



Introducing *raresites*: A Watershed Approach to Saving Lands and Protecting Water, together

During *rare's* Strategy and Planning process in late 2014 and early 2015 — through surveys, focus groups, expert interviews and a town hall meeting — it became apparent that one of the biggest issues faced by conservation in the Grand River watershed and adjacent areas is a lack of grassroots efforts to protect land; we are losing agricultural as well as natural areas at an unprecedented rate — *rare* is poised to fill that gap.

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve is an urban land trust and environmental institute, headquartered at the confluence of the Grand and Speed Rivers in Cambridge and North Dumfries Township. Our first four properties are also located within the Haldimand Tract — land promised by the Crown to the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation. On close to 1,000 acres, the lands include many habitat types — globally-rare alvars, remnant old-growth forest, cold water streams and wetlands, to name a few — and function as a living laboratory, taking us beyond traditional Western methods of land preservation and **providing unprecedented opportunities for ecological research, education, community engagement, recreation and reconciliation**. We discover best practices and answers to environmental problems that can be shared worldwide. And through a *Chain of Learning*, we make our findings available to even the youngest citizen.

Our goal is to protect much more of the Grand River watershed, acknowledging that it and its tributaries — including the Eramosa River — are heritage rivers under threat.

After several years of hard work behind the scenes to prepare for this growth, we have brought together under the *rare* umbrella leaders and members from other conservation organizations to create *raresites*, a community-driven approach to land securement in the Grand River watershed — they have identified more than 20 properties of conservation significance.

The Eramosa Conservation Corridor

Through this review, and confirmed through a needs assessment in the community, **the Eramosa River emerged as a priority for conservation**; a green corridor of highly sensitive landscapes and including mature forest, floodplain habitats, and Provincially Significant Wetlands, protecting the river and its adjacent uplands and forests forever, ensuring connectivity of spaces and survival of species in an increasingly and rapidly developing area — and thereby also ensuring the health of the river, so vital to our own health and well-being and that of future generations!

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We have now acquired our first property (Property 1) along the river in Rockwood — 87 acres of pristine lands with multiple differing habitats ranging from cedar swamp forest, through hay meadows and high quality mixed forests, to provincially significant wetlands and is part of the Eramosa Valley Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI).

Amazingly to our scientists and advisors, Property 1 has little invasive plant or human impact. The riparian area of the river is unmodified, and aquatic habitat quality appears high. With only our first forays into inventorying the species present, Bobolinks (which are on the province's endangered species list) and Black and White Warblers have been observed. It is suspected that the Golden-winged Warbler is also present, another bird of special concern in Ontario, and globally. There are also interesting limestone outcroppings and karst potholes, which support some at-risk plants such as Rock Polypody and Maidenhair Spleenwort, as well as Goldthread, quite rare in this area.

This property unleashes the potential of our larger strategy: we have identified two additional sensitive and well-located properties, both also along the Eramosa River and, now that we've secured Property 1, we would like to pursue these additional lands, bringing another 90 acres quickly into the conserved Corridor. Two other landowners adjacent to these properties are also willing to consider conservation easements on their lands (together they own about 500 acres). In addition, the North Waterloo Scouts have a 185-acre property in Everton, very close to the 87-acre property, and Camp Brébeuf, which backs on to Property 1, is 110 acres with a 5-acre river-accessible pond. This provides opportunities for youth programs and partnerships in conservation, **meaning a possible 965 acres of the Eramosa River kept in a natural state** — more than doubling what *rare* currently stewards on behalf of the community.

The kind of work going on at *rare* is now being shown to have the best chance of success at changing the trends in rapid species decline; namely, we take an ecosystem-based approach that protects multiple species, while doing important research to begin understanding what is really going on within the natural world. We also work to understand the interconnectedness of all relationships with land and people in small "islands" of protected space — all that is left to us on an increasingly developed planet — and we use our knowledge to educate the next generation of conservationists who will be responsible land stewards. *rare* will bring well-planned, sustainable conservation activity to the lands, including science- and Indigenous knowledge-based stewardship and environmental research projects. We will connect with the Wellington/Guelph community through restoration and maintenance, educational hikes, and citizen-science volunteer opportunities — including monitoring birds and butterflies.

With every property we purchase, we will also be including a stewardship fund in our fundraising efforts — a minimum of 20% of the purchase price — to ensure the lands are looked after in perpetuity.

Will you help us ensure the lands along the Eramosa River are protected forever? **Every dollar counts.** A contribution of any size means you will be making a significant difference to the health and beauty of this area — forever. You can make your donation online at raresites.org and choose "Eramosa Corridor" as your preferred fund, by cheque, over the phone, or even through a gift of shares.

Your support can change the course of history in conservation, not only in Ontario, but nationally where the goals are high and the time short.

For more information or to donate over the phone, please contact:

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