

# OUR FOREST



forestsontario.ca

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SPRING 2024



**Forging a path toward  
a wilderness that  
welcomes everyone**

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**Conference panel predicts  
severe fire season in 2024**

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# A Message from our CEO

## Annual Conference and the Ontario Envirothon give reason for hope

At the end of February, Forests Ontario held its Annual Conference – my first as CEO but far from my first with the organization and in our sector – and I'm thrilled to say that it was a great success. The entire Forests Ontario staff worked tirelessly leading up to the event and with the help of our conference committee, things went wonderfully, right from the pre-conference Evening Social to the final session focusing on last year's unprecedented forest fires.

For me personally, things felt special right from the start as Elder Garry Sault from Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation began the day with an Indigenous ceremony and song that grounded attendees. We then welcomed a diverse panel of up-and-coming young students and professionals to discuss their experiences breaking into the forest community. The mix of older and younger voices speaking openly and honestly really set a good tone to kick things off.

After that, we welcomed our own Director of Restoration Programs, Val Deziel, to the stage to moderate a panel on the Government of Canada's 2 Billion Trees program, which saw former Forests Ontario CEO Rob Keen back at the conference he had led for so many years. Later in the day, Rob won the Forests Ontario award (see page 18 for more).

Thanks to our incredible array of expert speakers, the rest of the day was informative, engaging, and inspiring, featuring a visit from the Honourable Graydon Smith, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and MPP for Parry Sound-Muskoka, and punctuated by an incredible photo and video journey by Parks Canada Fire Crew Leader Jabee Wu.

I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to every attendee, speaker, moderator, exhibitor, and sponsor who all combined to make our Annual Conference such a memorable one.

Speaking of memories, this year marks the 30th anniversary of Ontario Envirothon, one of my first responsibilities when I joined Forests Ontario as an Education Coordinator back in 2009. Forests Ontario is proud to be the lead agency of Ontario Envirothon – a unique, environmentally themed academic competition that immerses high school students in hands-on learning, discovery, and building their science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills.

Ontario Envirothon has reached over 10,000 students since 1994, a success that the competition owes to the efforts of the program's educators, regional coordinators, volunteers, judges, and sponsors, including lead sponsor Maple Leaves Forever, whose support means the world to us and all the students that benefit from the program.

With our Annual Conference behind us and 2024 Ontario Envirothon competitions taking place this spring (with a focus on biodiversity and its importance to ecosystems), it's now time to enjoy the season and focus on the challenges of getting millions of trees planted.

Please join us on our social media channels and sign up for our TreeLine e-newsletter to keep up with the latest news this planting and environmental education season will bring. I hope you have a safe and wonderful spring.



**Jess Kaknevicus**

CEO, Forests Ontario and Forest Recovery Canada



Forests Ontario CEO Jess Kaknevicus receiving her 2021 Susan Wiecek Forestry Education Award (which she had never received in person due to the pandemic) from Forests Ontario Chair Malcolm Cockwell at the 2024 Annual Conference. Photo by Forests Ontario

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**On the cover:** Rose-Breasted Grosbeak photographed on a Sugar Maple tree in spring in Creemore, Ontario by Bob Hyland. See the story about Bob Hyland on page 8.

# OUR FOREST

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Across the land we now call Canada, we live and work on the traditional, treaty and unceded territories that are part of Turtle Island, which is still home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Forests Ontario's office is located in the City of Barrie, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg people, which include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. We also acknowledge the Wendat Nation (Huron), who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century.

## BECOME A MEMBER

Become a member of Forests Ontario for \$50 a year, and receive **Our Forest** in your mailbox. To join, go to [forestsontario.ca](https://forestsontario.ca).

## STAY IN TOUCH

We do more than just plant trees, we grow forests for greener and healthier communities. Follow Forests Ontario on social media for the latest news and daily updates on all our programs.



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# Leading Ground and Air Hauler Supports Tree Planting

Thompson's commitment to Forests Ontario continues to grow

BY BROOKE MCCLELLAND

Forests Ontario is very fortunate to have support from several amazing small businesses, including Thompson Emergency Freight Systems Ltd. Thompson offers Canada's largest on-demand expedite fleet, logistical ground coverage across North America as well as IATA-certified air charter and cargo services worldwide.

A supporter since 2015, Thompson has been running its **BOOK A LOAD...PLANT A TREE** program for nearly 10 years, donating to Forests Ontario for every delivery booked through its online portal. Originally created to commemorate Thompson's 30th anniversary, the program has continued through the years because "it is very well received by our customers," says Mark Bortolotti, Marketing & Sales Director at Thompson. "For many Thompson customers, our support of tree planting is a reason why they book with us. Our planet's environment is a fragile balance, which everyone has a responsibility to protect." He added: "Thompson's ground and air transportation services produce a heavy carbon footprint, and as such, the planting of trees helps offset the negative environmental impact."

Not only has Thompson contributed to the planting of over 100,000 native trees in communities across the province, but the company's employees have also participated in



Forests Ontario's Brooke McClelland (centre) receiving a donation in October 2019 from Paul Ellsworth (left) and Mark Bortolotti (right) with Thompson Emergency Freight Systems Ltd.

Community Tree Planting events, and their enthusiasm for getting more trees in the ground carries over into how they run their business.

We thank Thompson, and all our other corporate partners, for their continued support of Forests Ontario!

## New Group Links Tree Nurseries Across Canada

Rob Keen is founding Executive Director

BY DON HUFF



Rob Keen, Executive Director of the Canadian Tree Nursery Association, addresses the Forests Ontario Annual Conference, February 2024. Photo by Forests Ontario

Rob Keen took the stage at Forests Ontario's recent Annual Conference in a new role. The former CEO of Forests Ontario is the founding Executive Director of the Canadian Tree Nursery Association (CTNA). At the conference, Keen emphasized the need for long-term planning and sustainable funding for tree planting in Canada.

Keen acknowledged Forests Ontario's support during the CTNA's gestation phase. He noted that the group's current membership of 54 nurseries collectively grow over 630 million seedlings yearly.

The CTNA aims to expand nursery capacity, encourage collaboration, foster innovation, and promote sustainable practices in tree nurseries and forestry. Keen highlighted the CTNA's relevance in responding to last year's intense fire season, emphasizing the members' crucial role in meeting the growing demand for seedlings.

Keen also praised the Government of Canada's 2 Billion Trees program and emphasized the significance of collaborative efforts with provinces to ensure a sustainable forest ecosystem for future generations.

# Fresh Faces

## Forests Ontario welcomes four directors to its Board

BY JOANA CARREIRA

Forests Ontario has welcomed four new members to our Board of Directors: Carol Walker Hart, Dan Marinigh, Will Martin, and Kim Rapagna.

### Carol Walker Hart

Carol Walker Hart (RPF) specializes in Urban Forestry and has spent 33 years managing a diverse portfolio of projects for the City of Toronto. Carol is a former President of the Ontario Forestry Association and has also been an active member of the Ontario Professional Foresters Association.



### Dan Marinigh

Dan Marinigh built a 34-year career with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, starting as a field forester and eventually becoming a Branch Director. In 2014, Dan was appointed as the Chief Administrative Officer/Secretary-Treasurer at the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority, and he retired from the Authority in 2022.



### Will Martin

Will Martin is an Executive Vice President for the American Forest Foundation (AFF), leading strategic innovations to drive meaningful conservation impact through the empowerment of family forest owners. Will focuses on developing the business models and implementation strategies for AFF's work in bridging public and private solutions to conservation challenges.



### Kim Rapagna

Kim Rapagna has over 15 years of experience in corporate responsibility and sustainability, having worked for major multinational companies such as Target Canada, TD Bank, Mondelēz International and Kraft Foods. Prior to joining the corporate sector, Kim worked in the non-profit sector with the World Wildlife Fund and the Canadian Human Rights Foundation.

We are excited to welcome these four new members to our Board and can't wait to work together towards long-term sustainability and success. Forests Ontario would like to thank outgoing Directors Gail Beggs, Bob Hyland, David Sisam, and Riet Verheggen for their service and commitment to forest restoration, stewardship, awareness, and education.



## In Memoriam

**Glenn Roy McLeod, 1952-2024** (aka the “Tree Guy” from Rugby, Ontario) began his career in the 1970s studying Forestry at Sir Sandford Fleming College and obtained his forestry degree from Lakehead University that later led to his Ontario Professional Foresters Association designation. After graduating, he worked with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry as the Assistant Superintendent of the Provincial Tree Nursery in Orono, Ontario, rising to the role of Superintendent and staying with the nursery until it was closed. During his tenure at the nursery, he and fellow staff grew millions of tree seedlings each year that contributed to the re-greening of South-Central Ontario.

Glenn went on to become the Stewardship Coordinator for Northumberland County, until his retirement years later. Never idle, Glenn joined Forests Ontario as a Field Advisor, and later formed a small business partnership with three colleagues called Northumberland Tree Planters. Along with his colleagues Art Marvin, Bill Newell, and

Laird Nelson, Glenn was recognized at Forests Ontario’s 2023 Annual Conference, winning the *Most Valuable Planter Award* for contributions to restoring ecosystem health through tree planting initiatives. Over the years, Glenn visited hundreds of private landowners, promoting the values of planting trees and helping to plan planting projects resulting in the planting of over a million trees in the county and surrounding areas.

Throughout his career, Glenn immersed himself in community and family activities. He ran workshops, school tree plants and participated in numerous other activities, many of which promoted an environmental conscience.

Glenn passed away at Northumberland Hills Hospital at the age of 71 on February 10, 2024. It’s safe to say that you don’t have to travel too far in Northumberland to see tree plantings that Glenn had a hand in establishing. We are grateful for his time with Forests Ontario and pay tribute to his dedication and the impact his work continues to have in communities across Southern Ontario.

Right: Paul Leet Aird



Above: Glenn Roy McLeod grew and planted millions of trees throughout his career. Photo by Donna Marvin





**Paul Leet Aird, 1930–2024** had many diverse talents, interests, and passions. A prolific writer about nature and conservation, he authored scientific and popular papers, reports and commentaries on forests and nature conservation issues. A graduate of McGill University with a B.Sc. Agr. in 1952, Paul went on to Cornell University receiving a M.S. in 1953, and PhD in 1957.

Paul was also a Registered Professional Forester in both Ontario and Québec and worked as a Forest Research Scientist in the Québec forest industry from 1952 to 1974. From 1974 to his retirement in 1996, he was Professor of Forest Conservation Policy at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Forestry and continued to be involved with the university for several years afterwards as a Professor Emeritus.

A well-recognized expert on the natural history and distribution of the Kirtland's Warbler - a bird species regulated as endangered in Ontario - Paul searched suitable habitat (young Jack Pine stands) in the wilds of Ontario and Québec for the presence of the species for 40 years until 2016.

Paul had been a long-time supporter of Forests Ontario, and often donated to our Annual Conference auctions, such as a unique piece or art or a favourite book that he had enjoyed, wanting to share that joy with others. He loved being outside in nature, and sharing those experiences with family, friends and students inspired his writing of fables, stories, and poems.

Paul passed away at the age of 94 on February 18, 2024. We are thankful for his support of Forests Ontario and pay tribute to his immense role in educating the next generation of environmental stewards.

## Marvelous and Magnificent Maples

Learn the trees' importance and how to tell them apart

BY ALLISON HANDS

Native maple trees are a significant cultural and ecological feature in many Canadian forests and landscapes. Standing tall in our communities and displaying a vibrant array of colours in the autumn, these trees are also emblematic of Canada as a nation - a stylized maple leaf dominates the Canadian flag, is Canada's arboreal emblem, and appears on both Canada's and Ontario's Coat of Arms. But did you know that there are seven species of native maple found in Ontario?

Each native maple species has unique cultural values and identification features. With many varieties of species and natural range, maples make for an excellent introduction to tree identification as featured in our newest lesson plan *Marvelous and Magnificent Maples*.

Developed with support from Maple Leaves Forever, the lesson plan has students learn about the values and threats facing maples through group discussion, exploration and art.

To download copies of the new lesson plan at no cost, please visit [forestsontario.ca/education](https://forestsontario.ca/education).

Striped maple in Brighton, Ontario. Photo by Ian Whyte





## Member Spotlight

Bob Hyland, former professor of medicine, loves wildlife photography

BY BROOKE MCCLELLAND

Bob Hyland's dedication to Forests Ontario is not only admirable but can also be seen through the many ways he is involved in our organization: as a member, a donor, a 50 Million Tree Program participant, and, until just recently, as a member of the Board of Directors.

Growing up in Toronto, Hyland always had a love for nature and the outdoors. Forty-four years ago, that affinity led him to purchase a 50-acre property in Creemore, Ontario.

**To date as a family, they have planted about 10,000 trees including pine, spruce and tamarack.**

"We were young," he recalls. "It didn't cost very much. That was long before this became Yuppieville."

Hyland and his wife, Cathie, began soon after the purchase to plant trees on their property. "I dug, my wife put the tree in the hole, and my children would stomp on it," Bob adds. To date as a family, they have planted about 10,000 trees including pine, spruce and tamarack. They have since planted another 5,400 trees with the help of the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority and Forests Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program.

Hyland worked as a professor of medicine at the University of Toronto and as Physician-in-Chief at both the Wellesley Hospital and St. Michael's Hospital, both in the heart of Toronto. These roles gave him a sound understanding of the benefits of nature and the importance of education.

"Trees capture carbon from the atmosphere; they produce oxygen, preserve and prevent extinction of all sorts of species, and help control floods," Hyland says. "Within cities, urban forests provide a canopy, and enable people to get out into nature, the unequivocal benefits of which can be felt psychologically and physically."

Hyland notes that nature has been shown to be therapeutic to those suffering from anxiety, depression, and asthma, and that Forests Ontario's education programs provide kids with experiences they otherwise wouldn't get.

"We are trying to make a better world for our children, and our grandchildren," Hyland says. "If Forests Ontario wasn't around and didn't do this, it would be worrisome."

Hyland's love affair with wildlife photography began when he retired as Chief of Medicine at St. Michael's Hospital in 2010, but still worked part-time with the hospital seeing patients and in various administrative roles until fully retiring in 2018. On a safari in Tanzania with his wife Cathie, Hyland recalls putting his new camera to good use, "I had so much fun taking photos of cheetahs and lions and elephants."

Since that magical adventure, Hyland has spent many happy hours photographing the wildlife on his farm. The photos on these pages, taken in and around his Creemore property, are just a small sample of his work.

Among other pastimes, he looks after the two horses that live on the farm, Big Bob and Sisi.

"They are two lovely horses, absolutely in love with each other," Hyland says. "The neighbourhood children, two or three years old, come to ride on Big Bob."

Forests Ontario would like to thank Bob Hyland and all our members and donors for their valued support. Your contribution continues to make our urban and rural communities healthier through the creation, preservation and maintenance of forests and grasslands.

Bob Hyland poses with Cleao, his Portuguese Water Dog, in front of a stand of spruce trees. "We got the spruce trees from Midhurst and planted them as a family in 1981 when our daughter, Meaghen, was eight and our son, Geordie, was five," Hyland reminisces. "Sort of an assembly line with the two children, my wife Cathie and I." Photo by Cathie Hyland







From top clockwise: A honeybee collects pollen and nectar from a Hollyhocks flower. Milkweed pod opens - milkweed is a key food source for Monarch butterflies. American Red Squirrel. Blue Jay in early Spring. All photos taken by Bob Hyland on or near his property in Mulmur Township.





# Uniting Community for Ravine Forest Restoration

Toronto French School students collect seeds for Forests Ontario

BY THE CLIMATE ACTION TEAM RAVINE POD

*The Toronto French School in north Toronto backs onto a ravine to which teachers bring their students for hands-on instruction about the natural world. Last year, the local Red Oak trees produced bountiful acorns. Forests Ontario signed an agreement with the school to buy 20 litres of acorns, gathered by the students, to supply its Tree Seed Diversity Program with the City of Toronto. The high school students filed this report on the acorn gathering and their broader goals for sustainable development.*

The invitations are sent, and the tables set. Twenty-five Toronto French School (TFS) students stand ready to welcome over 120 people in Lawrence Park, Toronto for a heartwarming evening focused on ravine forest restoration. As students, parents, educators, neighbours and local politicians all gather in the TFS foyer, their passion and their love of nature is clear. This is the Ravine Restoration Dinner, and everyone has arrived to hear about how we can better appreciate and restore our local forest environment.

Any great journey starts with a plan. Ours involves connecting with experts to find authentic learning opportunities that have community impact. This approach saw us connect with Forest Ecologist and certified Managed Forest Plan Approver and Seed Collector Eric Davies, a full

year prior to the ravine dinner. With Eric as our guide and featured speaker, we spoke about the importance of stewardship for all members of our community.

Whether it be looking into the history of invasive species, connecting with experts like Forests Ontario, or establishing tree-planting projects, the collaboration of student groups and community leaders alike allows a collective effort around a stewardship plan. The dinner is a major milestone in building this momentum. Pull up to our different tables to hear the ongoing conversations!

## ***Beyond the fence, into the ravine***

We have been learning in and from our ravine from a young age as part of our classes and outdoor activities. From measuring the height of trees and marveling at the xylophagous (wood boring) properties of the *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail), to identifying historical uses of plants, or learning of the invasive Norway Maple, our passion was ignited and has spread rapidly to fuel other projects. One of the most significant actions we have taken this year was to create a ravine stewardship team to collect acorns from those same trees that we played around as kids, and to deliver those acorns to Forests Ontario for the Toronto Tree Seed Diversity Program.

Toronto French School students follow the path into the ravine behind their school in north Toronto. Photo by Peter Kuitenbrouwer







Above: Toronto French School students use bamboo poles to shake branches of red oak trees to dislodge acorns for collection, fall 2023. Photo by Eric Davies

At left: Toronto French School students sort red oak acorns in the ravine behind their school. Photo by Léo Vêteau, TFS

### ***Beyond the trunk, into the roots***

The TFS Ravine Stewardship Team has been busy mapping the ravine, determining its biodiversity. The most recent efforts saw over 200 students participating in seed collection with Eric. We collected acorns from old growth trees at Glendon College, one of our neighbours, and also helped sort the seeds through the “float test” — floaters didn’t have enough nutrients to grow. It blossomed into a whole school project. Many hands from grades 4 to 12 made light work, contributing 20 litres to the Toronto Tree Seed Diversity Program. We are the first school to participate in the program and we are excited to see how this might flourish into a strengthened partnership in the coming years. We also have an eye to raising our own saplings and are working with Somerville Nursery to grow an additional 50 litres of these seeds into oak trees for ecosystem restoration!

“Getting youth involved in this kind of work is critical. Down the road they can say, ‘I was part of that tree.’”

Mark McDermid, Seed and Stock Specialist at Forests Ontario, comments: “The seedlings we provide to the City of Toronto must be 100 per cent native species, with 50 per cent from local sources. It’s nice to have local sources from trees that have been there for hundreds of years. Getting youth involved in this kind of work is critical. Down the road they can say, ‘I was part of that tree.’ That’s a pretty awesome thing for a young person to see and take part in creating.”

### ***Beyond the table, into the kitchen***

To extend our climate action to our food and kitchen operations, we exchanged ideas with the school chefs to develop a menu that featured local, sustainable ingredients, all sourced from Ontario and in season for this dinner. After taking a bite of Matthew Lam’s sweet potato chickpea patty, a TFS parent said her daughter would love food like this in the school cafeteria.

As the evening winds down, we reflect on our achievements as a community: we have improved the resilience of our surroundings, one acorn and one sustainable meal at a time. We all plan to continue to care for our environment as we move on to higher education and out into the beautiful, fragile world.

*The following TFS students wrote this article: Kate Atkinson, Caitlin Evran, Sylvie Harris, Lauren Hui, Matthew Lam, Elise Lassonde, Felix Li, Janaya Lo, Sadie Musselman, Lara Tadic, Molly Zeng, Anthony Zhang.*



# Meet Demiesha Dennis, Founder of Brown Girl Outdoor World

She is forging a path toward a wilderness that welcomes everyone

BY JACINTA GORDON



Demiesha Dennis is founder and Director of Brown Girl Outdoor World (BGOW), a Toronto-based organization that works to support outdoor access for women of colour, and to make the outdoors safer, more accessible, and intentionally inclusive. Activities include hiking, fishing, ice-climbing, conservation work, and skiing.

Demiesha first discovered the outdoors as she walked behind her grandmother in Jamaica, helping to plant crops for her family to eat. In moving to Canada, the allure of camping, and later fly fishing, drew Demiesha outside. She began to notice how the stories of the outdoors often excluded the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized individuals. To help these groups to feel welcome outside, she created BGOW.

I recently caught up with Demiesha to learn how she developed BGOW and the impact it's had on the community. Her story and ideas are inspirational. As both a friend and fan of Demiesha, I feel fortunate to be able to help share her story.

**Jacinta Gordon** **J**: Tell me about your journey to the outdoor world.

**Demiesha Dennis** **D**: In Jamaica where I grew up, being outside in nature was part of my everyday existence. The “outdoors” wasn’t a concept. In the summertime, the order of the day was breakfast, and then outside, often tracing in my grandmother’s footsteps as she planted seeds and pointed out birds. Other days I roamed the neighbourhood finding or foraging (as we’d say in Canada) fruits that grew

on trees in random fields. Some afternoons were spent with kids from down the street playing games that didn’t have names but somehow followed an order and included elements of nature. I grew up in a rural mining community and our imagination turned places such as open pits into gold mines which also became purveyors of crystals.

Then when I immigrated to Canada, I felt as though I was not welcome in nature. I wanted to step outside of the story that said my Canadian experience had to fit a certain mould. I looked for the version of Canada that existed in commercials. The Canada of mountains and turquoise waters beckoned me. I sought to find what I grew to know as “The Outdoors”.

**J** Tell us about your first Canadian experiences camping and fishing.

**D** For my first camping trip, I grabbed a tent from a retailer that offered no help or information and spent a weekend camping with friends who were just happy to have me there. My tent flooded because of rainfall. The experience created vivid memories that I still have today. For the first time, I felt very out of place. I saw no other Black people the entire weekend and that felt foreign. But that’s nothing new. I have been fishing for over 20 years and other than the opportunities I have created through BGOW, I have only seen two other Black women fishing here in Ontario. Realizations like this motivate me to delve deeper into the stories of those who do not fit the outdoor narrative that perpetuates privilege and exclusivity.



**J You love fly fishing. How does that tie into your conservation work with BGOW?**

**D** If you hang around me, you'll probably hear me say, "Know, Love, Protect." When I fish, I remember that fish love beautiful places and so do we. We must ensure these places remain beautiful and healthy for flora and fauna. In the past, we've helped conservation authorities with invasive species removal events. The event included an Intro to Fly Fishing element that allowed folks to connect with a local fishery and practice catch-and-release fishing.

**J Why are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of colour) stories in the outdoors community being seldom told?**

**D** The industry was designed to not see us. How can you hear or see a story when there is no desire to see the storyteller? Telling our stories would mean that folks recognize race, challenge their biases, and question why they never saw us in the outdoor space in the first place. Today, those who want to tell their stories are becoming their own writers and agents, ensuring that the stories of their generation don't go untold.

**J What does this connection to the outdoors do for your mental health?**

**D** Nature holds a certain silence that rejuvenates me, and drowns out city noises that compete for brain space. Thinking back to the pandemic when folks lacked human connection, many resorted to nature to connect with self and others. It's an immediate emotional booster. Any escape into nature, even locally, is a great source of peace.

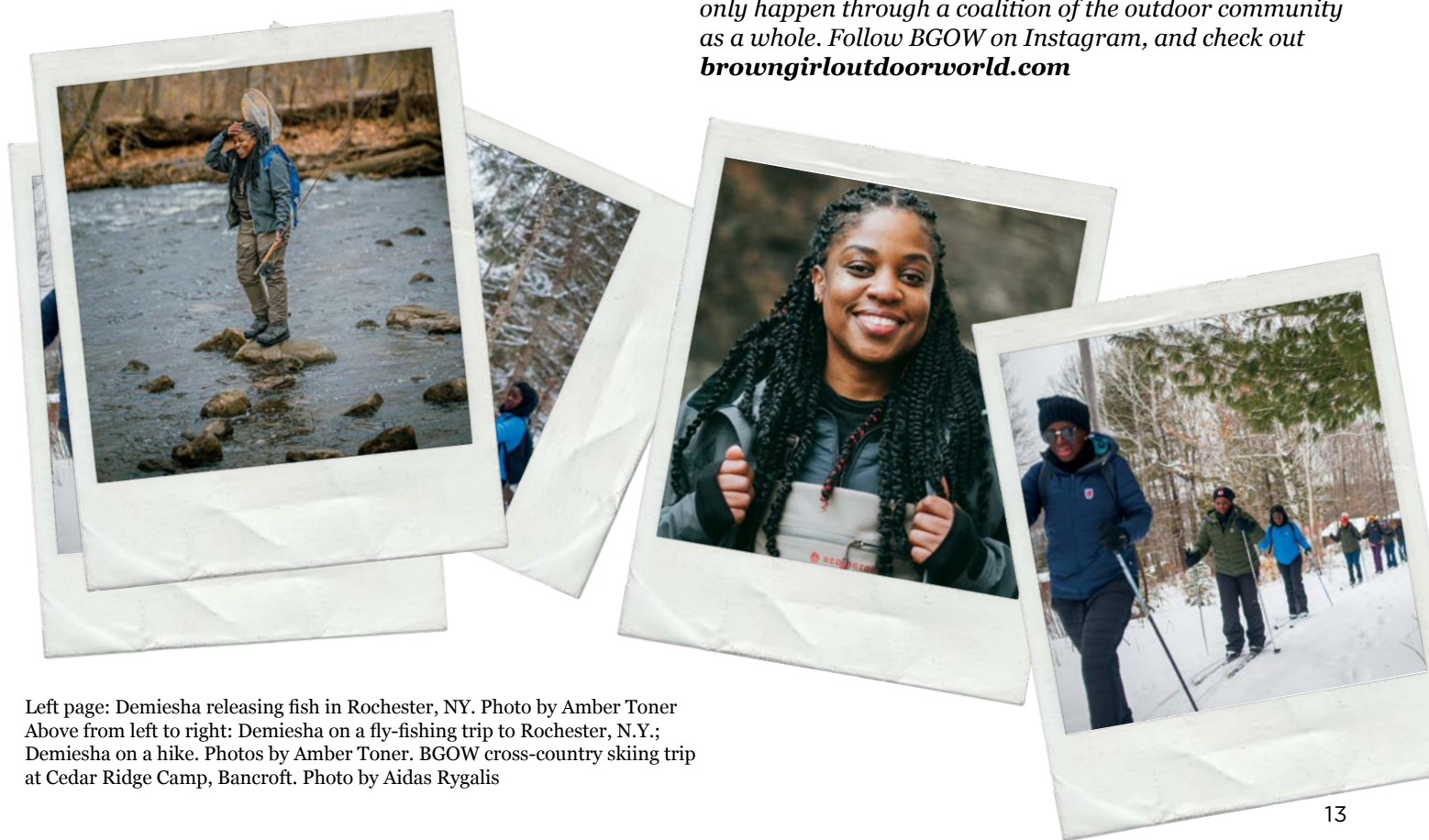
**J What are your dreams for the future of BGOW?**

**D** Creating inclusive outdoors doesn't have to look the same way for everyone. We want to inspire curiosity. Our dream is to take that inspired curiosity and turn it into a collective of people who find belonging through our programming and who will then in turn work to create change. We see land ownership and equipment libraries that allow for entry into the outdoors, unencumbered by a lack of knowledge, and access to necessary equipment and transportation. BGOW is now home, not just for me, but for a wide range of folks who see the value in belonging, safer spaces, and challenging the idea of who gets to take up space in the outdoors.

**J Tell us a bit about BGOW programming and how to get involved.**

**D** We seek to connect with folks outside of the opportunities available for a "youth" audience. We seek to educate the educators: those who have children and who have never had the chance to access the outdoors. Our partners all understand the need to cater for these activities, and we teach them to not infantilize the learning of our participants. We encourage folks who fall into the demographics of who we serve to join our mailing list, engage with our social media, and invite others to join the community. Instead of speaking for us, invite us into the room so we can be a part of the conversation. Offer to cover the cost of an activity for a participant; we have been running a fundraiser to purchase transportation. Even the smallest donation can make a difference.

*Demiesha Dennis and Brown Girl Outdoor World are paving the way to a more inclusive and decolonized outdoor community. True inclusivity in the outdoors can only happen through a coalition of the outdoor community as a whole. Follow BGOW on Instagram, and check out [browngirloutdoorworld.com](http://browngirloutdoorworld.com)*



Left page: Demiesha releasing fish in Rochester, NY. Photo by Amber Toner  
Above from left to right: Demiesha on a fly-fishing trip to Rochester, N.Y.;  
Demiesha on a hike. Photos by Amber Toner. BGOW cross-country skiing trip  
at Cedar Ridge Camp, Bancroft. Photo by Aidas Rygalis



Thank you to our attendees, speakers  
and sponsors for making our 2024  
Annual Conference a great success!





# Learning From the Next Generation

## Young presenters kick off Forests Ontario's Annual Conference

BY ANDI DARELL ALHAKIM

*In late February, more than 300 people attended Forests Ontario's 2024 Annual Conference to connect and discuss how the forest community can address the sector's most pressing challenges, including climate change, increased fires, and invasive species.*

The first session at our Annual Conference, "The Power of Youth: Breaking Barriers and Carving New Pathways," resonated with youth attendees and seasoned professionals alike. Our young speakers shared much-needed perspectives

on empowering the next generation of forestry professionals in a meaningful way. They highlighted the need to make equitable spaces and urged the forest sector to welcome Indigenous, Black, and Racialized youth, voices, and knowledge in the forest community, leading to a promising future for everyone.

Read what they had to say on being part of this important conversation.

"It was incredible. I was nervous going up on the stage but felt comfortable quickly, now I know I can be a moderator! While this isn't my first Forests Ontario conference – I spoke at the virtual conference in 2019 – this is still an exciting, new experience. Everyone here is so down to earth that it's so much easier to start conversations. **I truly hope the concrete actions we discussed can make an impact.**"

- **Catherine Langille**, Indigenous Relations Coordinator, Sustainable Forestry Initiative/Project Learning Tree Canada.



"I've spoken at career fairs and community events before and have been to conferences – but not as a speaker! As one of the youngest in the room, **I'm excited to share a different perspective through my First Nations background.** I know that people will approach us after our session, and that's good. It's easier for me to reciprocate than to initiate. Everyone is easier to talk to than I expected."

- **Jasey Cheesaquay**, Crew Leader in Training, Outland Youth Employment Program.



"This is my first Forests Ontario Annual Conference and my first time speaking to such a crowd in general! I was honestly nervous approaching this session but found it helpful to get to know my fellow panelists beforehand and sense the good energy between us. **The audience seems to share our excitement for the cause and are all open to learning, so that should be celebrated!**"

- **Gwekaanmad Pitawanakwat**, Graduate, Indigenous Environmental Science & Studies, Trent University.



"It's always great to have a platform like this, especially at the start of conference! I'm grateful that the four of us have crossed paths through this session. **I'll always remember each of our stories, perspectives, takeaways, and meaningful conversations.** I hope the audience members got the same impression from us and wrote down all the action items we discussed together!"

- **Vanessa Nhan**, RPF, Forest Resource Analyst, Silvacom.



At Forests Ontario, we look forward to continuing this dialogue and integrating key learnings to ensure the forest community moves towards greater inclusivity.

# Warnings of a Second Cruel Summer

Conference panel predicts tough fire season in 2024

BY PETER KUITENBROUWER



Top: Fire engulfs Wood Buffalo National Park, summer 2023. Photo by Jabee Wu

Above: Jabee Wu, front row, third from left, with firefighting crew at Wood Buffalo National Park. Photo courtesy of Jabee Wu

Left: Parks Canada firefighting equipment battles blaze in Wood Buffalo National Park. Photo by Jabee Wu

Right page: Jabee Wu with firefighting equipment in Wood Buffalo National Park, which straddles northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Photo courtesy of Jabee Wu



Last summer, when raging wildfires arrived near the home of Jabee Wu in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories (NWT), everybody evacuated the town. Everybody, that is, except for Wu, a Fire Crew Leader for Parks Canada, and her team. They stayed to brave smoke and heat to fight the fire in nearby Wood Buffalo National Park.

“We are all pretty trauma-bonded,” Wu said in February, in a talk titled “Spotlight: A Cruel Summer” at Forests Ontario’s Annual Conference in Vaughan. Wu, who grew up in the Toronto area, traded the big city for a rather remote posting. Wood Buffalo National Park, which straddles NWT and northern Alberta, is the second-largest national park on earth and, at 44,000 square kilometres, is bigger than Switzerland. It is also home to Canada’s largest herd of wild bison.

Wu told conference participants about smoke inhalation, and of the battle her crew faced to suppress the conflagration. She showed photographs and videos she took from a helicopter, and satellite images of the fire as it spread across the landscape. Among other challenges, she is pregnant, and fears the impact the fires may have had on her unborn child. “The levels of cortisol in my system from being in a high-stress environment are worrisome,” she said. “My hope is that all you smart people can do something to address climate change, to help us out.”

Forest fires were a dominant theme at Forests Ontario’s Annual Conference. Speakers reminded the crowd that last summer’s fires burned 18 million hectares of forest across the country, eclipsing any previous wildfire record. The fires forced the evacuation of 200,000 people across Canada. More troubling, the warm winter of 2023-24, with much less than average precipitation, may have set the conditions for another severe wildfire season in 2024, the speakers warned.

“I have been talking to people in Thunder Bay. There is no snow,” Rob Keen, Executive Director of the Canadian Tree Nursery Association, told the crowd. “There is a huge, huge concern that the fire season this year will be the same as last year – or worse than last year.”

Keen took the opportunity to tell the gathering that governments need to spend money to replant areas that fires have devastated.

“You can’t just walk away from these areas that have been burned,” Keen said. “You are not going to replant these sites? We’re losing the game folks!”

Phil Green, CEO of First Resource Management Group Inc., a Mississauga-based technology services firm that works to sustain the world’s forests, told the assembled that Canada urgently needs to embrace new technology that can help to assess wildfire risk. He said the insurance industry is particularly concerned about the risk, and is financing research. But Green said he already knows that the dangers of fire this summer are severe.

“We are facing a very bad year,” Green said. “Normally in New Brunswick, we have six-to-eight feet of snow on the ground. This year, we have four inches.”

The conference heard that, in order to get a handle on wildfires, we need to stop seeing all fire as bad, and embrace fire as a tool to manage the landscape as was common before European settlement.

Joshua Mitchell planted trees in Northern British Columbia for two years and spent six years as a wildlands firefighter. Mitchell, a Métis from Alberta, said Canada can learn from the First Peoples, who since time immemorial used controlled burns to manage the forest.

“Many Indigenous communities had fire keepers or fire

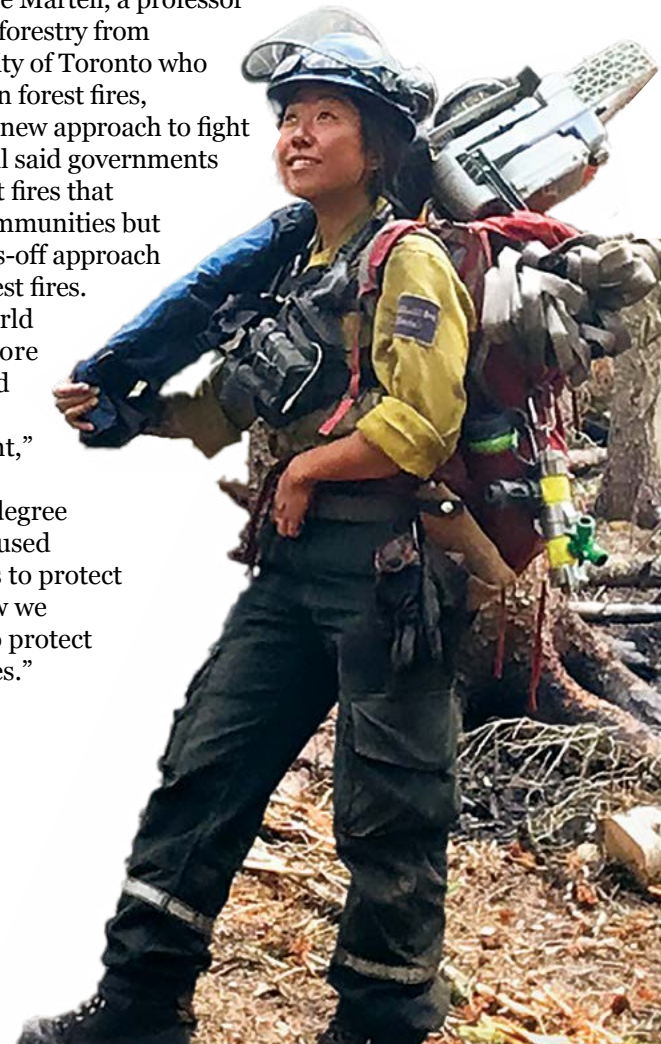
“...in order to get a handle on wildfires, we need to stop seeing all fire as bad, and embrace fire as a tool to manage the landscape...”

guardians who knew where to burn, when to burn, and for how long,” Mitchell told attendees. “In the Indigenous view, each element has its place, including fire.”

Mitchell mentioned British Columbia’s Bushfire Act of 1874, which restricted the cultural burning commonplace in the province before then. To gain control of fire we must return to those approaches, he said, and to understand “what is good fire.”

In a separate session on forest history, Dave Martell, a professor emeritus of forestry from the University of Toronto who specializes in forest fires, suggested a new approach to fight fires. Martell said governments need to fight fires that threaten communities but take a hands-off approach to other forest fires.

“The world is getting more complicated for fire management,” Martell said. “It’s a 180-degree switch. We used to fight fires to protect forests. Now we fight fires to protect communities.”





# Congratulations, Winners

## Awards recognize contributions to forests and nature

BY MATTHEW BROWN

At Forests Ontario's Annual Conference on February 28, important contributors to the forest community and the environment were recognized with an awards ceremony. We would like to congratulate the following award recipients:

### The Forests Ontario Award

| **Rob Keen**

Rob is from Huntsville, Ontario and is a Registered Professional Forester who for over 20 years led Forests Ontario to being the success it is today. His dedication and commitment to forest restoration and stewardship led to the planting of over 40 million trees across Canada, in addition to successful initiatives like It Takes A Forest. Today, he is the Executive Director for the Canadian Tree Nursery Association.



Forests Ontario CEO Jess Kaknevicius (left) presents the Forests Ontario Award to Rob Keen.

### The Forest Stewardship Award

| **Martin Litchfield**

Martin is a retired Registered Professional Forester from Guelph, Ontario with senior management experience in both the forest industry and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Martin plays a key role with Trees for Guelph, a volunteer group that has planted over 7,500 native trees and shrubs. He also helped deliver Forests Ontario's first Take Root program in Guelph in 2023, that saw the distribution of over 1,700 trees to local residents for backyard planting.



Forests Ontario National Program Manager Peter Moddle (left) presents the Forest Stewardship Award to Martin Litchfield.

### The Green Legacy Award

| **Enbridge Gas**

Enbridge Gas has been serving customers for over 175 years. Enbridge is committed to protecting our environment, making the transition to a clean energy future through net-zero emissions targets and investments in innovative low-carbon energy solutions. Since 2014, Enbridge Gas has donated more than \$230,000 to Forests Ontario.



Forests Ontario Director of Business Development Kim Sellers (right), with Camille Bruni of Enbridge Gas, recipient of The Green Legacy Award.

### The Forest Stewardship Award

| **Ken Elliott**

Ken is a Registered Professional Forester from Ennismore, Ontario who retired in 2022 after a distinguished 36-year career with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Ken has authored or co-authored over 30 journal articles, has been an instructor for the Ontario Tree Marking Certification program since 1999, and has now embarked on a new career as Senior Forester for FSmith Consulting Inc.



Ken Elliott accepts the Forest Stewardship Award.

### The Susan Wiecek Forestry Education Award

| **Mark Sherman**

Mark is a multi-year forest education volunteer with Forests Ontario from Toronto, Ontario. He has committed time to both Forests Ontario's Forestry in the Classroom program – delivering more than 13 presentations to reach more than 330 youth and educators in the past two years – as well as the Ontario Envirothon.



Forests Ontario Education Manager Allison Hands (right) presents the Susan Wiecek Forestry Education Award to Mark Sherman.

### The Most Valuable Planter Award

| **Brent Attwell**

Brent is from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and began tree planting as a summer student in 1996 for the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. In 2014, Brent's consulting business, REGEN Natural Resources Ltd., planted the first 50 Million Tree Program trees in Northern Ontario. Since that time, he and his company have planted nearly 500,000 trees.



Forests Ontario Field Advisor Peter Gagnon (left) and Brent Attwell, who received The Most Valuable Planter Award.



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# First Aid for Mother Nature

Sandy Agnew has written more than 200 forest management plans

BY PETER KUITENBROUWER

Sandy Agnew grew up on his family's 200-acre farm at the corner of Jane Street and Steeles Avenue - both were dirt roads at the time and Toronto was far away to the south. His house got indoor plumbing when Agnew was six.

"As a kid, I would spend all my time wandering around the fields," Agnew says.

Today, the city has grown to surround Agnew's birthplace. Thirty-two acres of the family farm does survive, choked by Greater Toronto on all sides. A satellite view shows an oasis of green in an ocean of pavement. Jane and Steeles are six lanes each; one of Canada's busiest intersections, Highway 400 and Highway 407, is visible - and certainly audible - from the front door of the old farmhouse.

The family of Agnew's mother, the Dalziels, had lived at Jane and Steeles since 1828, but that was when it was the countryside. Agnew is not a fan of the big city; he could not stay. As Toronto encroached on the ancestral homestead, he moved north. In 1997, Agnew and his partner, Lynne Melnyk, bought 47 acres of fields and forests in Elmvale, about 140 kilometres north of Toronto in the Township of Oro-Medonte, near the shore of Lake Huron.

Perhaps it is Agnew's own life experience - bearing witness to the rapacious pace at which highways, tract housing, parking lots, and shopping malls encroach on farms and forests - that has turned him into such a passionate defender of ecological sustainability. Agnew had a first career in waste management, and later attended Niagara College for a degree in Ecosystem Restoration. Today, he runs a business called Ecomedic, whose slogan is "First Aid for Mother Nature". His goal: to protect the environment, in particular, the waterways in his part of Ontario, which are vital for drinking water and treasured for recreation and for fish.





To help sustain the countryside, Agnew writes forest plans under the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP) for anyone within an hour's drive of his house. A landowner with four hectares of forest is eligible to enroll in the provincial program, known by its acronym MFTIP. This program teaches landowners to care for their forest and reduces tax by 75 per cent on the forested portion of a property. Agnew welcomes the opportunity to spread a message of care for the environment.

"One thing I like about the MFTIP program is that it is targeted at private landowners," Agnew says. "There is a lack of education with a lot of landowners moving out to the country – they don't know how to manage their property. Landowners need help. They need education."

A longtime Forests Ontario Member, Agnew is here to help. He estimates that he has written 200 forest management plans. It's an impressive effort, and people have noticed. Before Christmas, the Huronia chapter of the Ontario Woodlot Association gave Agnew its 43<sup>rd</sup> annual White Pine Award for his stewardship work. In a news release, the Huronia chapter said, "the White Pine Award is given to a deserving person to recognize and celebrate their dedication to good forestry practices."

Agnew teaches landowners how to control invasive plants such as garlic mustard, dog-strangling vine, and glossy buckthorn, which threaten the health of many forests in southern Ontario. "Buckthorn, people don't even know how to recognize it," he says. "Buckthorn will take over. It will crowd everything else out." Agnew teaches people to pull out garlic mustard, and to cut buckthorn.

"I am trying to raise awareness generally with landowners of environmental issues," Agnew says. "All environmental areas and wetlands are under threat from development."

Agnew is especially protective of waterways. Runoff of phosphorous from agriculture can create algae blooms, which clog lakes and prevent people from swimming in them or drinking the water. Maintaining forest cover reduces runoff of phosphorous.

"We have a lot of fresh water up here," he says. "If we don't protect the watershed then our water bodies will get polluted and eventually unusable."

Agnew gains inspiration from his clients, who he says are eager to learn about how they can improve the health of their forest and nurture the wider environment that we all share.

"I enjoy my work," Agnew says. "People generally have the same attitude toward nature that I do. They want to nurture nature and protect it and make sure habitat is sustainable. Sustainability is critical."



Top left page: Sandy Agnew, age 5, poses on the ruins of an old horse barn, in about 1950, on the farm where he grew up. The farm, which now belongs to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, sits at the corner of Jane Street and Steeles Avenue, in a community known at the time as Edgeley. Agnew's ancestors, the Dalziel family, bought the farm in 1828. Photo by John Glynn

Bottom left page: Sandy Agnew at an area on his farm in Elmvale, Ontario, planted with native grass seed by the Couchiching Conservancy in 2020, with funding through Grasslands Ontario (a division of Forests Ontario), to restore the prairie features. Photo by Lynne Melnyk

Right: Agnew poses with White Pine trees in 2021. Photo courtesy of Sandy Agnew



# Ontario's Grasslands

Where the bobolink and meadowlark sing

BY HEATHER LANG

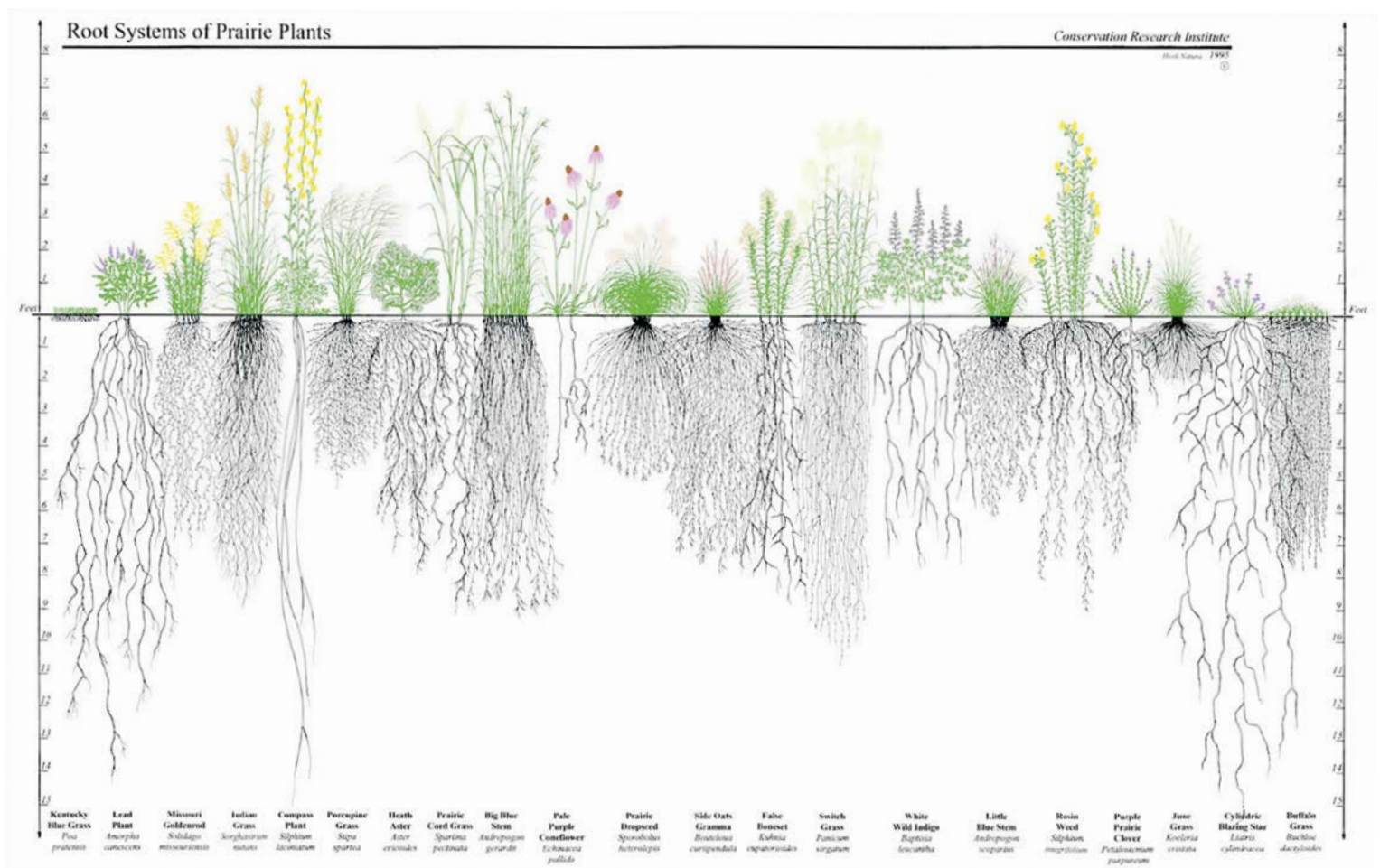
Imagine sitting in an abandoned meadow where grasses like Canada wild rye and fescues grow alongside chicory, ox-eye daisies, alfalfa, and clover. The meadowlarks and bobolinks are singing. Honeybees and butterflies seek the sweet nectar of native wildflowers, including milkweed and asters. Dragonflies flit among the grasses. A lone kestrel soars overhead.

Native meadows like these – also known as tallgrass prairies – once made up a significant part of southern Ontario's landscape (roughly 10 per cent) due to settlers turning old-growth forests into farmland. Their efforts inadvertently created the perfect landscape for deer, grassland birds, and a host of other wildlife species. But today, less than three per cent remains because of urban sprawl and agricultural practices that favour growing corn, soybean, and winter wheat. According to Shannon Stephens, a biologist with one of Grassland Ontario's local delivery partners, about 98 per cent of southern Ontario's native grasslands have been lost in recent decades.

The loss of the grasslands has impacted the insects, pollinators, and birds that depend on them for their survival – including the Eastern Meadowlark and Northern Bobolink.

In 2010, the bobolink was listed as a threatened species in Ontario and Canada; the meadowlark followed in 2011. According to the Bobolink Round Table, a group charged with exploring solutions to halting the decline of these birds, Ontario alone has 13 per cent of the world's bobolink population and 70 per cent of the country's meadowlark population.

Given these numbers, Ontario has an oversized role in protecting these birds. And conserving these species means restoring native grasslands. "With the loss of grasslands comes the loss of biodiversity, including grassland-nesting birds such as Eastern Meadowlarks and Northern Bobolinks," Michael Runtz, a natural history instructor at Carleton University and author of numerous books celebrating Ontario's natural heritage, says. "The only way to bring back their populations is to preserve and enhance grassland habitat."







“Here is the beautiful Bobolink,” Bob Hyland recalls of this photo taken by him in 2023. “It is also a ground nester, and its nest tends to be out in the middle of hayfields. Unfortunately, the hay is harvested before babies hatch. This is a huge justification for protected grasslands. These birds are becoming very rare.”

## Grasslands Ontario

The tallgrass prairie is one of North America’s most diverse and productive types of ecosystems – and Ontario’s most threatened. “Canada’s native grasslands are one of the rarest habitats in the world. Providing habitat for insects and our grassland bird species who are suffering steep declines from this habitat loss is critical,” Val Deziel, Director of Restoration Programs for Forests Ontario, says.

Grasslands Ontario works with local delivery partners like landowners, conservation groups, non-government organizations and all levels of government to create, enhance, or maintain this precious ecosystem.

Since 2019, Grasslands Ontario has lent its support to over 80 grasslands stewardship projects representing a total of 1,400 hectares.

One of these projects is in Middlesex County near London, Ontario. Ed Bolton invited ALUS Middlesex, which worked with Grasslands Ontario to transform 40 hectares of his farmland, previously a corn field to back to its natural state. “I’ve always loved birds and you need the prairie grass for the bobolinks and all these grasslands birds. I was 13 years old the last time I saw a bobolink in southwestern Ontario. And now the bobolinks are here. It’s a sanctuary and I love it,” he says.

The 19th-century American naturalist Henry David Thoreau would be pleased at these restoration efforts. Of the bobolink’s song, he wrote: “It is as if he touched his harp within a vase of liquid melody, and when he lifted it out, the notes fell like bubbles from the trembling strings.”

The song of the meadowlark is no less beautiful. The bobolink and meadowlark are part of our rural landscape. Thanks to the work of Grasslands Ontario and its local delivery partners, more and more people are able to enjoy the music.

Besides providing habitat for these threatened birds, native grasslands help sequester carbon, methane, and nitrogen – thus mitigating the impacts of climate change. Grasslands offer diverse habitat for pollinator species, which in turn contribute to more productive agricultural lands around them. Native grasslands also help protect our water resources by improving water infiltration and slowing runoff, and reducing nutrient, pesticide, and bacteria loading into nearby waterways. All this is due to their deep root systems.

“When you look at the grasses, you’re seeing the tip of the iceberg. A lot of the growth is actually underground in the root systems, which can extend probably twice the size of the grasses themselves,” explains Peter Moddle, National Programs Manager at Forests Ontario / Forest Recovery Canada and formerly Program Coordinator of ALUS Middlesex, a Grassland Ontario local delivery partner.

In contrast to trees where most of the root system is in the top foot, native grasses have root systems that go down two to four metres. This deep root system helps make the soil more porous, which helps rainfall penetrate deeper into the soil, which ultimately helps prevent flooding and preserve groundwater.

*Heather Lang is a contract writer and editor involved in restoring grasslands in a municipal park owned by the Township of McNab-Braeside, near Ottawa.*





Above: The Dads of Muskoka Disc Golf course in Bracebridge traverses a healthy mixed forest. Photo by Matthew Brown

Right: Matthew Brown of Forests Ontario competes at the Dads of Muskoka Disc Golf Course in Bracebridge, Ontario. Photo by Jen Hodge





## Disc Golf

A great way to get out and enjoy nature

BY MATTHEW BROWN

Four years ago, I don't think I knew what disc golf (affectionately known as "frolf" within my circle of friends) was. Even though London, Ontario, where I live, has a great disc course, it is tucked away off pathways I'd never visited and in woods I'd never had the chance to walk through.

Like many people, I discovered disc golf at the start of the pandemic because it provided me a way to get outside and have some fun while keeping a safe distance from others. Unlike traditional golf (jokingly referred to as "ball golf" by disc golfers), disc golf is usually free, so there is no clubhouse to check in at or lineups to be seen, making disc golf the perfect pandemic sport.

While it started out as a way to avoid people, it wasn't long before I started meeting members of the local disc golf community. They were always happy to give advice to beginners like me, whether it was about how to curve shots around corners or how to navigate an unfamiliar course. Not only was the local community friendly, but the sport itself brought me closer with my friends and gave me the opportunity to explore forests and places I'd never have seen otherwise.

So, what is disc golf? Instead of the clubs and golf balls of traditional golf, you have discs; and instead of a little hole in the ground, you've got a large metal basket in which you need to land your disc. In traditional golf, different clubs are designed for different distances and the same is true of disc golf. Most beginners tend to start with three discs: a driver (designed for distance but less so for accuracy), a mid-range or approach disc (designed for accuracy), and a putter (designed for stable, accurate flight).

As players get more confident, there are countless different discs to explore. Some are designed to turn to the right or to the left (depending on whether you are a right- or left-handed player) and some can go great distances,

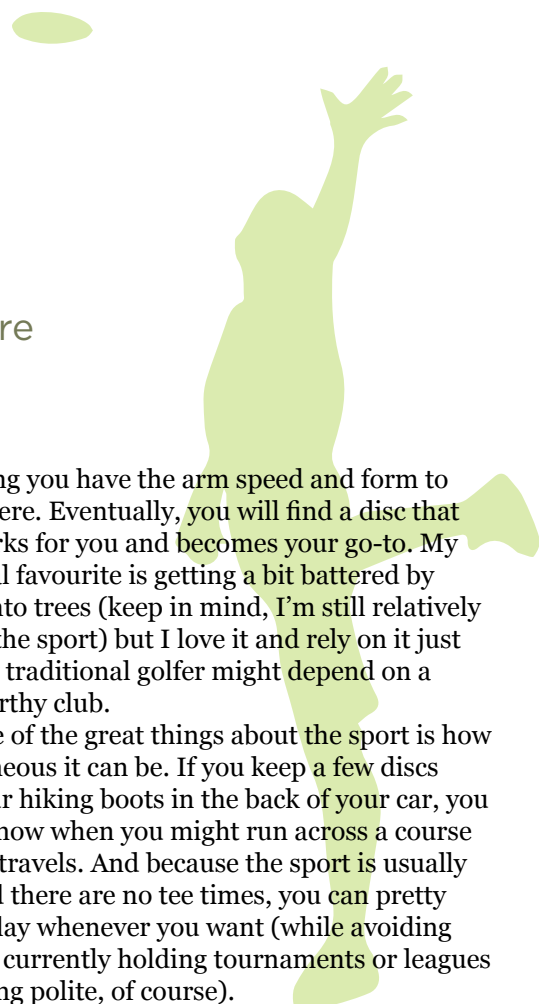
assuming you have the arm speed and form to get it there. Eventually, you will find a disc that just works for you and becomes your go-to. My personal favourite is getting a bit battered by flying into trees (keep in mind, I'm still relatively new to the sport) but I love it and rely on it just like any traditional golfer might depend on a trustworthy club.

One of the great things about the sport is how spontaneous it can be. If you keep a few discs and your hiking boots in the back of your car, you never know when you might run across a course in your travels. And because the sport is usually free and there are no tee times, you can pretty much play whenever you want (while avoiding courses currently holding tournaments or leagues and being polite, of course).

In the past four years, I've learned that my local course in London, River's Edge Disc Golf, is one of the better courses around. The players from the local London Disc Golf Association help to maintain the course (along with City of London crews who maintain the park it is in). The course offers a nice mix of open fairways along the river's edge, as well as tighter fairways tucked into the woods.

But the course I think about most is the Dads of Muskoka Disc Golf Course at Verena Acres in Bracebridge. Situated at the Peake Fields Recreational Complex, the property itself is a mix of forested, rolling hills with steep river valleys. It features an incredible mix of narrow fairways lined by pines, with soft pine needles underfoot, and some spectacular hills and elevation changes that make it both great fun and equally daunting. Regardless of how I play at that course, I always leave happy and in awe of the natural beauty of the area.

To find a disc golf course near you, no matter where you are in the world, visit [udisc.com](https://www.udisc.com).





# Growing Green Leaders since 1994

## Ontario Envirothon celebrates 30 years

BY ALLISON HANDS

It is a milestone year for the Ontario Envirothon as the program is celebrating its 30th anniversary. For the past three decades, Forests Ontario and our partners have been proud to support thousands of students as they learn about the challenges facing our environment through connections to field training, environmental sector mentors, and like-minded peers. The Ontario Envirothon program

encourages greater appreciation of our natural world among students and provides foundational STEM skills and knowledge to pursue post-secondary studies and careers in the environmental sector.

But you don't have to take our word for it! A few of our past participants, educators, volunteers, judges, and sponsors have shared their Ontario Envirothon experience with us.



"I was an Envirothon participant in 1995. The activities and lessons I received during my participation helped to inspire me to pursue a career in conservation and nature connection and also led me to explore the natural world both here in Canada and in many other countries."

- **Ben Teskey**, alumnus, now Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program Coordinator at the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.



"Listening to and interacting with experts opened my eyes to the many different paths I could follow career-wise, or even in terms of hobbies and passions. Ultimately, Envirothon showed me and my classmates that working in the environmental field is fun and exciting and involves new things every day."

- **Emily Febry**, alumnus (2012 & 2013) & volunteer, now Communication & Education Technician at St. Clair Conservation Authority and host of Ranger Em on Rogers TV.





"I believe that programs like the Envirothon are critical in a digital age to demonstrate all the various environmental fields that are available for students to explore as they continue with their education. The Envirothon made it possible for me to think about pursuing a career in an environmental field so that I could maintain my interest in environmental issues and proceed to make a difference on our ecological landscapes."

– **Kelly Jamieson** (1998 & 1999), alumnus, volunteer, now Senior Project Manager, Restoration Projects at Toronto Region Conservation Authority.



"Ontario Envirothon kept me grounded during high school and gave me a reason to stay connected to nature. It matters that our youth learn about environmental issues, but it also matters that they simply learn about our soil, water, and local flora and fauna. The knowledge I gained during my years participating in Envirothon led me toward a Master's Degree in Environmental Education and Communication and a life following those values."

– **Emily Gray**, alumnus and volunteer, now a grade school teacher.



"In 2019, I participated in the regional Envirothon competition held near Stratford, Ontario. As a member of a four-person team representing the juniors from our high school's Science Club, I had a hands-on wildlife learning experience. We learned so much, and the teamwork skills I developed continue to benefit me to this day."

– **Kashish Dhanoo**, alumnus, now student at Western University in Electrical Engineering.



"I want to say a special thank you to Envirothon. You have helped shape my teaching career in Ontario. From my first opportunity to have a team in 1999, I was hooked on this program! I am so fortunate to have been on writing teams for provincial events and sit in the soil pit at provincials as a judge, read rain-soaked provincial papers in the evening while the kids enjoyed a break and Envirothon officials didn't get any sleep!"

– **Bob Roddie**, Envirothon coach and volunteer, now Lead Educator at WWest (UBC-Okanagan).



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