

Cooper Marsh Conservators
Annual General Meeting, 2015-16
Sunday, March 20th, 2016
Cooper Marsh Visitors' Centre

Report from the Chair

The Cooper Marsh Conservators (CMC) have been very active this last year. We meet monthly with our main partners, the Raisin Region Conservation Authority (RRCA), Cornwall and Area Birding Club (CABC), The River Institute (RI) and South Lancaster Fish and Game Club.

Finances are, as you will hear from our treasurer Jacques Legault, in good shape. Bylaws are being revised by a small committee under the leadership of Elaine Kennedy. The Directors decided to work within the proposed changes during this year, while not contravening the present Bylaws. We will send the proposed new Bylaws to all members for study before the 2017 Annual General Meeting. If anyone is interested now, please contact Elaine Kennedy.

Much has been achieved to ensure a very viable future for Cooper Marsh and for all those who love and enjoy all it has to offer: also for those who learn about our wetlands and their wildlife in educational programs for students of all ages at the Cooper Marsh Conservation Area offered by RRCA and The River Institute.

The Visitors' Centre continues to act as the main focus for the interpretation of Cooper Marsh and its attractions. Open from Spring to Fall it is manned by Conservators and members of CABC most ably assisted by our 2015 student interpreter, Kate Schwartz of Char-Lan District High School. She was here from June to August funded by a federal summer student program. We also arranged for our fundraising and informational video, *Discovering Cooper Marsh*, that is available on *YouTube* and on our website (rrca.on.ca/cooper-marsh), to be available at the Visitors' Centre for visitors to enjoy.

The new widened boardwalks continue to be a source of much enjoyment by all visitors. This year we have continued with our work to restore breeding habitat for fish, turtles and wetland birds. This involves the creation of deeper ponds and channels that will resist cattail invasion. We raised \$42,000 from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Toronto Dominion Friends of the Environment Foundation and TransCanada: this, together with \$10,000 raised by

RRCA, has enabled us to start creating in the last few weeks new areas of open water south of the Visitors' Centre. These will be further developed in the near future.

A funding application has been submitted to the National Wetland program, run by Environment Canada, for the creation of new ponds and channels in the eastern part of the Marsh.

From Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund, OPG and Enbridge, we have raised an additional \$28,500 funding for the creation of 3 new Viewing Blinds for observing wildlife. One of these will be located close to the Visitors' Centre and another by the ponds and channels built in winter of 2013/14: a third is being completed in the western section of the Marsh by the entrance and pumping station. This year we have raised over \$70,000 towards our restoration activities.

On September 13th, 2015 we held Donor Recognition Day to honour and thank our donors whose contributions have made the *Get on Board* restoration of Cooper Marsh possible, starting in 2012/13 with the boardwalks. We also recognized and thanked those who rebuilt the boardwalks and viewing Platforms for their excellent work. The Donor Recognition Posts that stand beside the Visitors' Centre were officially unveiled at this time. They list the names of all our known donors no matter however small the donation.

This year, 2016, the 5 year drawdown, designed to kill off invasive plant species, will end. Under the advice of Ducks Unlimited Canada and RRCA, one third of the normal water level will first be introduced to protect new wetland plants, such as wild rice, that grew up in this period. Further increases to normal water levels will occur in the 2 subsequent years. This should result in a welcome increase in areas of open water and much improved habitat for wildlife.

During the year we enjoyed much public support at the enjoyable Spring Fling and Fall Wine and Cheese. To facilitate operations we created a new committee to manage social events lead by Paul Peterpiece, with Ian Mackintosh and Mike Chegrinec. We encourage you all to attend the Spring Fling on May 1st which will include a live local band, the TrevClefs, and a live raptor display in addition to the Silent Auction introduced last year.

A membership committee has been created under the leadership of Karen Cooper who has also done an excellent job in helping us promote our various events.

Future activities that are planned for 2016/17 include our active support for the creation of a native plant botanical station and wildflower nursery at Cooper Marsh. This project, led by Chris Critoph of RRCA, will involve the transfer of Dr. Philip Fry's wild flower nursery from the Old Field Garden and Wildflower Nursery at Oxford Station near Kemptville. It will be supervised by Dr. Fry and we welcome volunteers to join us in this project. Cooper Marsh is viewed as a special site for this project, being home to the endangered Canada Lilly.

In the future we are also looking at restoration and addition of signage and infrastructure in the area by the car park and at and around the Visitors Centre.

It was with much sadness that we lost our chair and longterm member Judy Bobka in 2015. We will honour her memory with a simple plaque placed beside a newly planted tree this Spring.

In closing I would like to acknowledge our special partners the RRCA, RI and CABC who, together with the excellent Conservators officers and board members, who for me are a pleasure to work with, will ensure that Cooper Marsh will remain a very special place for its many visitors. The support for the Conservators commitment to its conservation and restoration work remains strong in the years to come. Thank you for being with us today and for your continuing interest in the Cooper Marsh Conservators and your support of our activities.

We look forward to welcoming you all at our fundraiser, the ever popular *Spring Fling* from 2.00-4.00pm at Cooper Marsh Visitors' Centre on Sunday, May 1st, 2016. It will feature wine and food pairings, a live band, live birds of prey and a Silent Auction.. Tickets are available at \$25 per person from the RRCA office, phone 613 938 3611.

Dr. Robin Poole,
Chair, Cooper Marsh Conservators Inc.