

## **Cooper Marsh Conservators**

**Annual General Meeting, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

### **Report from the Directors of the affairs of the Cooper Marsh Conservators for 2017-18**

The Conservators have had yet another busy year working on the restoration and enhancement of facilities at Cooper Marsh, a class I provincially significant wetland. This is done in partnership with the Raisin Region Conservation Authority (RRCA), the St. Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Sciences, the Cornwall and Area Birding Club, the South Lancaster Fish and Game Club, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and, very recently, the Great Lakes St Lawrence River (Cornwall) Remedial Action Plan.

The drawdown, to remove cattail overgrowth, recreate more open water and improved breeding habitat for fish and wetland birdlife, led by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and RRCA, ended in 2017 after 6 years. The Marsh is again full of water. Frogs love it, multiplying rapidly as evidenced by the great abundance of tadpoles. Plant habitat has improved and with it many bird species have returned to nest as revealed by a survey conducted by Bird Studies Canada last summer. Visitors love it having waited patiently for this day for many years.

Habitat restoration is continuing. More cattail-resistant ponds and channels will be built next winter in the Main Marsh by the visitors centre to promote increases in fish stocks and other wildlife. Funding applications totaling over \$100,000 have been submitted to federal and provincial governments and foundations. The Conservators are contributing \$7,000 from donations and fund-raising events and from contributions by local businesses. So far \$52,000 in funding has been secured to date. The cattail-resistant areas of open water that were dug in the Eastern Marsh in early 2017 (see the results at *YouTube* and select Cooper Marsh East Cell July 2017) are already attracting much new wildlife.. Since 2012, the Conservators have raised well over \$0.5 million for the restoration of Cooper Marsh.

Our popular fundraising social events continue in 2018. The *Spring Fling and Silent Auction* will be on May 6 and the *Wine and Cheese* on September 30, both from 2.00-4.00pm here at the visitors centre.

Volunteers, including Conservators, have helped create a native wildflower garden outside the visitors centre, along with a wildflower nursery. The project is led by Chris Critoph (RRCA) and Dr. Philip Fry who is transferring his wildflowers to Cooper Marsh from his wildflower nursery at the Old Field Garden and Wildflower Nursery at Oxford Station near Kemptville. Many seedling wildflowers are being raised in the nursery and were been planted out last fall in the new wildflower and butterfly meadow by County Road 2. RRCA has also received

funding to create new butterfly- and song bird-friendly habitat in land adjacent to the wetlands by County Road 2. Join the wildflower volunteers by contacting Chris Critoph at 613 938 3611, ext.223. We are delighted to announce that Philip Fry is joining the Conservators today to ensure oversight and management of this exciting project in the future.

An initiative led by Conservator Ian Macintosh has resulted in the creation of a beautiful new sign at the entrance to the Main Marsh. The sign includes details of the West Marsh as well as the East and Main marsh. This has resulted from a partnership with local businesses, identified on each side of the sign, now contributing annual funding that supports our restoration and maintenance projects. We thank Phil Barnes at RRCA for all his artwork in creating this sign. We warmly welcome these and future partnerships with local businesses that now help promote the local economy as well as helping us restore and maintain Cooper Marsh.

It has been determined that there has been a serious damage to the perimeter dyke in the West marsh. Following consultations involving DUC, who played a major role in the construction of Cooper Marsh, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests, a 5 year drawdown and restoration of the West Marsh was initiated last year. This will involve major repairs to the perimeter dyke which will be financed by a fundraising campaign led by DUC together with the Conservators and RRCA.

Educational classes at Cooper Marsh are run by Cornwall's St Lawrence River Institute. These are for students from 6 upwards. They have again been a great success. Run by professional educators, day camps and 12 local and regional schools made up the mainstay of the visits. In 2017, when 1,258 students attended classes.

The wildlife displays at the visitors centre have been starting to show their age as the once bright colours of birds fade, plumage and fur deteriorates with the ravages of time. In partnership with Gary Bray, a local taxidermist in St. Andrews, the Conservators have launched a new project to restore the display with new additions. These already include a porcupine, a barred owl and local song birds in addition to displays donated by members of the public.

Many visitors to Cooper Marsh seek information from our interpreters who, with Conservators, come mainly from the Cornwall and Area Birding Club. Each year we have a summer student on duty funded federally and by the Conservators. Visitors often ask about the history, activities and wildlife at Cooper Marsh. So a committee was struck to prepare a small booklet that provides all this information. This will be available this year.

To help guide our operations, In 2017 the Conservators' By-Laws were updated. In addition an operational agreement was completed that provides guidance for

the working relationship between the Conservators and the Raisin Region Conservation Authority, who own the Cooper Marsh Conservation Area.

Finally I would like to pay special tribute to Jacques Legault. Jacques looked after the finances of the RRCA for many years. Since 2003 he has been our Treasurer and also served a term as Board Chair. Jacques has decided to step down as Treasurer. We couldn't have wished for a better person to watch over our finances and guide us on a firm and steady path forward. When I joined The Conservators in 2011 and started writing grants to secure funding for our *Get on Board* fundraising endeavour to restore Cooper Marsh, we could not have wished for a more committed member of our fundraising committee. He provided me with guidance as to where we might apply, educated me in designs for boardwalks and contributed greatly to the sourcing of materials for the boardwalk and the management of our agreements with funding agencies. We thank you Jacques for all that you have done and hope you will remain with us so we can continue to benefit from your wise counsel.

I would also like to thank my colleagues on the board of directors for all their commitment to and involvement in our many projects this past year. We are blessed with a very committed and collegiate group of volunteers who really care about Cooper Marsh and the results of their collective activities you can now enjoy at Cooper Marsh.

We are fortunate to have welcomed new members and are currently engaged in a membership drive. We invite you to join the Conservators and enjoy giving back to your community, working with our professional partners. This will help ensure that Cooper Marsh remains such a special place and a very important part of our environment and community.

You can contribute to the Conservators restoration work with secure electronic, tax-deductible funding on-line at [rrca.on.ca/cooper\\_marsh](http://rrca.on.ca/cooper_marsh) clicking on *CanadaHelps*. Include your name, address and e-mail so we can recognize your contribution to Cooper Marsh and send you an official tax receipt and keep you updated. If you are able to join us as a Conservator to help look after the Cooper Marsh Conservation Area please call Robin Poole at 613 347 7673.