



# MINESING REEDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF MINESING WETLANDS

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## Marsh Monitoring in the Minesing Wetlands

The Minesing Marsh Monitoring Program began back in 2007, largely in response to the need for monitoring noted in the “hot off the press” Minesing Wetlands Biological Inventory (Bowles, Laverty and Featherstone, 2007). Since then, a portion of the Willow Creek marsh has been monitored using Bird Studies Canada’s Marsh Monitoring Protocol. Monitoring occurs twice annually in late spring and early summer, using six stations on the same route each time. I am the lead “monitor” but have enjoyed the company of many NVCA staff, students and volunteers over the years.



We put in to the Nottawasaga River at the end of McNabb Road - by 3:30 latest so that we can be at our upstream Willow Creek marsh site shortly after 6 pm. The journey upriver begins in a narrow portion of the wetlands – warbling vireos and eastern wood-pewee often herald our entrance to the wetland. The R2D2 burble of bobolink can occasionally be heard from the surrounding fields.

Further upriver, we enter the core of the Minesing silver maple swamp. The fiddleheads of early spring are now fully-formed ostrich ferns and the river levees are clearly visible as high areas separating the river from the low silver maple swamps beyond. Core forest birds such as northern waterthrush, scarlet tanager and black-and-white warbler join a variety of forest edge species through this section. Occasionally, the uptilting warble of the threatened cerulean warbler can be heard.

Entering Willow Creek, I am always struck by the contrast of water colour as

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## KEEPING YOU INFORMED

👉 At 8:00 a.m. on Saturday June 21st, 6 FOMW met to tackle the Mad River once again. The purpose was to clear the accumulation of logs gathered since the major work was done last summer to cut through the river’s log jams. Standing on the silt in the river was challenging, as it forever wanted to hold onto one’s rubber boots, but the bugs were not too bad and the weather was great! It is a beautiful paddle, and more so now.

👉 Also on June 21st, Friends were represented at MEC Paddlefest Barrie on Centennial Beach Park from 9am—5pm, sharing a booth with the NVCA. The Nottawasaga River Paddling Routes map, which is hot off the press, was distributed at no charge and is available to anyone who would like one.

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For more information on the Minesing Wetlands or for Friends of Minesing Wetlands membership information, please contact the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority  
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*please visit minesingwetlands.ca*



### Your Directors

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## Improving the Nine Mile Portage Trail

The Nine Mile Portage Trail is an historical travel route that dates back to Native American use. Use by British military and early European settlers followed, and it currently acts as a recreation and cultural trail. The Nine Mile Portage is not reaching its full potential as a recreational and educational trail because of its current condition. Frieda Baldwin, a trails advocate involved with the Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association, recently hiked the Nine Mile Portage Trail, and saw first hand the difficulty in orienteering the full length of the trail. "The state of the route signage does not make this historic hike easily accessible, and until improvements are made I cannot recommend this hike to anyone," commented Baldwin.



A group of concerned citizens have joined together to address improving the trail's accessibility and promote its cultural and historic values. The Nine Mile Portage Committee is seeking donations and funding that will improve the public's enjoyment and safety of this heritage trail.

Jim Paterson of the Trans Canada Trail Ontario Association says that connecting the Nine Mile Portage Trail to the Trans Canada Trail system is an important link in the trail's network. The Trans Canada Trail fully supports the Nine Mile Portage Committee's efforts in revitalizing the route and working towards the designation of the Nine Mile Portage Trail as part of the national trail network. Funding is available from TCT to assist in planned improvements to the trail.

The Nine Mile Portage Trail east terminus is along the shores of Kempenfelt Bay at Fred Grant Squire in what is now the City of Barrie. The trail makes its way across Sunnidale Road into Springwater Township, and up and over the Algonquin Bluff to the trails' west terminus, at Historic Fort Willow. The British military built this depot as a link between York and Georgian Bay during their efforts in the War of 1812.



The Nine Mile Portage Committee's goal is to contribute to the growing education and outreach that comes from the Nine Mile Portage trail, the War of 1812 and Native American history tied to this route. Please contact the Friends of Minesing Wetlands to learn more about the Nine Mile Portage Trail or to contribute to the efforts of the Nine Mile Portage Committee .

*Submitted by Sean Rootham, Vice-Chair, FOMW*

## Celebrate Rural Living

On Sunday June 22nd, FOMW participated in the Celebrate Rural Living event in Midhurst. Special guest and keynote speaker was Margaret Atwood, and the event was emceed by AM 740's Dale Goldhawk. There was a First Nation Drumming Circle, Farmer's Market, local Artisans, a BBQ and more. Friends wanted to be present to provide an educational opportunity to those in attendance to learn more about what projects we have been working on, and about the ecological integrity of the very special Minesing Wetlands.



## Workshop on Wetlands

The NVCA and Ducks Unlimited are hosting an exciting, informative and free Workshop on Wetlands at Tiffin Centre on July 3rd from 6:30—9:00pm. Participants will learn about restoration techniques, shoreline enhancement methods, and other projects that improve habitat for fish and wildlife. A new grant program that may cover 50-90% of qualifying project costs will be introduced. To register for this free workshop, please contact Sean Rootham at 705-721-4444 or [s\\_rootham@ducks.ca](mailto:s_rootham@ducks.ca)

## Spring Canoe Trips 2014

Friends hosted two spring canoe trips this year: May 3rd and May 17th. While the weather was cold and grey for the first trip, spirits were high as 16 participants navigated the back-and-forth passage of flood waters in the “Willow Narrows.” This part of the trip always involves a bit of ducking under tree limbs for fun. The tour met the Nottawasaga River and paddlers made their way out at Ronald Road. People still wore smiles despite some cold rain near the end of the trip. Even while it is cold and rainy, it is hard to not appreciate the beauty of the wetlands.



Photo courtesy of William Sherwood

The second tour saw 17 participants (as pictured) make their way through lower water levels on a warmer and dryer day. Highlights for many of us included stopping to pick Fiddleheads and seeing the porcupine up in the trees, nibbling away. For the last few kilometres of the trip, the winds had picked up which wreaked havoc on some tired novice paddlers. Luckily our ‘sweep’ Lucy had the patience and compassion to keep them going to the very end, which was much appreciated. It was quite a long trip for anyone to begin canoe adventuring on, so hat’s off to the newbies!

*Submitted by Naomi Saunders, Chair, FOMW*

## Marsh Monitoring in the Minesing Wetlands

*Continued from page 1*

the two systems converge – the Nottawasaga River looking like a “double-double” while Willow Creek runs clear and “tea-stained.” The relatively narrow Willow Creek takes on a jungle appearance as we paddle through a tunnel of silver maple and hackberry festooned with a variety of vines.

Soon, the forest edge drops away and we enter the Willow Creek marsh. It takes almost an hour to paddle upstream through the meanders of the Willow Creek to the first station and the marsh always offers a taste of things to come – black-crowned herons roosting on dead snags, American bittern warming up for their evening performance and flocks of mallards roaming the early evening sky.

The marsh monitoring itself never gets old. Calls from five marsh birds – least bittern, sora, Virginia rail, common moorhen and pie-billed grebe – are played. These birds are territorial and will respond to taped calls. Sora and Virginia rail are the most common marsh birds and we often get multiple birds at each station. Least bittern and common moorhen are less common but occasionally pleasant surprise. A number of other marsh birds including red-winged blackbird, marsh wren, Wilson’s snipe, swamp sparrow, tree swallow and a variety of herons are also observed and recorded. The haunting call of the sandhill crane has become more common over the years. Occasionally Minesing’s resident bald eagles are observed foraging over the marsh.

Too soon, sunset arrives and we head back downstream along the Nottawasaga River. Generally, this an easy trip replete with evening bird song (veery and wood thrush) – occasionally it becomes a running battle with hordes of mosquitoes and deerflies. Bats used to be common company on the return trip but are much rare now due to “white nose syndrome” which has devastated bat populations in eastern North America. Common nighthawk has, in small part, replaced the bats , wheeling and “peenting” in the night sky above the swamp in search of insects.

We pull out of the river after dusk and hurriedly strap our canoes to our vehicles in the vain hope of beating the mosquitoes. Another great night – a quick trip home, a tall drink and to bed!

*Dave Featherstone,  
Manager, Watershed Monitoring  
Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority*

## Sean & Dave's Excellent Adventure

Sean Rootham and I met at the Concession 2 Lookout at 8 am, hoping to head north along a drain system running parallel to the Mad River. The landowner noted that it was full of downed trees and nearly impassable. Knowing we were to meet Richard Bowering and troop at 11 am, we turned to Plan B – a trip south through the flooded fields between the Mad River and McKinnon Road.

The Mad River cut through its levee upstream of Concession 2 twelve years ago, flooding dozens of hectares of former farm field. Since that time, a mosaic of thicket and marsh habitats has evolved and we were in the “thicket” of it! Large expanses of flooded marsh were alive with waterfowl including hooded merganser, wood duck, bufflehead, pied-billed grebe, green-winged teal, trumpeter swan, northern pintail and northern shoveller. These sightings were tempered (only slightly) as we traversed areas of invasive rough manna grass and patches of Phragmites.



After a circuit of the silver maple-ash swamp to the south and daring the white water of the Mad River breach, Sean and I headed back to the Lookout to meet up with Richard and crew. After a round of introductions, we headed downstream into the Mad River.

The work undertaken in 2013 to make the Mad River navigable had paid off! I had attempted this voyage several times in the past and always bailed out, heading east to the marsh between the Mad and Notty to continue my journey. This time, we were able (sometimes just barely) to keep to the river. Sean and I did our best to clear a handful of jams and I learned that pound-for-pound Sean is likely our strongest Director!

As we meandered our way down the Mad, we passed along sparse silver maple and willow forest. Evidence of past forests – now marsh – was all around us. Muskrats seemed to be everywhere and a large beaver kept close watch from its lodge as we paddled past. A roost of turkey vultures surprised us as we neared the open marsh near the eagles' nest. A highlight of the trip was the observation of a “new” heronry off to the west near 3rd Concession – more than a dozen nests were observed from a distance.

As we neared the Nottawasaga River, we had the unsettling sensation of paddling upstream while heading downstream! The Nottawasaga River was backflooding up the Mad River, causing the Mad River to reverse flows. This downstream section of the Mad consists of silver maple swamp with numbers of hackberry present along the higher levee shores. A lone, bedraggled butternut appeared as a tired sentinel as we reached the Nottawasaga River.

We parted company with Richard's group at the Nottawasaga River and headed back upstream. A tempestuous west wind had blown up while we were downstream and we fought whitecaps in the Mad/Notty marsh for ten minutes before reaching the relative serenity of the thin Mad River forest. Popping out into the marsh, we tiredly made our way back to the Lookout parking lot, agreeing we'd sleep well that night!

*Submitted by Dave Featherstone*

Are you interested in becoming a “Friend of Minesing Wetlands?” Do you frequently visit the Minesing Wetlands, or would someone you know appreciate the gift of a membership and annual pass? Funds raised are directed to the Conservation Lands Reserve. Members receive an annual pass for all Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority lands, and receive “Minesing Reeds” (by post or by email). Memberships are valid for the current calendar year.

*Please check the appropriate box for your pass and membership category:*

\$20 for an individual       \$50 for a family       \$200 for a Club       \$400 for a corporation

*Please return this form, with a cheque payable to NVCA c/o Friends of Minesing Wetlands,  
to the N.V.C.A., 8195 Line 8, Utopia, ON, L0M 1T0.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address/Phone/email \_\_\_\_\_

Vehicle License Plate # \_\_\_\_\_