

Conservation Breaking Out All Over!

By Bob Barnett

Each new reserve brings an adrenaline rush! Imagine protecting John Muir's home near Meaford where he lived before he returned to found the Sierra Club and encouraged Teddy Roosevelt to start the U.S. National Park system at Yosemite. That was our first new reserve of 2021. For me, it was a homecoming of sorts since I paddled the whitewater on the Bighead in April back in the '60s. The Trout Hollow Trail is a popular walking destination where one can see the old power dam near the site of the mill where Muir improved rake-building efficiency. He is less remembered for his technical prowess than for his documentation and collection of plants as he wandered for months through southern Ontario. The Knight Brothers passed the torch to Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) to care for this historic place.

12 Reserves Completed

But that was just one of 12 reserves we completed over the last year. We started by buying another 25 acres adjacent to Misery Bay Provincial Park. This was our fifth wetland, rock face and forest buffer for this iconic park.

Next we were able to work with the families creating homes at Boyd Lake near Chesley. We protected 78 acres of lakes and plan to set out trails to improve the community.

The Bartram family trusted us with Mount Dhaulagiri by placing an agreement on title before selling to a young family. That's another 200 acres of Escarpment and wetland in the Beaver Valley protected after almost 20 years of discussion. The Bates family

gave us a tiny fen at Pine Tree Harbour where we found Snapping Turtle eggs and now a Massasauga. Then just east of Bartram, the Phillips donated a 100-acre agreement to protect more Escarpment forest and wetland. Hal Graham donated a hundred acres of Escarpment wetland and forest just east of Copper Kettle.

December was frenetic. It started with the Hobson reserve at Little Pike Bay where four years of discussions, severances and a donation of road to the Town created 167 protected acres with shoreline, meadow marsh, alvar, forest and wetland. Then Chris Robinson donated his forester father's Escarpment acreage beside our Harvey reserve. Gloria Hildebrandt, of *Niagara Escarpment Views*, placed a conservation agreement on Escarpment acreage near Georgetown, previously owned by her parents Charles and Ursula. And then, just as the year ended, Dan and Bernie O'Reilly donated a 65-acre agreement on the west Humber. Protecting this rapidly urbanizing site resulted in a \$5.9 million receipt. Will this be the High Park of the future?

Then, over the Christmas break, we heard that a project we'd been discussing with the owners for years, took off. Gary Albrecht and his wife Virginia both died in 2020. The family offered us the property for \$1.65 million but only gave us three months to raise the money. We moved into action; talking to local cottagers, talking to the CBC in Sudbury, getting the message out on Manitoulin. The target: The Skyline Reserve on the LaCloche Mountains with 2,140 acres of spectacular quartz/silica mountains, the source of many Group of Seven paintings and the Heaven's Gate Trail. It linked

two existing EBC reserves and joined three provincial parks. We had to succeed!

Donations Picked Up

Roy Jeffery and his family stepped forward and offered us a loan of \$500,000, then, his master stroke, a matching grant of \$250,000. The board put up \$500,000 from the Muriel Dobbie bequest. Donations started to trickle in when we went out on Facebook. They picked up when we sent out 2,000 letters with a descriptive brochure to our supporters. Ted Cowan worked with the cottagers at Bay of Islands. Large donors like Kay and Derek Coleman, who wrote a book about the LaCloche, gave us \$200,000. Roy Jeffery's mother, Muriel, gave us \$80,000. Several foundations like Trotter, Thomas Ford Memorial, North Shore Preservation and Conam chipped in. My old friends the Gingrichs contributed \$25,000, Susan Potts \$20,000 and doctors like Raymond Jacques and Maurianne Reade \$10,000. 238 people donated cash or securities, with many in memory of people who loved the place. Pioneer Construction and Espanola Home Hardware joined in. Our American supporters donated almost \$200,000 through American Friends of Canadian Conservation. The money was

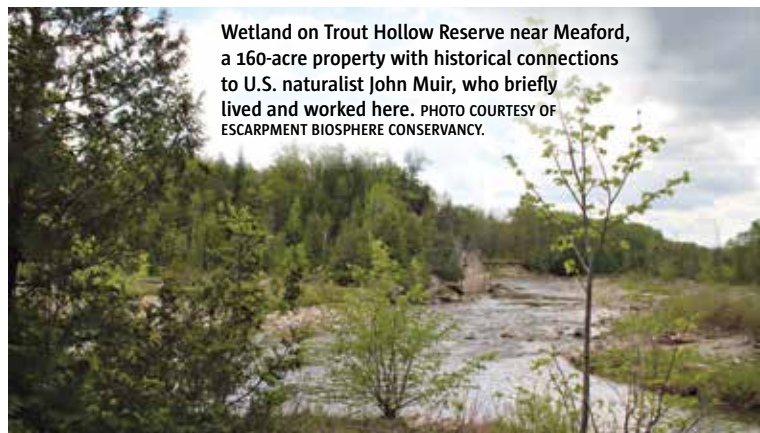
adding up as hundreds more people donated through our website and Canada Helps. We were getting closer and closer. During all this panic, on February 1 we completed the Muir reserve, mentioned above. Then on April 12 Anita Cunningham donated her 27-acre property in Cemetery Bog near Lion's Head with a whole string of important orchids and carnivorous plants.

Then we took the plunge as purchasers. Fortunately, we got two major grants from Ontario Conservation Partnership and Wildlife Habitat Canada at the last minute which pushed us right over the top. On April 27 we bought the mountains. Our friends had donated and granted us enough to buy the whole thing. Fortunately, we didn't need Roy's loan and the bequest is available for future projects.

While we raised the money, Roy Jeffery walked 200 km to mark out and improve the trails. He built two parking lots. And now it's open for you to visit and enjoy. Join us!

What a year! We protected over 3,000 acres (12 sq km) and \$10,000,000 worth of land. Our friends are changing the world!

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Wetland on Trout Hollow Reserve near Meaford, a 160-acre property with historical connections to U.S. naturalist John Muir, who briefly lived and worked here. PHOTO COURTESY OF ESCARPMENT BIOSPHERE CONSERVANCY.