

Notes for Isthmus Bay Property Owners Ass.

Sat. July 18 2009

Bruce Trail Conservancy

Intro – In our 10 years of living on the Peninsula we have come to better understand and appreciate the natural treasure we share here. A recent study by the Nature Conservancy of Canada concluded to everyone's surprise that our Peninsula has the greatest level of biodiversity of any region in the province – a fact that we absolutely must not take for granted.

Interestingly, to me anyway, most people who travel through the peninsula have little idea of the natural wonder they are missing by not getting out of their car. In fact, to appreciate the nature of the Peninsula, one must see it on foot or possibly by boat and share it with those who live here in an unhurried quiet stay. One must open one's ears and eyes and share the sights, sounds, smells and even the magnificent dark skies at night. All this is not lost on those of us who are associated with the Bruce Trail Conservancy.

Mission Statement:

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is a charitable organization committed to establishing a conservation corridor containing a public footpath along the Niagara Escarpment, in order to protect its natural ecosystems and to promote environmentally responsible public access to this UNESCO World Biosphere reserve.

Our Mission Statement has been revised recently to recognize the important role we play in preserving the escarpment corridor as the natural treasure that it is and is designated as such by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve. Of course the terms only have meaning if we take local action to implement them. The pioneers of the trail had those exact same conservation objectives in mind when they

began the work 40 years ago. So the trail is in a conservation corridor and its function is many-fold but it does guarantee public access for low impact foot-borne appreciation of the unique environment along the escarpment.

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is not a government agency. It is a private land trust, no more responsible to government than say Nature Conservancy of Canada or World Wildlife Fund or Ducks Unlimited.

Nor are we just a hiking club, as the following facts well illustrate.

In 2007 The Bruce Trail Association changed its name to Conservancy to better reflect the broader land stewardship role of the organization

At present the BTC has over 8600 members and a board of directors of 20 members which meets six times a year

The BTC also has a professional staff of 12 (some part time) based in Hamilton, but it is overwhelmingly a volunteer organization with over 1000 active volunteers.

As the mission statement says, our goal is to secure the natural conservation corridor on which the trail resides. We have secured approximately 48% of this goal leaving 52% of the optimum trail route unsecured and vulnerable to development of all sorts. We presently maintain over 885 km of main trail and over 400 km of side trails. We also manage over 6400 acres of Escarpment lands as part of our land stewardship program making the BTC one of the largest private land trusts in Ontario.

While we do receive grants from government and private sources, over half of our \$2.9 million revenue is from memberships and

donations. Of that income over half was spent last year on active land securement.

The Peninsula Bruce Trail Club is one of nine associated clubs making up the BTC. We have the most trail, the most land area to steward and one of the smallest numbers of members at under 600 with approximately 150 active volunteers – trail captains, land stewards, executive members and general workers. Our estimate is that our volunteers logged approximately 3500 hours of work in the last year.

We enjoy the work and find it a privilege to serve such a worthwhile organization. We are active hikers as well but the evidence shows that we serve a world- wide clientele. One survey of 1000 hikers that MNR placed on the Gun Point trail last summer revealed that of those who filled in the form only 5% were actually local residents. And actually more respondents replied that they came from outside Ontario than locals. These visitors not only hike on our trail but they stay in hotels, motels and B&Bs, they shop in the stores and eat meals in the restaurants as well.

Indeed we feel that the Bruce Trail is probably the number one tourist attraction in the Peninsula and obviously plays a very important role in the culture, the environment and the economy of our community.