

*“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



## **rare**sites and the Eramosa River Conservation Corridor: A Watershed Approach to Saving Lands and Protecting Water, together

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. 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.

More than four years ago **rare** brought together individuals from different conservation and related organizations in this area under the **rare** umbrella as the **rare**sites 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**.

In particular, **with the help of the community, we identified three parcels of environmentally significant lands in the Eramosa River Valley**—the first of which became a new **rare** site in April 2019 in the Rockwood community. In addition, we continue discussions with neighbouring

landowners who are considering conservation easements on their properties to create a significant green corridor. And, our educators have begun discussions with Camp Brébeuf—connected to Property 1—and they are excited by the prospect of linking *rare's Every Child Outdoors* program to their existing offerings, which attract 12,000 youth throughout the school year, from all over southern Ontario—Hamilton, Guelph, Mississauga, Oakville, Toronto, etc. In addition, there are 600 overnight campers in summer, 400 day-campers and 80 in a leadership program. Our work will close a major gap in the area, which currently lacks both community-owned land-based conservation efforts as well as the related engagement opportunities.

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. Together we will steward these lands with respect for generations past, present and those yet to come.

### The Eramosa River Conservation Corridor – Property 2

Early in 2019 we successfully purchased 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.



Photo by T. Woodcock

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 to also cover associated fees and build a stewardship endowment of 20%, for a total of \$754,000. We have raised \$110,000 toward this goal, in just a few short weeks, with more than \$450,000 in requests being reviewed.

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



Photo by T. Woodcock

elsewhere along the Grand River Watershed. In fact, we are seeing this happen already with just our early forays into the new land purchases.

**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.

**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.

### **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.

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 Property 1 and Camp Brébeuf, which backs on to Property 1, is 110 acres with a 5-acre river-accessible pond—**meaning a possible 965 acres of the Eramosa River kept in a natural state** and potential new partnerships in our education program.

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 birds—and community BioBlitzes, which will allow us to build a species inventory of these properties, 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](https://raresites.org) and choose



“Eramosa Corridor-Property 2” 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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