

Preserving a Wild Future, One Wild Acre at a Time

By Beth Gilhespy

We're in the midst of an unprecedented environmental crisis. Globally, nearly one million species are at risk of extinction, many within our lifetime. In Ontario, the leading threat to biodiversity is habitat loss—the slow but steady erosion of forests, wetlands, alvars, and meadows that species need to survive.

Even as this crisis deepens, protections for Ontario's natural areas are being weakened. So who will safeguard the land when policy falls short? Never before has the work of land trusts like Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC), been more important.

At EBC, we have worked with landowners to protect nearly 25,000 acres of ecologically significant land on the Niagara Escarpment and surrounding areas: dramatic Escarpment ridges, tall forests, gentle wetlands, and sensitive alvar ecosystems. These are places that store carbon, purify water, and give at-risk species the space they need to thrive.

Work Far From Done

Through our 2025 Wild Future Campaign, we're aiming to protect another 1,100 acres by the end of 2025. Each of these places tells a story—not just of ecological value, but of the choices we face. Will we protect what remains, or watch Ontario's natural heritage slip away?

Among them: 365 acres of forest and wetland near Benallen, expanding on

233 adjacent acres protected last year. A 100-acre mosaic of meadow, karst, and wetland on the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula that shelters nesting Bobolinks and a family of Black Bears. A 20-acre fen and alvar nearby where tamarack trees and showy Lady's Slipper Orchids bloom. And on Manitoulin Island/Mnidoo Mnising, a dramatic Escarpment ridge with rare ferns and dolostone caprock increasingly vulnerable to quarrying.

The cost to preserve these and other sites in 2025 is \$3.8 million but thankfully we already have \$2.7 million in funding and donations secured. That means a 2025 Wild Future Campaign goal of \$1.1million, and every donation has 3.5 times the impact.

A wild future is a hopeful future. A wild future means intact expanses of forest, protected shorelines and thriving wetlands. A wild future means the habitats that Ontario's sensitive and vulnerable species call home are safe from impairment. And a wild future means health for ourselves and the generations that follow.

If this vision of a wild future resonates with you, I invite you to learn more about the Wild Future Campaign and make a donation at www.escarpment.ca. You can also contact me at beth@escarpment.ca. I'd love to tell you more about the incredible places we're safeguarding, and the future we're working toward—one wild acre at a time.

Beth Gilhespy is CEO of Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy

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