

MEDIA RELEASE
For Immediate Release

**Land Trusts Recognize Excellence
First Annual OLTA Community and Vision Awards
and
OLTA receives support
to achieve Standards of Excellence
Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of \$300,800**



Toronto (Nov. 2008) – Ontario Trillium Foundation announced a grant of \$300,800 to the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA).

The announcement was made at the annual conference held in London, in late October last week and co-hosted by Ontario Land Trust Alliance and Carolinian Canada Coalition.

Pictured L to R – Sheila Simpson, OTF Staff, April Wepler, OLTA Board Chair OLTA, Donna Passmore, OTF Board Member, Dr. Gordon Nelson, CCC Board Chair.

Ontario Trillium Foundation Volunteer Board Member, Donna Passmore announced the grant to support Ontario Land Trusts to implement best practices and meet standards of excellence in the highly technical field of land securement and stewardship.

Over half of Ontario's land trusts have no staff and rely exclusively on volunteers. Fortunately many of these volunteers have a professional background that provides some of the needed expertise in land conservation. The grant will support volunteer land trusts actions to meet legal requirements and regulations, recruit and train excellent board members, set priorities for organizational development, as well as efficiently and effectively secure land for conservation and protection in their communities.

The wide range of training needed to operate a land trust was covered in over 20 workshops, field trips and plenary sessions facilitated by experts in natural heritage inventory and mapping, fund-raising and fund management, real estate transactions and legal tools such as conservation agreements at the recent three day conference.

Conference organizers acknowledge the valuable support from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Parks Research Forum of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and Environment Canada-Ontario Region to make this conference a success.

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For more information or digital images, please contact:

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Land trusts help to link public and private stewardship for ecosystem recovery. As registered charities, they receive donated or purchased lands and conservation agreements in important natural, cultural and agricultural areas. These organizations work to achieve a healthy balance between development and conservation in their communities, improving the quality of life in rural and urban areas by preserving natural and cultural heritage.

This year OLTA starts a new tradition

In recognition of the enormous passion and dedication of the land trust movement, **OLTA 's COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Award** recognized the extraordinary achievements of



Couchiching Conservancy. Highlights include:

- a series of community workshops involving quarry owners and ranchers.
- a partnership with the Orillia Packet and Times who print Couchiching's full newsletter four times a year.
- a corporate membership program involving 80 local businesses

Pictured L to R – April Wepler, OLTA Board Chair (Toronto), Ron Reid, Executive Director, Gayle Carlyle, Chair Kyra Howes, Isabelle Thiess, Jane Ball, all Couchiching Conservancy of Orillia.

Couchiching has taken a challenge – being in a smaller community with more finite resources and fewer larger funders, and turned it into an opportunity in connecting so broadly and at such an intimate level.

OLTA'S VISION AWARD is given to an individual or organization who has displayed extraordinary vision and exemplary leadership.



The first award recipient is ahead of the curve in identifying challenges and opportunities, and works hard to develop solutions. Our first OLTA Vision Award recipient **Professor Stew Hilts** was also the first Chair of the OLTA and "wrote the book" on land trusts, *Creative Conservation*. Stew lives near Guelph and is a Professor at the University of Guelph, where he is also the Director of the Centre for Land and Water Stewardship. Most recently, Stew has been working to save Ontario's best places to grow food as Chair of Ontario Farmland Trust.

Pictured L to R – Melissa Watkins, Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust, April Wepler, Chair, OLTA, Stew Hilts (Guelph)