

# Investing in Ontario

By Bob Barnett

**S**outhern Ontario has a remarkable legacy of natural heritage including: 237 rare species, rare ecosystems like the Niagara Escarpment, the La Cloche/Killarney Mountains, the Carolinian Zone and, of course, the Great Lakes and its remarkable rivers.

The services that nature provides to humans are worth \$84 billion a year. Tourism is just one example where the hiking, cycling, birding and skiing on the Greenbelt alone is worth almost \$2 billion a year. Health and education too are invaluable. In Japan, doctors prescribe walks in nature. Removing carbon from the atmosphere, another of nature's services, is now a major challenge for society. Old trees, like those on our conservation reserves, are much more effective at removing carbon than young forests, especially when woodlots are harvested every few years. Only 15 per cent of harvested wood lasts 100 years, in buildings and furniture. The rest becomes CO<sub>2</sub> as it is left to rot, burned, thrown into landfill, or flushed down as toilet paper.

We're losing 300 acres a day to development like roads and urban sprawl. That's 400 square km a year. We can't relax and leave nature to be protected by the government. Ontario has cut off funding for land trusts and conservation authorities yet is creating no new parks on its own. Only 4.41 per cent of southern Ontario is protected to international standards, not the 17 per cent that 193 countries including Canada have agreed to protect by 2020.

We're told the Greenbelt

is protecting our land. Regulations help but one can still build in the Greenbelt, and regulations can change or disappear altogether depending on who is writing the rules.

## Tax Problem

We're told that nature is exempted from property taxes. There are some exemptions from property taxes for landowners who are looking after their woodlots and wetlands, but only a small percentage

qualify. Some qualify as provincially significant lands. In most other cases including municipally or regionally significant areas, the taxes still apply. Forest owners can be 75 per cent exempt if they agree to use good forestry practices for 10 years. Why should there be taxes on the same nature that is saving us from floods and cleaning our air and water? If taxes were lower, the need to sell off parcels and cut the trees would be reduced. Surely resource extraction and "developed" properties that don't provide nature's services should be taxed instead.

Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) was

started in 1997 for precisely these reasons. We wanted to protect as much of the entire ecosystem as possible, not just a trail corridor, but the forests and river valleys that flow to Lake Huron. Manitoulin is an essential part of the Escarpment, but only a small fraction is protected by either nature reserves or regulation. One of our first reserves was Manitoulin's Cup and Saucer, where more than 10,000 people a year climb up for the majestic view. We've grown from protecting one

silica and quartz remnants of the 3.5 billion-year-old mountains so often painted by the Group of Seven and now featured in galleries. The Mountain also has 12 of Ontario's rarest species including wolves, eagles and the Peregrine Falcon. We've cared for the paintings, now worth millions.....we need to protect the original site. It's only \$158,000 or \$700 an acre.

EBC is just a small charity with only two full-time staff. We've managed to protect 162 nature reserves, 53 precious square km of land and coincidentally 53 of Ontario's rare species so far. Each dollar we spend once on land protects \$1.40 worth of those important ecological services every year thereafter. What better investment is there?

## Canada's Commitment

The job of protecting the land that sustains us is too big for land trusts alone. We appreciate the recent efforts of so many public figures and MPPs to say that Canada will INVEST in our land by putting \$1.3 billion new dollars into the current budget to meet our 17 per cent commitment under the International Biodiversity Initiative by the agreed target of 2020.

We need your help finding the cash to conserve land and then building trails and monitoring the land we have protected.

**Contact Bob Barnett of Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy through [www.escarpment.ca](http://www.escarpment.ca) or at 888.815.9575.**

*Donate to the campaign to buy Willisville Mountain by cheque, credit card or PayPal. Get more details from EBC.*

*Great news!  
The federal government in the February budget announced \$1.3 billion over five years. Much of that was specifically targeted toward meeting Canada's 17 per cent biodiversity goal by 2020. This should help EBC conserve more land to help meet our collective goal.*

reserve a year to almost one a month because landowners want to see the land they cherish protected from ever-encroaching development.

Typically, it only costs us \$5,000 to \$15,000 for lawyers and appraisers to protect a big reserve, maybe 100 acres or half a square km. Typically we have at least one rare species on a property. It's only costing us \$50 or \$100 an acre to protect such valuable habitat.

## Buying Land

Maybe once a year we buy a property. Right now we're trying to raise the money to buy Willisville Mountain, part of the La Cloche/Killarney chain of