

Algonquin to Adirondack Conservation Association

“Connecting with respect”

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President's Report 2008-2009

The last year has undoubtedly been the busiest yet for A2A.

Thanks to the work done by our Membership Secretary, Claudette Weststrate, we now have up-to-date contact information for almost all of our members, which was certainly not the case a year ago. From 57 paid up members for 2007, we now have around 75 members paid up as of 2008, including several new members from the Perth area. If you have not renewed for 2009, we encourage you to do so. Please use the new membership form we have enclosed.

We also encourage you to consider A2A when you do your charitable giving. We could be take on even more projects if we could afford to hire a staff member, but we need your generosity to make that happen. What we receive gets spent right here in this region, on projects and events to improve habitat connections for wildlife, while making the environment a cleaner, healthier place for people. And you'll receive a charitable receipt!

Since our last Annual General Meeting A2A has been working intensely on several fronts.

For the first time, we undertook a large scale project with a grant of over \$56 000 from the Ministry of Natural Resource Species at Risk Fund and over \$48 000 in in-kind and financial donations from partners and individuals. We hired 4 university students or recent graduates to form 2 field crews: one to work with Tom Beaubiah of the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority to do a shoreline analysis of Lower Beverley Lake, and the second to do seining of aquatic animals living in the near shore area, under the guidance of Scott Smithers. We hired a project manager to oversee the project, Dr. Svenja Belaousoff, who was also serving as the A2A coordinator, but resigned from that position shortly after becoming Project Manager.

Look for our article about the project in this newsletter and check out project pictures and stories on our website a2alink.org.

We are very grateful to David Bull and Don Ross of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere who were extremely helpful with excellent advice and endless patience for a group just learning the ropes about big projects.

A2A has committed to working on other parts of the Gananoque Watershed for the next 2 years. We have an application in to MNR for over 100 000 dollars to do work of a similar nature on Gananoque Lake and time permitting, South Lake. And we hope to begin investigating where eels, a species very much at risk, existed on the Gananoque system and to analyze barrier effects from structures-especially dams, in a partnership with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. As well, the project will go back to Lower Beverley Lake to undertake the stewardship recommendations that came out of Phase 1, working in partnership with the Lower Beverley Lake Association members, who gave generously of their time to work alongside A2A last summer, as well as donating funds to the project.



This summer we look forward to working in a similar manner with the Gananoque River Waterways Association and the South Lake Association. We have already signed up over 80 volunteers for this year. 23 partnering organizations are involved, now including the Ontario Ministry of Environment, which will undertake water quality testing as an in-kind contribution.

In addition to applying for funding to MNR for next year, we have also made application to Evergreen Foundation, HRDC, and CFWIP, and will also approach a couple more in the next few months. The funding applications are being done with the help of Kim Goodman and the Centre for Sustainable Watersheds, which will manage the project if we are successful.

While it sometimes seems as though the whole year was taken up with the Watershed Project, A2A has been engaged in several other events and presentations.

One very special project we undertook this year was participating in the production of a video about A2A by videographer Paul Lang. The video is not yet ready for viewing. When it is, you'll all be invited for its grand opening!

In September A2A hosted the Eastern Conference of Ontario Nature. We had a chance to meet naturalists' groups stretching just about to Algonquin Park, and offer our Big Picture approach to helping them raise awareness in their areas. A special thanks to Richard Deering and Margot Miller, who worked to make this conference such a success.

A2A also put on a display in Brockville at an event hosted by the Council of Canadians at which Maude Barlow spoke on water issues. Richard Deering and Anne MacLean worked with me to set up the display and reach out to the people there to show some of the positive steps that can be taken to protect water resources and the life they support.

There have been several speaking engagements, including one for Friends of the Tay, The Rideau Valley Field Naturalists, the Brockville Rotary Club, as well as an informal presentation at the conference "2 Countries, 1 Forest" in Montreal last October and a presentation for the International Joint Commission on water levels in the St. Lawrence. We also make submissions in writing from time to time on policy matters that affect the A2A region. Through Sophie Borcoman, Parks Canada has generously contributed its printing facilities and paper so that we can produce materials to distribute at these presentations. Chris Bellemore from St. Lawrence Islands National Park works with our Communications Committee.

Bob Bailey, an advisor to A2A, and vice president of Delta Waterfowl, has worked with our group on three different occasions to plan a membership and fund raising strategy. Our work has already been influenced by his recommendations, which stress that we are a local group doing work that benefits people, as well as native plants and animals.

As members of Ontario Nature A2A has been able to get a fuller insurance package than we previously had, including Directors' insurance.

I want to offer A2A's gratitude to George Boland, who has been our treasurer for the past two years. This has been a demanding job, including figuring out how funding from ministries works, how invoices and in-kind contributions are recorded, and how to maintain two separate accounts — one for A2A itself, and a separate account just for the Watershed Project, pay invoices and look after charitable receipts.

I look forward to hearing from you over the next year with your comments and direction. As members you are the heart of the organization. I thank you for your commitment and enthusiasm.

Emily Conger
President, A2A

The Algonquin to Adirodacks Conservation Association (A2A), with the aid of over 20 partners, has completed the Gananoque Watershed Project phase 1. The project had many different components: learning about the species at risk in Lower Beverley Lake, doing a shoreline inventory, water quality testing and doing stewardship outreach to the many residents who live around the lake. A2A sees this as an opportunity to enhance and connect habitat in the near-shore (littoral) areas, the most important habitat area for most wildlife. We were thrilled that over 70 people signed up to volunteer. We were not able to schedule all of them in, partly owing to the fact that the MNR announced the funding quite late, so our field season was half as long as anticipated. But for those who did participate, we celebrated with a Volunteer Appreciation night on Dec. 15th.

We were able to hold quite a few outreach activities over the course of the summer. The culminating event was on Feb. 10th, where the final report was presented to a group of around 45 people, many from Lower Beverley Lake. It thrills us to see how infectious the enthusiasm for the project is, and to see how the people on the lake have been engaged. We believe that this is the key to their taking an active role in stewardship in coming years.

Press coverage of the project was excellent, including front page coverage twice on the Whig Standard in Kingston, and several editions of CBC Ottawa, which were broadcast across Ontario as well as a host of articles in various publications.

Phase 1 was the first year of a multiyear project on the entire Gananoque River Watershed. The goals this year included establishing an inventory of fish species at risk for Lower Beverley Lake, attempting to identify some the interactions between the species at risk and their environment, and to establish some preliminary recommendations to help protect the important habitats for these species. This work on Lower Beverley Lake included collecting fish, shoreline mapping and establishment of base line water quality to be used in future years. Water testing was also performed on the remainder of the lakes in the Gananoque River Watershed. Most of the results are preliminary, and future work will need to be carried out.



Crew members pull a seine net through the water to catch young fish and local vegetation.

In July and August 2008, a total 13,483 individual animals representing 22 species were collected and safely released, mostly fish. Of those species, four were identified as species at risk: a Pugnose Minnow, a Stinkpot Turtle, a Northern Map turtle and 22 Grass Pickerel. Grass Pickerel was the only species of these four found in sufficient numbers to allow further analysis. Grass Pickerel were found in the same places as Bog Willow, Broad-leaved Arrowhead, Common Cattail, Duckweed, White Water Lily and Burweed. They are also found with Emerald Shiner, Brook Silverside and young of the year (fish hatched this year). These associations are important and indicate potential fish and plant communities that should be protected.

Although not directly linked to Grass Pickerel, the shoreline analysis indicated that some areas of the Lower Beverley Lake may be considered as over developed. These sections of the shore may be contributing to stress on the lake ecosystem. Recommendations to reduce development impacts were provided. A key recommendation of the report is to reduce run-off from homes and cottages.



The young fish are identified and measured. Then the fish are safely released into the water.

Data about the catch area is also recorded.

Biosphere, Leeds and the Thousand Islands Township, Leeds County Soil & Crop Assoc., Leeds County, Stewardship Council, Lower Beverley Lake Assoc., Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Ontario Fur Managers, Ontario Nature, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, St. Lawrence Islands National Park, Shawmere, South Lake Assoc., Thousand Islands Community Development Corp., Toronto Zoo, Upper Beverley Lake Assoc.



A shoreline inventory field crew member identifies some aquatic vegetation on Lower Beverley Lake. She will record it, along with the location where it was found.

An analysis of all the data collected allowed for the development of initial stewardship strategies for Species at Risk. These strategies will be used to help improve the conditions of the lake. Because they are based on the preliminary data, they may be modified in future years.

Given adequate funding, A2A plans to extend the project to the rest of the Gananoque River Watershed. Funding applications have already been submitted for 2009.

A2A recognizes the financial support received from Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Stewardship Fund for this project. We want to recognize the partners who helped A2A to make Phase 1 of the Gananoque River Watershed Community Stewardship Project a success.

Thank you everyone!

Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority, Centre for Sustainable Watersheds, Charleston Lake Assoc., Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans, Elizabethtown-Kitley Township, Gananoque River Waterways Assoc., Frontenac Arch

For the entire report, visit our A2A website at: http://www.a2alink.org/projects/GRWProject_Phase1.pdf

Focus on Stinkpot Turtles

by Chris Bellmore — Outreach Coordinator, St. Lawrence National Park

In the minds of local residents the Thousand Islands is a place full of great mystery, offering the rewards of both a rich cultural and natural heritage if you look hard enough and in the right places. For shoreline property owners, one such hidden gem may be right under their noses. The stinkpot turtle, a small but feisty creature, is one rare resident of the Thousand Islands that prefers to live an elusive lifestyle almost exclusively under water.



Stinkpot turtles have always fascinated me. These turtles are tiny, having a shell length of no more than 5 inches. What isn't apparent through first impressions is that these turtles have a few surprises in store. Firstly, a stinkpot turtle will actually snap, like their big cousin the snapping turtle. If it feels that it isn't getting anywhere by snapping it has a second, more effective method of defence – a musky fluid is secreted from its glands that packs a scent that rivals that of skunk spray. This is a sure fire way to guarantee any predator or perceived threat (such as a park interpreter) will leave it be and walk away disappointed and perplexed. One has to appreciate the tenacity of this species.

These turtles rely on shallow areas directly adjacent to the shore, where areas are sandy and there is plenty of aquatic vegetation. If that vegetation in the water is removed there will be less habitat, and less continuous habitat that is equally important, and therefore less turtles in an area. It's really that simple. Another problem is their limited opportunity to reproduce. They lay only 5-9 eggs each year, and go only a few feet from the water to lay them. A natural shoreline helps to protect the eggs from predators, while a modified shoreline leaves them exposed to predators (racoons, skunks, foxes), who are much more numerous due to human influence. Over 80% of their eggs are typically lost that way.

On the topic of survival, stinkpot turtles, like other turtles in the Thousand Islands, are under a considerable degree of stress from human activity. They are listed as "threatened" federally and provincially. Development of shoreline areas where the turtles nest and the removal of aquatic plants can play a huge role in deciding the fate of this species. Although there have been severe alterations of natural shoreline in many places, these unnatural shorelines can be rehabilitated to be suitable for turtles once again. Even retaining walls can be broken down and replaced with a softer and more natural shoreline.

St. Lawrence Islands National Park, in collaboration with the Leeds Stewardship Council and the local community, has developed a strategy to improve turtle habitat in the Grenadier Island area of the river. Research conducted over three years by the University of Ottawa has shown that stinkpot turtles have been known to populate the southern shoreline areas of Grenadier Island and Tar Island. The strategy works to develop community initiatives that complement this research on the habitat requirements of local turtles. Such initiatives include landowner visits, a community turtle monitoring project, and the compilation of community knowledge on turtle activity. The Park hopes that a community approach to recovery will ensure that stinkpot turtles and other important species can continue to contribute to the uniqueness of the Thousand Islands region and be enjoyed by future generations.

So, as a resident of the Thousand Islands area that owns shoreline, don't dismiss the thought that there may be something mysterious living, just out of reach, under the surface of the water, and more bizarre than you ever could imagine.

For more information on how you can help stinkpot turtles on your property contact:
St. Lawrence Islands National Park at
613-923-5261.

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Many of the ecosystems within national parks are fire adapted. In these ecosystems, fire helps maintain forest health and biodiversity. A portion of St. Lawrence Islands National Park represents a unique forest community that has been traditionally managed by natural wildfires. This ecosystem has been suppressed over a number of years, which has had an adverse impact on rare species such as pitch pine, deerberry, five-lined skinks and black ratsnakes.

As part of a series of management actions taking place, the park is planning a number of prescribed burns over the next few years to restore natural processes. A prescribed burn is an intentional fire that is carefully managed by Parks Canada fire specialists with support from trained staff. These specialists, who manage fires across Canada, take into account weather, type of vegetation, terrain and fire behaviour when writing a prescription. The team outlines the conditions under which the prescription can be used. When these conditions are met, the site is prepared and fire management commences. These fires are low lying, with the intent to remove the ground cover to allow for forest regeneration. Often this results in favouring the establishment of fire dependant species (pitch pine, red oak) over other species (maple, beech).

A prescribed fire was conducted on Hill Island in 1998 on the top of a ridge known to have one of the largest pitch pine forest stands in Canada. Pitch pine is a species that has cones that often remain closed until they are exposed to fire. After the burn significant regeneration of pitch pine was observed. Most of the remnants of this fire are gone but evidence of it can be still seen today.

The proposed sites for this summer are pitch pine stands found on Georgina Island and at the north portion of Mallorytown Landing. The park is also looking at working to restore pitch pine in its northern range with local partners through developing stewardship practices, collaborating on seedling establishment and identifying potential planting areas.

For more information contact the park at 613 923 5261.

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The Parks Canada fire team conducted a prescribed burn on Hill Island in 1998.