

“At its most human-centric, greater biodiversity provides us with a variety of foods and associated health benefits. We cannot survive on this planet without plant and animal species providing free services like oxygen, pollination, decomposition and topsoil production.” Susan Koswan – TheRecord, Sep 4, 2019



raresites and the Eramosa River Conservation Corridor: A Watershed Approach to Saving Lands and Protecting Water, together

It has always taken the whole community to ensure that **rare's** motto—intact in perpetuity—will also be a promise kept. During our Strategy and Planning process in late 2014 and early 2015, we conducted surveys, focus groups, expert interviews and a town hall meeting to explore community needs. 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.

The **rare Charitable Research Reserve** is an urban land trust and environmental institute in Waterloo Region/Wellington, with its first four locations protecting almost 1,000 acres of highly sensitive lands. Since inception, **rare** has taken care of the land on behalf of the community through the use of Western tools in conservation, research and education. As **rare** becomes engaged in reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (North America), these pillars have gained flexibility and now equally include and value Indigenous ways of knowing and being—becoming three strands of a strong braid. 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. Together we will steward these lands with respect for generations past, present and those yet to come.

More than four years ago we brought together individuals from different conservation and related organizations across the Waterloo Region/Wellington area under the **rare** umbrella as the **raresites** land securement team; watching and exploring lands of ecological significance along the Grand River Watershed. What we found—which was confirmed through a needs assessment in the community—resulted in a unanimous decision that **Guelph-Eramosa is in need of further conservation efforts to protect unusually rare and sensitive landscapes.**

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.

The Eramosa River Conservation Corridor

As part of this effort, several properties along the Eramosa River emerged as a priority for conservation that could lead to a green corridor 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 our own health and well-being and that of future generations!**

As climate change wreaks havoc around the world, those places with high deforestation and other disturbances of the natural environment are often harder hit. And it's not just far-flung places that are in decline. One of the most comprehensive reports on trends in Canadian wildlife populations was released in 2017 and the results are shocking to many who think of Canada's vast wilderness areas as a refuge for wildlife. After all, we have a quarter of the Earth's wetlands, 8,500 rivers and more than 2 million freshwater lakes. But, the report shows that during the past four decades, human activity—whether industrial development, farming, forestry or the expansion of urban areas—as well as climate change, pollution and overfishing have helped shrink the populations of 451 species, representing half of the 903 monitored species in the country. And earlier this year, scientists and climate change experts stated that we have just 11 years left before the damage to the environment is past the point of no return.



The kind of work going on at rare is now being shown to have the best chance of success at changing these trends; namely, that we take an ecosystem-based, landscape-scale approach that protects multiple species—while doing important research and using our knowledge to educate the next generation of conservationists.

Help us elevate this work and create a 900-acres green corridor in Wellington County!

In this land securement effort, we have engaged six landowners in the Eramosa River Valley—from Eden Mills to Everton—whose lands are of highest ecological significance and which are so far largely unaffected by direct human impact. **Your support can help to make sure it will remain this way now and for generations to come.** In total, this could add more than 700 acres under *rare's* stewardship, with 2 properties purchased, 2 conservation easements and two ECOgift land donations.

Early in 2019 we were successful in purchasing Property 1 of the *rare Eramosa River Conservation Corridor*—87 acres of pristine lands in Rockwood, with multiple differing habitats ranging from cedar swamp forest, through hay meadows and high-quality mixed forests, to provincially significant wetlands. Amazingly to our scientists, it has little invasive plant impact. The riparian area of the river is unmodified, and aquatic habitat quality appears high. Even with only our first forays into inventorying the species present, we have found Bobolinks (endangered primarily due to habitat loss and a change in farming practices), interesting limestone outcroppings and karst potholes, which were noted to support some at-risk plants such as Rock Polypody and Maidenhair Spleenwort, as well as Goldthread, quite rare in this area. It is also suspected that golden winged warblers breed in this area—a priority species globally.



We have now put in an offer to purchase **Property 2—58 acres in Eden Mills**—and are actively fundraising for the full purchase price and also to cover associated legal fees and a stewardship endowment of 20%, for a total of \$754,000.

Acquiring Eramosa Property 2 will result in close to 177 acres added to *rare's* land trust holdings in less than a year; **bringing over 1,000 acres under the stewardship of rare for the community to enjoy in its natural state—forever.** The addition of this significant property to our land trust will be a major boost to conservation in southern

Ontario and will result in the kind of awareness that we know will continue to open yet other doors for us along the Eramosa River and elsewhere along the Grand River Watershed. In fact, we are seeing this happen already with just our early forays into the new land purchases.

As an ecologist and biologist myself, adding these Eramosa properties to *raresites* is very exciting because **we need a landscape-scale conservation approach if we want to protect habitat and species for our own well-being and future generations.**

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.**

As with our other properties, we will bring several dimensions of conservation activity on the lands, such as science- and Indigenous traditional-knowledge-based stewardship, threat mitigation, monitoring and the potential to develop research projects and partnerships on the property. We will also endeavour to connect the community to the property through such events as restoration work days, educational hikes, litter clean-up and citizen-science volunteer opportunities—for example, monitoring butterflies and salamanders—and community BioBlitzes, which will allow us to build a species inventory of this property, too.

It is also notable that Property 2 has an easily accessible trail that is part of a larger connection that, over time, could lead all the way to the City of Guelph. This is another unique opportunity to work with the community and the surrounding landowners to continue and improve active transportation and passive recreation opportunities in the area.

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 in Southwestern Ontario, one of Canada’s most biodiverse areas. Protecting large areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services is challenging, however, because there is very little intact habitat left—what does remain is in small parcels; almost all land is in private ownership; and property values are very high.

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

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