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Moraine's past and present explored

Posted By BOB OWEN

Posted 1 day ago

The Cramahe Horticultural Society got a history lesson and a current events lesson combined on Monday.

Lower Trent Conservation Authority landowner contact specialist Ashley Wilson and Nature Conservancy of Canada science and stewardship co-ordinator Todd Farrell gave the 30 members a glimpse of the history of the Oak Ridges Moraine and a summary of what is happening on the unique geological formation.

Thirteen thousand years ago, the last glaciers covered much of Canada with up to two kilometres of ice. When they retreated they left two large ice lobes where Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe now sit. The Oak Ridges Moraine was a crack between the two where sediment was deposited by the flowing water. The sand, gravel and silt is up to 200 metres deep in some parts of the 160-km long moraine, which runs from Peel County on the west to Northumberland County on the east.

On the moraine are significant heritage features and large expanses of natural species, as well as significant water resources for thousands of Ontarians. The moraine is protected by a 2001 act of provincial parliament.

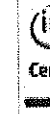
The Rice Lake Plains forms one part of the ORM. It is identified by the unique plant species in the area. Wilson informed the horticultural society at their Colborne meeting that the species of the plains have been diminishing due to fire, suppression, and agricultural activities. Incompatible recreation, invasions of non-native species, and aggregate extraction have had their effects, too.

In 2002 the Nature Conservancy of Canada purchased 328 hectares of the plains and in 2003 helped form the Rice Lake Plains Conservancy to help protect, restore and sustain the tallgrass prairies and oak savanna which lie south of

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Rice Lake in Northumberland County. One of their goals is to protect the eastern hog-nosed snake, a harmless snake sometimes incorrectly referred to as the puff adder because of its defensive posturing.

Since 2006 there has been an organized approach to work with landowners on the plains to provide stewardship.

Some of the stewardship projects include tree and prairie species plantings, invasive species removal, erosion control projects and the provision of alternative livestock watering methods.

There will be three spring outings.

On March 25 at 6:30 p. m., Caring for the Moraine Forest Ecology Workshop will be held at the Baltimore Community Centre. On May 9 anyone interested can join the Migratory Bird Day at Roseneath. In June an Invasive Species Hike will leave from the Beagle Club Road parking lot.

Farrell helped the group understand which species are native, using references to research done by pioneers, First Nations members, and botanists in the 19th century. If it has been here a long time, has adapted to existing conditions, and is part of the ecosystem, it's native.

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The Rice Lake Plains forms one of the largest protected black oak savannas in the Great Lakes Region, Farrell said. Red Cloud Cemetery is an excellent location to see many of the native plant species in their natural habitat. Many pioneer cemeteries were left relatively untouched, allowing the native species to flourish.

To date, local moraine supporters have had numerous successes. They have evaluated more than 2,833 hectares and secured 526 hectares. Prescribed burns have been conducted over 150 hectares. A growing list of landowners has been contacted and more and more tallgrass species are being protected.

The presenters had some advice for the gardening audience.

Ask growers the source of their plants. Use local species, collect ethically -- no more than 10% of the available material. Remove non-native invasive species using correct methods, and refuse to plant non-native invasive plants.

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