders and clearing trash from the river and shoreline. Participants also planted water-loving



Figure 2. Wading in the Speed River.

plants on the water's edge and tossed native seed balls along the riparian zone. The site is one of the focal areas of our 2 Rivers Conservation Corridor program, which is working towards improving the health of the Speed and Eramosa rivers and their tributaries while connecting community members to these cherished wild spaces within urban and peri-urban areas.

Feedback from participants was very positive, with the opportunity to wear waders and wade through the river a

clear highlight. Approximately 100 m of river was cleaned, 30 plants were planted, and 100+ seed balls were distributed.

October 2025 – Ellis Creek in Cambridge, ON

In October 2025, Freshwater Conservation Canada again partnered with Colour the Trails to host a restoration event for racialized community members and allies. The event took place at the Chilligo Conservation Area in Cambridge, ON. The Chilligo Conservation Area, managed by the Grand River Conservation Authority, includes the confluence of Ellis Creek with the Speed River. Ellis Creek is a valuable community feature in the City of Cambridge, and provides coldwater habitat to aquatic species.

Ten participants helped to clear 500m² of invasive European Buckthorn, an invasive shrub that outcompetes native beneficial plants along riparian areas, threatening native biodiversity and stream health. Participants also ran a trash clean-up session after finding scattered garbage along the creek. Finally, they conducted a Bioblitz, documenting flora and fauna in the conservation area and along the creek, including a species of barberry and the hanging nest of a Baltimore Oriole!

Bioblitz is a form of community science (also known as “citizen science”), which is an increasingly valuable data collection tool in supporting conservation efforts that relies on observational data collected by community members. Data collected (often



through the use of photography) on biodiversity has become a fundamental tool in supporting research, conservation, and land-use planning, management, and decision-making processes. Advancements in technology (like the use of apps) have made the data collection process simple, fun, and accessible to everyone. An additional benefit for participants is an increased ecological literacy as they foster deeper relationships with nature, learn about the biodiversity



Figure 3. Connect and Protect participants at Ellis Creek.

around them, while contributing to meaningful research and community building. This was the first time Freshwater Conservation Canada has incorporated a bioblitz into a Connect and Protect event and feedback was positive from participants.

Summary

Freshwater Conservation Canada is grateful for the support provided by Ontario Wildlife Foundation, allowing us to continue our Connect and Protect program. Each of the three events described above provided dedicated space for racialized community members to participate in conservation action, while connecting them to parks and wild spaces within their communities. In addition to the social impact, we are proud of the ecological impact of these activities, in improving the health of local streams and riparian areas.