

It's Up to Each of Us

By Bob Barnett

My revelation was hiking the Bruce Trail 30 years ago with my wife and six and eight-year-old kids. We watched porcupines and raccoons and looked up flower names in our guidebook. We shared adversity like rain, mud, dark and a stolen shuttle bicycle. Sitting on top of the cliffs eating lunch gave us a sense of nature's grandeur and put us into our human place. Nature became real and very, very important. It took determination to get there on Sundays for two and a half years, eventually reaching our goal: Tobermory. The farmland, the ice cream stops, the little towns, all became part of us. Today I follow that dream, trying to protect the nature that inspired me then.

We are carving up our land and developing it at the rate of 300 acres a day. More than a square km a day is being turned into houses, shopping centres, golf courses and dominated by looming wind towers. That pleasant country drive up the Gore Road is now suburbia, to be avoided by driving on expressways. The gravel pit beneath our majestic Cup and Saucer cliffs grows yearly and the slash and overburden is pushed up right beside the trail.

We used to get generous grants from the province to conserve the Escarpment. No longer. Now it seems the priorities have shifted but not toward the health and education, benefits that come from walking in nature. Hospitals and schools get funding, but not trees, cliffs and streams. Our government has become good at legislating greenbelts and stating provincial policies, but got off the land-protection train and shows no signs of getting back on board. Instead of feeling helpless, I try harder and harder to conserve



▲ View of 175-acre property near Chatsworth offered for conservation. Only \$5,000 is needed to cover fees. As little as \$10 helps to protect it. You can get a tax receipt.



▲ One of the waterfalls on the Chatsworth property. It feeds the Bighead River.

what's left; it's up to individuals to preserve the landscape.

Overall, we have protected only 4.37 per cent of southern Ontario as parks, nature reserves and conservation areas. A major part of that protection has come from private landowners who either donate land outright or place covenants on their own land to protect it from development. The goal of 180 countries is to protect 17 per cent of our land base, especially in areas of high biodiversity, like southern Ontario. Both Ontario and Canada have signed the "Biodiversity" Initiative.

Governments Talk But Don't Give

In southern Ontario the growth is painfully slow with our land trusts being the leaders. Private land and cash donations to charity far exceed government and conservation authority progress. Our Canadian governments say biodiversity is a good idea, but put their money into jobs and the economy. They forget that nature's ecosystem services protect clean air,

water and flood prevention worth \$84 billion in southern Ontario every year. Every acre of rural forest we lose costs us \$1,800 every year.

Here's one example and a challenge. A private landowner in Grey County near Chatsworth has offered our Escarpment Conservancy a donation of a conservation agreement on 175 acres. He's agreed to forgo gravel pits, additional houses and to protect his forest. This gift will be worth roughly \$200,000.

That land has an Escarpment waterfall on the Bighead River and protects rare Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark and Hart's Tongue Fern. It has mature forest and Escarpment outcrops. The owner has planted thousands of trees to add to the forest and its species' richness.

Need Donors

Our cost to receive that gift will be only \$5,000 to pay for an appraisal and legal fees. You might say "What a good deal, do it." But we can't afford each gift as it comes in. We rely on donors just like you

who care about the legacy we are leaving our children and their grandchildren.

Every dollar you donate protects 1525 sq ft (142 sq m) of land with an average of 24 trees. Every dollar out of your pocket will protect \$30 of eco services every year, forever. What investment could be better? Your 3,000 per cent annual return beats any mutual fund.

I had a life-changing experience with our young family 30 years ago. We are not just conserving land, habitat and species, but conserving opportunities to visit our own countryside. Now the government has left this field, it's up to each of us. Your grandchildren will thank you, but ask why you were such a forerunner. Why was government so far behind us?

Maybe you're interested in being way out front by protecting your own land from being developed. **NEV**

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