

Land donation of scrub land helps offset clear-cutting

Ten family members who owned the property agreed to transfer it under a federal program providing tax incentives for donation of ecologically significant land

BY TOM VAN DUSEN

Ontario Farmer

Crysler – Donation of scrub farmland for green space conservation and habitat enhancement is an important way to help compensate for the loss of forest to agricultural expansion and residential development.

That was one of the main messages delivered July 26 during official opening of a 99-acre preserve in North Stormont Township west of Chrysler at the corner of Concession 10-11 and Reveler Road. It was turned over by a local family to South Nation Conservation to be maintained in perpetuity.

Now open to the public, the managed acreage bears the name of the family in question: Reveler Conservation Area. Ten family members who owned the property agreed to transfer it under a federal program providing tax incentives for donation of

ecologically significant land.

As about 75 people looked on – including Revelers of all ages – a ribbon welcoming the gift was cut by Ian Reveler and SNC chairman Bill Smirle, a Morewood dairy farmer. After a tour of the new conservation area, participants enjoyed a barbecue and slices of commemorative cake.

Smirle pointed out that if at least one third of the land in a region isn't treed, crops don't fare as well. He agreed with North Stormont Deputy Mayor Bill McGimpsey and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Counties Warden Eric Duncan that land donation is a good way for farmers and other rural property owners to give back to the common good.

"I'd never seen a butternut tree before I took a walk here," McGimpsey revealed.

Ian Reveler observed that his Uncle Ray who purchased the parcel in 1972 had a philosophy



Ian Reveler (in yellow shirt) and Bill Smirle do the honours at Reveler Conservation Area ribbon cutting

when it came to cutting trees: "Leave that one for the woodpeckers," he would often say.

The land in question never was much good for farming. Over most of it, the topsoil is thin, with limestone jutting through in many locations. Since first homesteaded by the Empey family in 1854, the land has been

used for pasturing in low flat spots, apple trees on the rocky rises and maple sugaring in upland woods.

Going by the stockpiles of picked stone, settlers tried hard to make a go of it on the site. Now it'll be the domain of bird lovers and naturalists.

Among attractions in the park

that has a trail circulating through it are 10 acres of mature maple, grasslands providing habitat for 100 species of birds, a small pond, hedgerows and rare tree including butternut, rock elm and slippery elm. Among the bird population are endangered eastern meadowlarks, bobolinks and loggerhead shrikes.

SNC property supervisor Jim Hendry said hunting and motorized vehicles are prohibited from the Reveler site, one of a dozen conservation areas in the authority's 4,200 square-km watershed.

Commenting on the large turnout for the ribbon cutting, SNC General Manager Dennis O'Grady said area residents are increasingly taking an interest in acquisitions that enhance their natural surroundings. In all, SNC owns 11,100 acres of mostly forested land.

As a member of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance, SNC is authorized to accept property donations through Environment Canada's Ecological Gift Program that applied in the Reveler case.