



## **Ontario Nature honours conservation heroes**

Algonquin to Adirondacks Conservation Association, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Cootes to Escarpment Parks System and residents of Burnt River, McGregor, Chelesea, Port Rowan and Lansdowne have been recognized for leadership in conservation and the protection of nature.

### **For Immediate Release**

(SARNIA, ONTARIO, May 31, 2010) – This weekend, Ontario Nature, a leading conservation organization, recognized the exceptional contributions of eight individuals and organizations to natural habitat protection through Conservation Awards.

Naturalists and leading conservation organizations from across Ontario gathered at one of Canada's world-class biodiversity hotspots for a three-day conference "Exploring Our Watersheds" and Ontario Nature's 79th Annual General Meeting. The idyllic setting of Lambton County's watersheds and the exceptional natural diversity of Carolinian Canada set the stage for the much anticipated ceremony. The deserving recipients are:

### **Ontario Nature Achievement Award – *Clarke Birchard***

*Awarded to an Ontario Nature member who has made an outstanding contribution to the activities of Ontario Nature.*

Clarke Birchard is a tireless contributor to Ontario Nature's reserve system as past chair of the nature reserves committee and continuing adviser. He is a member of the stewardship committee of the Kinghurst Forest Nature Reserve, and a "walking educator" during his hikes and restoration projects. His widespread network in Grey and Bruce Counties was critical in establishing the multi-stakeholder group for Ontario Nature's Greenway initiative. Recently, Birchard helped secure a gift of additional land to Ontario Nature's Petrel Point Nature Reserve, and he is an active participant in efforts to secure new reserves at Malcolm Bluff Shores.

### **W.W.H. Gunn Conservation Award – *Vic Orr***

*Awarded to individuals who demonstrate outstanding personal service and a strong commitment to nature conservation over a number of years with exceptional results.*

Vic Orr played an instrumental role in the expansion, development and ongoing stewardship of the Altberg Wildlife Sanctuary Nature Reserve. Initially comprised of 101 hectares donated by Rudolph Altberg in 1983, the reserve now encompasses 470 hectares, straddling the landscape between the granite of the Canadian Shield and the limestone of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest - including the Burnt River watershed. He was chair of the Kawartha Field Naturalists Altberg Reserve stewardship committee for 17 years during a period of exceptional growth and development of its prime wildlife habitat. In 2006, the city of Kawartha Lakes named him Environmental Hero of the Year. Orr is a lifelong advocate for nature and naturalist who inspires others with his love of the wild.

### **The Steve Hounsell Greenway Award – *Algonquin to Adirondacks Conservation Association***

*Awarded to an individual, group or organization who add a vital linking piece to the Greenway, preserve a core area, or build public support for preserving a natural heritage system, or lay the groundwork for a substantial legislative advance for greenway planning, or fight to restore a watershed, or any other action that contributes to the Greenway vision.*

The Algonquin to Adirondacks Conservation Association (A2A) secured a significant “pinch point” on the Canadian side of the St. Lawrence River through a multi-year project designed to maintain ecological connectivity through a greenway from Algonquin Park, Ontario to Adirondack State Park, New York. The Ganonoque River and the 19 lakes in its watershed were extensively mapped and surveyed by partners working under the A2A leadership. Moreover, private property owners are being recruited by A2A as volunteer stewards and taught how to naturalize their shorelines.

### **Richards Education Award – *Dan Bissonette***

*Awarded to an individual who has succeeded in helping people understand the natural world and become enthusiastic supporters of conservation and environmental protection.*

Dan Bissonette has been instrumental in conducting public education and outreach in Windsor and Essex County about native plant gardening and landscaping through his extensive professional and volunteer work. A dedicated environmentalist, he runs an educational organization, the Naturalized Habitat Network and its Seeds of Hope initiative. Through his books, fact sheets, educational curriculum, courses and public outreach, Bissonette has attracted considerable local media attention as he spreads the word about the importance of planting native species.

### **W.E. Saunders Natural History Award – *Cameron Smith***

*Awarded to an individual who has achieved a significant goal related to an aspect of natural history or natural science research, raising public awareness of natural history, demonstrating local leadership, saving a natural area, or generating conservation funds or publications.*

Author and environmental columnist, Cameron Smith was the driving force behind the establishment of Ontario Nature's Lost Bay Nature Reserve, near Ganonoque. For close to a decade afterwards, he tirelessly campaigned and fundraised to add the western half of this ecologically-important property. He was instrumental in adding 59 hectares to the reserve in October 2009. The reserve now encompasses more than 100 hectares of Canadian Shield and provincially significant wetlands, home to several endangered species. The reserve contributes to the Algonquin to Adirondacks corridor and lies within the new Frontenac Arch-Thousand Islands Biosphere Reserve.

### **J. R. Dymond Public Service Award – *Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment***

*Awarded to an individual or group who shows distinguished public service that resulted in exceptional environmental achievement.*

Canadian Association for Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) led a successful campaign to ban lawn and garden pesticides across Ontario. While several organizations participated in the campaign, CAPE developed the strategy and messaging that resulted in the passage of Ontario's Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act. As of April 2009, the act banned the cosmetic use and sale of some 250 toxic lawn products. The campaign was a model of smart, science-based advocacy conducted fearlessly against a well-funded industry lobby group. It led to the enactment of some of the strongest health-protection pesticide legislation in North America.

**Ian Shenstone Fraser Memorial Award – Cootes to Escarpment Parks System, and its Steering Committee**

*Awarded to an individual or group who produce innovative work of exceptional quality that makes a contribution to the maintenance, protection, or preservation of the Niagara Escarpment.*

Cootes to Escarpment Parks System, and its steering committee, was able to rally all major partners with lands in the 1,500-hectare proposed park pass resolutions that signalled their support. Officially launched in February 2010, this globally significant urban park would stretch from Hamilton Harbour, through Cootes Paradise, to a 10-kilometre section of the Niagara Escarpment. It is the only piece of the escarpment that is not separated from Lake Ontario's wetlands by a 400-series highway. The system will provide an important layer of protection and enhancement for existing green areas, including the Niagara Escarpment. Although much work remains to be done to turn the vision into reality, the steering committee has already established a critical mass of supporters and attracted major media support.

**Margaret and Carl Nunn Memorial Camp Scholarship – Megan Wilcox**

*Awarded to youth who are 10-14 years of age, who display promise and interest in natural history interpretation or education and have the potential to take an increased leadership role in club programs.*

Megan Wilcox has shown a strong willingness to help and positive attitude in her volunteer work with Kids for Turtles in Norfolk County and Backus Camps. She has proven herself to be a capable young leader and has already demonstrated a keen interest in teaching other kids about the environment. She will be attending Camp Kawartha's four-day nature camp at the end of the summer "because," she says, "I love learning pretty much about anything."

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For more information on the recipients, to arrange an interview, or for photos of the presentations, please contact:

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