

Unveiling of signage for the Bluebird Ranch, recently purchased by the Couchiching Conservancy



Balancing act: Conservation meets extraction

By Marta Blocki

The purchase of Bluebird Ranch by the Couchiching Conservancy is an example of how diverse groups can work together to create lasting environmental value



Following a lengthy acquisition process, the 206-acre Bluebird Ranch in Carden Township officially came under the wing of the Couchiching Conservancy land trust organization on May 27.

The occasion was marked by an unveiling ceremony attended by various project supporters, including members of the Ontario Stone, Sand & Gravel Association (OSSGA); Margaret Kelch, Ontario chair of the Nature Conservancy of Canada; as well as ornithologists and representatives from the Carden Field Naturalists, to name just a few.

Many thanks!

The Couchiching Conservancy would like to thank the following contributors for their generous support:

- The Weaver clan volunteers for building the sign;
- Ron Jenkins for use of his bluebirds photo;
- Bill and Faye Duggan for their efforts in the acquisition process;
- The Natural Areas Conservation Program, a Nature Conservancy of Canada - Government of Canada partnership, which provided nearly half of the funding;
- The Carden Alvar Acquisition Fund, created by Lou and Judy Probst;
- The McLean Foundation;
- Members of the Toronto Ornithological Club, led by John and Margaret Catto;
- Carden member companies of OSSGA, including:
 - Lafarge Canada Inc.
 - Ferma Aggregates Inc.
 - The Miller Group
 - R.W. Tomlinson Ltd.
 - K.J. Beamish Construction Ltd.
 - Bot Aggregates Ltd.
 - Halton Crushed Stone Limited
 - Vicdom Sand & Gravel (Ontario) Limited;
- Participants in the 2011 Carden Challenge; and
- Many generous private donors.

“(The event) is being celebrated as a great example of how diverse groups can work together to accomplish something of lasting value,” said Ron Reid, Carden program coordinator for the Couchiching Conservancy, at the ceremony.

Last summer, OSSGA co-sponsored a dinner and silent auction with the Couchiching Conservancy at the Carden Recreation Centre in Sebright, Ontario, netting over \$12,000 towards the Bluebird Ranch purchase. The fundraiser hosted 85 guests, including nearly all of the 11 aggregate companies with operations on the Carden Plain.

“Couchiching Conservancy has been a driving force in co-operative discussions between our industry and local residents who have struggled to find the balance between conservation and aggregate extraction,” said OSSGA CEO Moreen Miller. “The success of this project suggests that conservation and extraction can co-exist and find a sustainable balance,” added Miller.

Based in Orillia, Ontario, the non-profit, non-government organization has been active in the Carden Plain for over 20 years, working to protect

environmentally sensitive lands through innovative partnerships. Since 1993, the Couchiching Conservancy has helped protect 10,000 acres of special natural lands – some of which have included rare global ecosystems. Bluebird Ranch is the most recent acquisition among 23 other properties.

Located in Carden Township at the foot of Wylie Road, Bluebird Ranch will link directly to Windmill Ranch to the north, creating a large area of protected land. The grassland section of the property provides an excellent habitat for birds such as Meadowlarks, Bobolinks and Bluebirds. Other portions of the property contain critical habitat for endangered species, such as the Loggerhead Shrike and Henslow’s Sparrow. Future plans for the site include a solar-powered water system for grazing cattle, restoration of patches of grassland and fence building. ●

For more information on the Couchiching Conservancy, please visit www.couchiching-conserv.ca.

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