

# Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy Continuing a Legacy of Conservation

By Beth Gilhespy

Since we were last in *Niagara Escarpment Views* there have been new faces and new initiatives at Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC), but our commitment to protection of Ontario's sensitive and vulnerable places has been constant and unwavering. We have been working to protect thousands of acres of sensitive and vulnerable land. You haven't heard from us for a while, but rest assured our work to preserve land continues unabated! I'm pleased to have the opportunity to update you on happenings at EBC.

## New Faces and Spaces

In March 2024 I joined EBC as its Chief Executive Officer following a 14+ year career as the CEO of the Bruce Trail

Conservancy and almost five years as Executive Director of the Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy. Conservation of land and wildlife is my passion!

I was privileged to join seasoned staff members Shannon MacDonald (Land preservation), Liv Callo (Land Stewardship), Hannah Jowett (Communications and Education) and Selena Wong (GIS and Data), who have been with the organization a number of years and remain essential parts of its success. Another relatively new staff member is Luisa Rodrigues (Director of Finance and Operations) who manages the finances of our growing organization. To add capacity in our volunteer, engagement and land stewardship areas, we brought in Amy Darrell (Community Outreach and Engagement). Our staff now has one part-time and six full-time members working together to carry out our mission.

There have been other new faces in the organization. Our Board Chair Sean O'Hare, a resident of Manitoulin Island, is supported by Karen MacDuffee as Vice Chair, Kim Neale as Treasurer, and Jason Harlow as Secretary. With the contributions of the other Directors, the Board has provided supervision and guidance as we achieve even more success in land preservation! The next annual general meeting of EBC is June 22, 2025, and we will be contacting members with more information at the end of May.

Our small office is amongst many other not-for-profit organizations at the Centre for Social Innovation at 192 Spadina Avenue in Toronto. Our staff and Board are dispersed regionally, and we are fortunate that working remotely is now so mainstream and communications are almost seamless; we are always a computer click or video call away for meetings and conversations. I personally love the blend of home office work, donor visits, field work and spending time at our office.

## Commitment to Preserving and Caring for our Land

During 2023 and 2024, with the help of donors and other partners, we preserved just over 3,000 acres of land worth about \$8.2 million, on Manitoulin Island, the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula, along the Huron Shore and throughout Grey, Bruce and Wellington Counties. The total amount of land now in our care is a staggering 24,900 acres: 5,000 acres of wetlands, 15,000 acres of forests and 4,900 acres of other sensitive and vulnerable landscape including shorelines, alvars and meadows.

With just under 25,000 acres of land to care for, we are placing a strong focus on land stewardship to ensure we know everything we need to know about the ecology, geology and human impacts on our nature preserves so that we can care for them in the best way possible. This has been a monumental task as many nature preserves have not been visited in a long while, some not for decades. Nevertheless, the task is always a delight as staff and volunteers discover new vistas, find delicate species, create new trail opportunities and find rejuvenation in connecting with the land.

## What's Next?

We are in a pleasant "bubble" right now where governments at both the federal and provincial levels are helping fund land trust work. These programs are designed to leverage donor funds by requiring that the land trusts match the government



Simon Bay Nature Preserve. PHOTO BY ESCARPMENT BIOSPHERE CONSERVANCY.

funding with donations. We have had wonderful response to our matching fund programs and are fortunate that the government commitments appear to be extending into 2025. How long will this commitment last, especially given the uncertain political and economic climate? It's clear we need to expand our reach to engage more members and supporters, but if the results of the Fall 2024 Wild Futures Campaign are any indication, when more than \$1 million dollars were donated to match \$850K in government funding, then we are on our way to continued success. I look forward to telling you about the beautiful properties we will be protecting under the 2025 Wild Futures program, including rocky shorelines, upland bear habitat, towering cliffs and sparkling waterfalls.

## YOU CAN HELP OUT!

Our responsibility and our commitment are to continue to build on EBC's incredible legacy of the past 28 years, preserving sensitive and vulnerable places, engaging donors and volunteers, and stewarding the land in our care. We'd love a few more helping hands! Here are some ways you can support our work:

For more information about the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy, go to [www.escarpment.ca](http://www.escarpment.ca)

To permanently protect the land you love, contact Shannon MacDonald ([shannon@escarpment.ca](mailto:shannon@escarpment.ca)).

To volunteer to help us care for the land and create and maintain trails, reach out to Amy Darrell, ([amy@escarpment.ca](mailto:amy@escarpment.ca)) and Liv Callo ([Li@escarpment.ca](mailto:Li@escarpment.ca)). To help with communications (graphic design, web page development and social media), contact Hannah Howett ([hannah@escarpment.ca](mailto:hannah@escarpment.ca)). To volunteer and help with office administration, contact Luisa Rodrigues ([luisa@escarpment.ca](mailto:luisa@escarpment.ca)).

Consider becoming a member (<https://escarpment.ca/make-an-impact/become-a-member>) or making a donation (<https://escarpment.ca/donate>)

We've got some great items in our on-line store, including individual map cards for 17 hiking trails on our nature preserves from Manitoulin to Caledon. Visit <https://escarpment.ca/make-an-impact/online-store>

Do you have any other questions or queries? I am more than happy to connect with you! My email is [beth@escarpment.ca](mailto:beth@escarpment.ca). With gratitude for the opportunity to serve conservation, and for the people who are making it happen.

*Beth Gilhespy is CEO of Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy.*



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