

Landowners Collaborating for Biodiversity

“Healthy ecosystems support healthy people, animals and plants, as well as a healthy economy”

~from the [Ontario Biodiversity Council](#)

May 19 – 22, 2015: **Ontario’s First “Biodiversity Summit”** – Over 300 people gathered in Niagara Falls to celebrate Ontario’s biodiversity and talk about ways to better protect it. The [2015 State of Ontario Biodiversity Report](#) was released and provided a foundation for understanding the threats, challenges and opportunities associated with protecting the biodiversity that sustains us all. Participants came from many backgrounds and sectors including government, academia, conservation and stewardship groups, industry and the private sector, health and wellness, educators and environmental organizations.



Plenary and concurrent sessions examined topics such as **engaging the public, reducing threats, increasing resilience and enhancing knowledge**.

Featured speakers included M. Sanjayan, Senior Scientist with Conservation International who talked about *Saving the Earth in the Age of Man* and Baba Brinkman who performed the *Rap Guide to Wilderness* (and stimulated some great raps by a number of session leaders!). Topical panel discussions were held on *Climate Change in the 6th Great Extinction* and *Putting Nature on the Balance Sheet*.

An exciting part of the Summit’s “Mainstreaming Biodiversity” theme was getting our youth involved. Forty young adults from across Ontario participated in **“Young Leaders for Biodiversity”** – providing valuable inspiration for these future leaders, and many useful insights for building a stronger community of caring for our natural spaces and species. [Click to video the video](#) (YouTube).

Stewardship Works! How Landowners, Businesses & Agencies Collaborate for Biodiversity was a panel discussion moderated by Terry Rees, member of the [Stewardship Network of Ontario](#) (SNO) Leadership Committee and Executive Director of FOCA (Federation of Ontario Cottagers’ Associations). Panelists were drawn from different sectors: Freeman Boyd (farmer in Grey County), Kerry McLaven (Forests Ontario), Pete Birrell (General Motors), Phil Holst (Stewardship Oxford), Joanne Jeffery (Toronto and Region Conservation) and Tony Bull (Ontario Woodlot Association; Renfrew County). Terry began by asking the panelists, **“what do you think are your best examples of effective (and perhaps unusual) partnerships that have helped demonstrate successful stewardship?”** The panelists’ examples illustrated the wide range of stewardship activities and creative partnerships in Ontario:



- Curriculum-linked multicultural ESL classes run by Toronto and Region Conservation
- Native plant program with schools, accompanied by a teacher's resource, provided by Toronto and Region Conservation
- South-west Ontario partnership to address reforestation needs resulting from tree loss due to emerald ash borer, developed by Forests Ontario
- Wildlife habitat certification obtained by General Motors on their St. Catharines property
- General Motors' collaboration with Niagara College course on ecosystem restoration
- Stewardship Oxford's landowner outreach approach that provides "coaching" to help landowners through all stages of stewardship projects
- Forest fair that includes activities linking forest management to biodiversity goals, hosted by Renfrew chapter of Ontario Woodlot Association
- Steady growth in uptake of landowner-driven Environmental Farm Plan (75% of Ontario farmers now have EFPs)

Terry's second question to the panelists was, "***what are some ways to break down barriers to stewardship?***" This stimulated a wide range of responses from panelists, who discussed the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program, Sustainable Forestry Certification approaches, changing landowner patterns in rural areas, ways to work with local property managers, Northern Ontario reforestation and the knowledge gap in urban communities.

The workshop concluded with some brainstorming about ways to get more landowners engaged in stewardship. **Key suggestions included:**

- Provide relevant and useful educational programming tailored to meet the specific needs of diverse sectors (urban, rural non-farm, farming, industrial etc)
- Develop new and unusual partnerships to deliver education, outreach, stewardship projects and landowner coaching/training
- Remember that the messenger is as important as the message, and landowners like to hear from other landowners
- Provide stewardship tours for farmers
- Encourage neighbourly peer pressure
- Understand and acknowledge landowner perspectives and identify benefits. Find out what they need/want. Ask "how can we help you?"
- Recognize and support stewardship councils – they are an essential mechanism to reach out to communities, provide a hub for information, and work directly with landowners to promote and extend stewardship



This event was an important opportunity to share lessons learned and to support each others' efforts towards sustainable and healthy communities. Waterfront groups have many stories to share and to build on – FOCA looks forward to connecting the leaders and innovators within our community to **help keep our lakes great!**

(This article was originally prepared by the Stewardship Network of Ontario, for circulation through the SNO Squall e-newsletter.)