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LIVING

Conference offers rare opportunity



OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Drew Monkman

The Kawarthas is blessed with one of the richest assortments of flora and fauna in Ontario. This diversity is attributable to a unique mix of northern Shield forest, deciduous southern woodlots, various types of wetlands, and farmland, both active and abandoned. More localized habitats include the extensive bare rock, oak and juniper ridges of Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park, the unique limestone ecosystems of the Warsaw Caves Conservation Area, the patches of remnant tall-grass prairie scattered around Rice Lake and the unique, open expanses of flat, surface limestone known as alvars. Translated into species, these various habitats are home to more than 1,000 types of vascular plants, 55 mammals, 160 breeding birds, 17 amphibians, 16 reptiles, 86 butterflies and 55 dragonflies.

Within less than an hour's drive north from Peterborough, it's possible to be observing ravens, moose and black spruce, species typical of northern Ontario; on the other hand, by heading south, you can be seeing red-headed woodpeckers, white-tailed deer and bitternut hickory, all of which are more characteristic of Ontario's south.

From June 8 to 10, local and area residents will have a unique opportunity to learn more about the Kawarthas' exceptional richness of habitats and species when the Peterborough Field Naturalists hosts the 76th Annual General Meeting and Conference of Ontario Nature at Trent University. Ontario Nature, formerly known as the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, is an organization that serves to protect and restore natural habitats across Ontario through research, education and conservation. In doing so, it connects thousands of individuals and communities with the natural world.

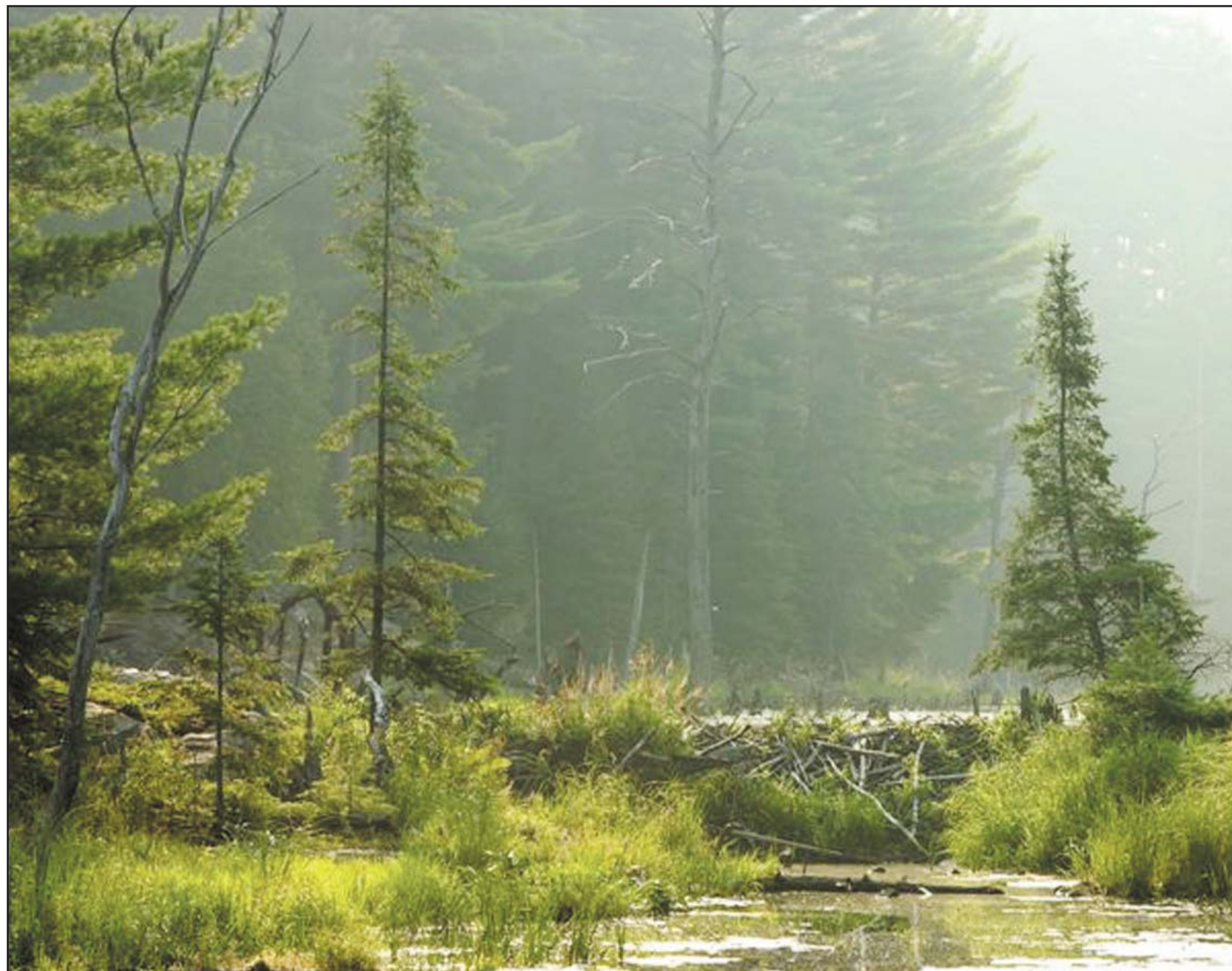
The theme of this year's conference, Landscapes of Transition, encompasses both the natural and the human elements of the land. The Kawarthas sits on the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, a vast area composed of ancient Precambrian bedrock, and on the northern edge of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowland, a region underlain by younger sedimentary rock. Just as there is transition in habitats and species as you travel from north to south across our region, the human history, too, has always been one of transition. From the minimal effects on the land of First Nations peoples, to the major impacts of early European settlers, and, now, the huge footprint of modern-day society, this landscape is still in transition today.

A wide variety of sessions has been planned, all of which are open to anyone who registers for the conference. In particular, people new to the Kawarthas or new to nature study in general will be able to gain a unique overview of the natural history of this intriguing part of Ontario. A host of mostly local speakers and field trip leaders has been brought together to provide a rich array of short walks, longer field trips, indoor sessions and workshops.

The indoor sessions are grouped around eight different themes. Under the rubric of plants and animals, come and learn about such things as a year in the life of a black bear, the richness of our area's botanical treasures, the Kawarthas' two species of flying squirrels and highlights from the new Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario (2001-2005). If you are curious about aquatic natural history, you can attend sessions on the natural history of Kawartha fishes, Ontario mussels and the ecology and life history of the pumpkinseed.

The session on special habitats should be of particular interest to anyone who has recently moved to this part of Ontario. It will introduce you to the remnant tall-grass prairie of the Rice Lakes Plains, the alvars of Peterborough County, and the significant natural features of the new Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park.

Landscape change, too, is a key theme at the conference. Talks include how glaciers shaped Peterborough County, trends in pat-



A beaver pond at Silent Lake Provincial Park (above), and a tall-grass prairie scene from southern Peterborough County. The dominate plant here is wild bergamot. From June 8 to 10, the Peterborough Field Naturalists will host the 76th annual general meeting and Conference of Ontario Nature at Trent University.

terns of land cover and land use, and the importance of the "Land Between," a mosaic ecotone stretching from Georgian Bay to Kingston and lying between the Boreal Forest and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands.

In a session entitled Living with Nature, you will learn about the dynamic relationship between First Nations and nature, natural lawn care, waterfront living, straw-bale buildings, and solutions for dealing with so-called nuisance wildlife. The theme of traditions looks at topics such as canoe travel in the Kawarthas and the province's hunting heritage, while the session on human impacts includes talks on climate change in Ontario, managing invasive plants and the conservation challenge of Ontario's turtles. Finally, the land-use planning theme will look at planning for conservation on private lands as well as how the City of Peterborough plans for natural heritage values.

In addition to the sessions listed above, a number of workshops has been organized on topics that include alternative energy sources and off-grid living, digital nature photography, illustrating nature, gardening with native plants, and identifying dragonflies.

On both Saturday and Sunday, a full complement of field trips is planned. These include early morning bird walks both days, amphibian walks, astronomy sessions, and outings to special habitats such as Silent Lake Provincial Park, Petroglyphs Provincial Park, Warsaw Caves Conservation Area, Peter's Woods, the Peterborough Ecology Park and the Rice Lake Plain. Most of



the longer field trips will take place on Sunday.

On Friday, June 8, Ontario Nature has organized a Provincial Issues Day. This year, the theme is Making Green Connections: Creating partnerships and providing tools for Greenways. Plenary speakers, case studies and workshops will highlight real world examples and best practices for creating and implementing corridors, greenways and waterways that provide connections for nature and people.

Saturday morning marks the official start of the conference. The plenary session address is by Ron Reid of the Couchiching Conservancy, a regional land trust based in

Orillia. He will bring people face to face with changing landscapes in Ontario through a presentation of current issues such as urbanization, farm economics and climate change. The various indoor sessions and workshops will follow Reid's plenary address.

At the Saturday evening banquet, the guest speaker will be award-winning Peterborough author, raconteur and canoeist, Kevin Callan. His talk, entitled Misadventures in a Canoe, will take a humorous look at paddling Ontario's wilderness.

There is still time to register for the conference. Local residents will only need to pay the registration fee plus any meals they wish to have. However, accommodation in one of the university's residences is also available. You can learn more about the event and register online by going to www.peterboroughnature.org/AGM/. If you do not have web access, call Jim Cashmore at 742-8644.

Planning for the Ontario Nature conference began in the fall of 2005 and has involved a great deal of time and effort on the part of the organizing committee, all of whom are members of the Peterborough Field Naturalists.

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