
SER Ontario News
Newsletter of the Ontario Chapter of
the Society for Ecological Restoration
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 [Chapter Update](#)


 [Glenda Jones, new SER Ontario Treasurer](#)

 [The Ecological Role of Fire in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest](#)

 [Highland Creek - Trail of Trials](#)

 [Forest Gene Conservation Association Update](#)

 [Help for the American Chestnut](#)





 [Gerald R. McKenna -- New Director-at-Large](#)

 [The 1998 International Society for Ecological Restoration Annual Conference](#)

Chapter Update

MANY MEMBERS had an opportunity to meet and share information recently at the successful "Reclamation and restoration in settled landscapes" conference, co-hosted together with the Canadian Land Reclamation Association (CLRA). Many thanks are due to the SER—Ontario members on the organizing committee: Kevin Trimble, Jill Cherry, and Steven Smith. Congratulations on a well-organized, well-attended conference that generated a great deal of excitement about ecological restoration! Your efforts contributed enormously to promoting ecological restoration principles to our colleagues in the land reclamation field. Participants received a copy of the conference proceedings as they registered. Additional copies of the conference Proceedings are available. See the [notice](#) in this issue.

During the joint CLRA/SER —Ontario conference, we hosted a successful membership forum. An opportunity to win 1 of 3 copies of SER—Ontario member Lorraine Johnson's latest book, *Grow Wild*, motivated members in attendance to contribute their ideas for:

-  increasing public exposure to the concept, principles and practice of ecological restoration
-  increasing planting of native trees, shrubs, herbs, especially in new development projects, where exotics continue to be favoured
-  enhancing restoration education and networking opportunities for members and others; and
-  increasing our membership.

Thanks to Dale Leadbeater for ably facilitating this session in my absence, and to Glenda Jones for ensuring that all your good ideas were recorded. These ideas will be deliberated by the Executive during a facilitated one-day session being organized for January 23rd, 1999. You may see some of these ideas implemented next year!

We were successful in recruiting three members for recently vacated Executive positions this fall. Glenda Jones has assumed the responsibilities of Treasurer, taking the helm from Jim Dougan who has held this position since the inception of our Chapter. Gerry McKenna has joined us as our newest Director-at-Large. And, Paul Morris will be our new Ontario Environmental Network (OEN) representative, ensuring that our organization effectively provides input to provincial government policy and program initiatives regarding the environment, and that the viewpoint of ecological restorationists is well represented. Welcome aboard Glenda, Gerry and Paul! A brief introduction to each of our new Executive members can be found in this issue of the SER-Ontario newsletter. Also in this issue, Margot Ursic provides a fitting tribute to Jim's contributions to SER-Ontario—thank you for always keeping your eye on the bottom line, Jim!

Plans are underway to assemble the next edition of the Resource Directory. An organizing committee has been formed and we are soliciting advertising support. Distribution is targeted for the first week of February, in plenty of time for the busy spring planting season. Next year's edition will include additional information of interest to Ontario's ecological restoration community, plus expanded listings of native plant materials growers. We are pleased that the Forest Gene Conservation Association, an organization that shares our commitment to promoting the planting of biologically appropriate material, is again partnering with us in this endeavour. If you are interested in advertising your company's services in next year's directory, please see the [advertising rates](#). If you are interested in lending your talents to improving next year's directory, please contact me at 613/923-2680.

Finally, I would like to extend my best wishes to everyone for the Holiday Season!

Silvia Strobl
Chair

 [top](#)

Glenda Jones, new SER Ontario Treasurer

GLENDA JONES is welcomed to the *SER Ontario* Board as our new Treasurer. Glenda obtained her Bachelor's of Science degree at the University of Toronto in Biology and Environmental Science. While attending the University of Toronto, Glenda began her career in ecology through two summer field assistant-ships on Ellesmere Island in the Canadian High Arctic. She continued her own research work on Ellesmere Island completing her Master's of Science degree at the Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Glenda's research on primary plant succession on glacier forelands helped her to win the 1996 Canadian Geographical Society Studentship. During her Master's, Glenda took on a plant biomass contract and assisted with teaching courses in plant ecology, plant taxonomy, and biogeography.

Following completion of her degree in 1997, she completed several short-term contracts including positions as a forest ecologist in Alberta and as a multivariate statistics analyst for the Peatland Ecology Group at Laval University in Quebec. She currently works for an environmental consulting firm as a terrestrial ecologist where she has applied her background to projects involving environmental impacts, restoration, forest cover analysis, and development of mitigation plans. Welcome aboard, Glenda!

 [top](#)

The Ecological Role of Fire in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest

Part 3 in the "Your Forest-Your Choice" Conference Series, October 1-3, 1998

THIS CONFERENCE highlighted the research being carried out on the use of prescribed burning for forest management in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence ecosystem and provided information on the logistics of conducting a prescribed burn. The majority of people attending the conference were affiliated with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR); however, there were also a few land owners, non-governmental organizations, forestry companies, and consultants represented. Ideally, it would have been better if there had been more non-government representation as the MNR appears to be relinquishing its responsibility for conducting prescribed burns.

On Thursday night, the keynote address on the role of fire in Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest ecosystems was given by Charlie Van Wagner. His talk focussed on the complex nature of the forest and how fires sustained certain components of the forest by creating short-term disturbances to open the forest canopy providing light, reducing competition in the understorey, creating a suitable seed bed and releasing nutrients.

On Friday, a diverse array of speakers gave talks. The first talk of the day was on the future role of the MNR in prescribed burning. It was stated that the MNR would no longer be in the business of conducting prescribed burns. Instead, the MNR would provide skills and resources to use fire for ecosystem management and policy development (*i.e.* development of prescribed burn regulations). This led into a talk by Fred Bruin, a retired MNR southern Ontario prescribed burn specialist, who outlined the steps needed to successfully prepare for and conduct a prescribed burn, especially in an urban setting, including how to get much needed community support.

The rest of the day's talks fell in to two categories -- the use of fire for managing forest ecosystems and the use of fire to manage a particular component of the forest ecosystem. The latter included the majority of talks at the conference. These talks focussed on research into the use of prescribed fire as a tool to sustain the shade intolerant tree species within a forest ecosystem. Species that were discussed included yellow birch, red oak and white pine. As the talks were primarily directed at timber production, I would have been interested to hear more information on the use of fire for ecosystem management, especially the role of fire for non-native species control or if fire has a role in the management of herbaceous species in a forest understorey.

Talks on the use of prescribed burns to manage forest ecosystems included fire management in the state of Michigan and Pukaskwa National Park's new fire management program. These talks emphasized the disparity in the use of prescribed burns for ecosystem management between Michigan and Ontario, especially in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest region. Types of management for which prescribed burns are being used in Michigan include: prescribed burns in Jack pine stands to create Kirtland warbler habitat; prescribed burns to restore oak savannahs; and prescribed burns to open cattail marshes for waterfowl habitat. In Ontario, even though individual national parks are beginning to move from a fire suppression program to a fire management program, the use of prescribed burning appears to be targeted at the management of individual species rather than ecosystems. For example, the first prescribed burn at Pukaskwa N.P. was conducted to reduce the balsam fir understorey in a white pine stand.

Two optional field trips were included in the conference. On Thursday afternoon, there was a field trip to a recent local wild fire site conducted by MNR Parry Sound Fire Staff. This field trip highlighted the regeneration capabilities of many plant species following a fire. The fire occurred at the beginning of August along a section of rail line and by the beginning of October a number of early successional species were already well re-established. On Saturday, a field trip was held to allow conference attendees the opportunity to observe a prescribed leaf burn.

Mary Ann Johnson
Geomatics International Inc.

 [top](#)

Highland Creek - Trail of Trials

PART I: THE PROJECT






HIGHLAND CREEK is one of the few ravine systems in "Toronto the Amalgamated" (formerly Metro) that has not been ravaged by the installation of infrastructure systems (sewers, communication lines and roads). As a result, in places it feels as remote as Temagami, complete with old growth White Pine and Hemlock, for which it has been designated in part, an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). The valley is alive with wildlife, and in the lower end, three wetlands have been complexed to form a Provincially Significant Wetland Complex (PSW) whose star breeders include Wood Ducks and Northern Flickers.

A spontaneous labyrinth of footpaths had formed through this urban wilderness and, with the large development planned just to the east of the valley, it was anticipated that the trails would deteriorate. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources was concerned about possible impacts of an improved trail on the PSW and requested an Environmental Impact Study to examine the effects and make recommendations to reduce its impact on the valley system. Gartner Lee Limited was hired to undertake the assessment which involved reviewing background information available about the area, especially fisheries, mapping the vegetation units in the valley south of Lawrence including the beach area, and documenting the breeding birds, mammals and amphibians. From this came a recommendation to keep the trail on the west side of the creek which would keep the east side of the creek undisturbed and act as a sanctuary adjacent to the ESA. The difficulty lay in the routing of the trail around a dense glacial till ridge whose eroded face was a prominent and remarkable feature in the valley. It also was an obstacle to hikers and the spontaneous trails had stripped off the vegetation in wide swaths, compacting the soils and exposing sensitive Eastern Hemlock roots to desiccation and mechanical injury.

The solution called for the cutting back of the erosion face, and the construction of an armour stone wall around the toe. The wall would be out of the creek, therefore not affecting fish habitat, although some river run boulders were to be placed to improve fish habitat. Although the project required the loss of some trees, every attempt was made to salvage as much native material as possible.

The criteria for placement of the trail included:

 placing the trail at least 15 metres from the creek to eliminate any effect on the creek from the trail;

-  placing the trail as far away from the wetland boundary as possible, given the creek setback;
-  minimizing the number of trees that would need to be removed, which required that the trail meander quite a bit;
-  maintaining a closed canopy as much as possible to minimize the invasion of invasive aliens who usually require intense sunlight;
-  salvaging native plant material when possible, and;
-  replanting the edges of the trail with native materials, encouraging thicket to limit disturbance to wildlife from trail users and re-vegetating the re-sculptured erosion face with native trees and shrubs.

Almost two years after the completion of construction, the site was visited to evaluate the success of the plantings. The results of the project will be discussed in Part II of this article in the next newsletter issue.

Dale Leadbeater, B.Sc., B.Ed.
and Teresa Bosco, B.Sc., MEd

 [top](#)

Forest Gene Conservation Association Update

THE FOREST GENE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (FGCA) has had a very busy season focussing on our goal of ensuring the use of biologically appropriate seed and stock in restoration and reforestation efforts in southern Ontario. The Richard Ivey Foundation graciously provided us with the funding to undertake a business and marketing plan approach to this goal. It began with a series of focus groups sessions with tree planting agencies across southern Ontario. We learned a lot about the local and fiscal realities they are dealing with. We found them very willing to work with us to promote the use of, at the very least, source identified stock. How that happens, that is, whether it is through a formal seed certification system, is yet to be determined. On the latter point, we learned that certification is one thing, having something to certify is another. This brought up the question of how to ensure a supply of appropriate seed and stock.

Very pertinent to this question is the future of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Ontario Tree Seed Plant (OTSP), which was to be privatized this year. Several private growers as well as the FGCA have been keeping close tabs on this process as they are very concerned that the functions of seed crop forecasting, processing, testing and, especially, long-term storage be kept alive and well for the benefit of southern Ontario reforestation and/or restoration efforts.

Without such functions, ensuring a supply of appropriate planting stock becomes a next-to-impossible task or one that will demand great changes in the current responsibilities of those promoting appropriate reforestation.

The FGCA is continuing its efforts this year, including:

1. working with the OMNR and the OTSP regarding its future,
2. working with growers to determine, as for the tree planting agencies, their local and fiscal realities in providing appropriate planting stock,
3. working with our members and associates to devise a system to begin implementing this year, at least as a pilot study.

As always, we are very open to receiving any and all feedback on our efforts. Please don't hesitate to call Barb Boysen (613) 269-3145 or e-mail newleaf@storm.ca.

 [top](#)

Help for the American Chestnut

A PROGRAM has been launched to help increase the numbers of American Chestnut trees (*Castanea dentata*) in Canada.

Once a common and even dominant forest tree in Ontario's Carolinian region, American Chestnut populations suffered drastic losses and continue to struggle due to the introduction of a blight (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) from foreign nursery stock in the early 1900s.

The program is currently selecting suitable sites of up to one acre which will be planted with Chestnut in the Spring of 1999. Ten to twenty percent of the stand will be planted with 100% pure genetic stock of Chestnut. The remaining trees will be a combination of suitable hardwoods and conifers. Chestnut seed sources will be appropriately matched to sites with the help of computer modeling provided by the Canadian Forest Service. Landowners are expected to provide the land base, long-term protection and management, and contribute to planting costs.

The program is supported by a partnership of several conservation organizations, most notably the Grand River Conservation Authority, Natural Resources Canada, and members of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition, led by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association. Funding is being provided by the federal *Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund* and Natural Resources Canada.

The program has produced a brochure describing the Chestnut, the blight, what individual landowners can do if they have Chestnut on their property, and the planting program. For more information, you can contact:

Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Association at Tel: 1-800-265-9751 or 519-826-4214 oscia@netcom.ca or Grand River Conservation Authority Tel: 519-621-2761 ext. 270 conservationaction@grandriver.on.ca

 [top](#)

Gerald R. McKenna -- New Director-at-Large

Gerry has a B.Sc. (Specialized Honours) in Environmental Science from York University. He has worked for Ontario Hydro since 1984. Currently, he is a senior scientist in their environment department where he provides technical services on biological issues for Ontario Hydro's fossil-fuel power plants. This includes providing guidance and assistance on natural areas and land management, conducting biological surveys, implementing habitat enhancement programs, and coordination of scientific research programs. Recently completed projects of interest to restoration ecologists include: naturalizing a landscaped parkland on a power plant property, constructing an "engineered wetland" to polish domestic sewage treatment plant effluent, and assisting the CWS in a study of Black Tern breeding biology in an onsite wetland area.

You can reach Gerry by email at: gerry.mckenna@hydro.on.ca

 [top](#)

The 1998 International Society for Ecological Restoration Annual Conference - Austin, Texas

Over 700 individuals attended the 1998 event in the beautiful surroundings and rangelands of Austin, Texas. Plenary sessions of the 3 day event focussed on Restoration Education, Rangeland Restoration and Traditional Knowledge. As always, the pre- and post-conference field trips were the highlight for many of the attendees. Some of these field trips and workshops focussed on rangeland restoration specific to Texas. Day three of the plenary sessions included a memorable presentation by Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior of the United States. A number of conference attendees perceived the attendance of the secretary as a historical turning point for SER. It was apparent from his words that Secretary Babbitt viewed SER as a leader in the environmental movement and saw the activities associated with restoration as mechanisms for public emotion and local activism. Secretary Babbitt fielded questions from several of the attendees and seemed to enjoy the opportunity to interact with the audience. Updates on activities of the individual chapters of the Society took place prior to the conference. Executive members were extremely impressed by the progress and initiatives taken by the Ontario Chapter over the last year. The Annual SER Members Meeting was held on day three of the conference and brought about an opportunity for the SER Executive to update members on the status of the International Chapter. During the meeting the revitalization of the Restoration Education initiative was announced. Julie St. John presented the Restoration Education Training Program initiative, which will function separately from the much maligned Restoration Training Network. It was also announced that the conference in the year 2000 will be held in Liverpool, England. It is the hope of the Executive that future conferences will alternate between the U.S. and other international locations from year to year. Overall, the majority of attendees felt that the 1998 edition of the International SER conference was an overwhelming success.

Conference proceedings

The Ontario Chapter tried something different in September by convening a joint conference with the Canadian Land Reclamation Association. No less than six provinces and one territory were represented by 120 participants from diverse sectors, including government, industry, practitioner, teacher and community groups. The conference consisted of a mix of plenary and concurrent sessions to squeeze in 42 contributed papers covering a wide spectrum of the latest research and applications in restoration and reclamation. On the social side, there were generously sponsored events including a wine and cheese, an evening walk at the Leslie St. Spit, a banquet dinner, and several tours on the last day.

The CLRA annual business meeting also gave our chapter an opportunity to hold an informal meeting to update members and solicit input on future directions. The Board of Directors has taken all of the suggestions from this well attended session and will consider them in strategic planning.

The SER wishes to extend sincere thanks to the many sponsors and volunteers who made this conference a success. The conference closed in the black with each group sharing proceeds. *Conference proceedings are available through either the SER or CLRA offices at \$40 each while supplies last.*

 [top](#)
