

Rice Lake Plains

Northumberland County, Central Ontario

The rolling Rice Lake Plains, on the east end of the Oak Ridges Moraine between Peterborough and Cobourg, contains the largest unprotected oak savannah and tallgrass prairie remnants in the Great Lakes region. Black Oak savannah is an endangered ecosystem in North America, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is committed to conserving and restoring this habitat on a landscape scale. To date, NCC and its partners have conserved over 1,920 acres (777 hectares) of significant habitat on the Rice Lake Plains – almost 70 percent of our current 5-year conservation goal. NCC is restoring and expanding natural prairie and savannah remnants, bringing the rich natural heritage of the Rice Lake Plains back to life. Meanwhile, NCC biologists are conducting plant, animal and habitat inventories and observing new records of important species. Now NCC is also part of a multi-partner science project conducting ground-breaking insect surveys at key prairie and savannah sites in the area. Insects are a good indicator of the health of tallgrass prairie and savannah ecosystems and many unique species remain to be discovered.



BLACK OAK IN SPRING;
PHOTO BY NCC

NCC's newest project is 290 acres (117 hectares) of oak woodland, savannah, sand barren and grassland habitat on Robson Road in Hamilton Township. It is the location of numerous sightings of at-risk species such as Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, Red-headed Woodpecker and Whip-poor-will, and provides habitat for the rare Ghost Tiger Beetle. The property features a large block of grassland that is a known hot-spot for the fastest declining bird group in North America: grassland birds – a group including Eastern Meadowlark and Savannah Sparrow. When this property came up for sale, NCC quickly secured an agreement to purchase it in order to conserve its species and habitats from development and incompatible recreation.



BLACK OAK REGENERATION ON
PROPERTY; PHOTO BY NCC

The Robson Road property is one of the last documented sites of a healthy Wild Lupine population - food for the Karner Blue butterfly which is no longer found in Ontario, but continues to live in areas of the eastern United States. Conservation partners are ramping up plans to restore Wild Lupine in the hopes that the property will become a key reintroduction site for Karner Blue. **NCC must raise \$324,625 from private sources by the end of September, 2011 to complete this project.** All private donations will be matched by federal government funds. NCC hopes to honour local legend Hazel Bird with a property naming opportunity. **Help us conserve this special property on the Rice Lake Plains, along with its rare plants and animals!**

Project Budget	
Land Securement and Associated Costs	\$525,005
Short Term Stewardship Costs (e.g. site clean-up, fencing, management planning)	\$52,550
Contribution to NCC's Stewardship Endowment Fund (long term stewardship)*	\$71,775
Total Funds Required for Acquisition	\$649,330
Public funding requested	\$324,665
Private funds received to date (July 2011)	\$7,750
Private funding remaining to be raised	\$316,915

**NCC may direct all or a portion of gifts made to this project to its Stewardship Endowment Fund, for use in Ontario. Revenue generated by the Stewardship Endowment Fund is used to care for properties across Ontario, including those in Rice Lake Plains Natural Area.*

Remembering Hazel Bird (1920-2009)

Hazel Bird, Harwood resident and mother of seven, was a well-known local naturalist who had a personal connection with the Robson Road property. The property was one of the locations for the nest-box project she initiated in 1968 to help the then vanishing Eastern Bluebird. With the help of students, neighbours, volunteers and enthusiastic members of the Willow Beach Field Naturalists, she installed and managed hundreds of bluebird boxes in the area. Hazel carefully monitored her nest box network, acted as liaison with local landowners, scheduled volunteers to assist in monitoring the boxes, and built and located new boxes as needed. Hazel's efforts were a great success with thousands of broods being raised in her boxes. She was the recipient of many well-earned awards, including the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society conservation award in 1997. Hazel's biggest sense of accomplishment came in 1996 with the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada's announcement that the Eastern Bluebird was no longer considered a species at risk. Hazel retired from the project in 2005. All her boxes were removed and given to the many volunteers who had helped Hazel over the years.

Hazel was interested in all aspects of nature and documented in notebooks her many observations on the flora and fauna of the Rice Lake Plains including tallgrass prairie plants and animals such as Eastern Hog-nosed Snake. Local volunteers are now examining these notebooks and transcribing notable sightings for future reference. Hazel introduced Dr. Paul Catling, pre-eminent Canadian botanist, to this area. She also taught outdoor education at the Laurie Lawson Outdoor Education Centre with her long time friend, Audrey Wilson.

Hazel was an all-round naturalist who inspired hundreds of others with her dedication for and love of nature in Northumberland County. In her honour, NCC would like to consider a naming opportunity on the property to continue her legacy in the area.

NCC is also fundraising for Rice Lake Plains insect surveys: contact Hugh or Mark for more information on this important project.

Nature Conservancy of Canada Fundraising and Donations Office

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Donations may be made to "The Nature Conservancy of Canada" by cheque, credit card or transfer of shares.

Robson Road - Rice Lake Plains Natural Area: Property Context



Legend		Landscape Context	
Property of Interest	Plantation		
Road Network	Landscape Context		
Hydrology Network	Conservation Lands	Environmentally Significant Area	
Property Context	Parcel Fabric	ANSI	
Lupine Target / Restoration Site	Lupine Target / Restoration Site	Oak Ridges Moraine	
Ecological Land Classification	Coniferous Forest	Conservation Blueprint	
Deciduous Forest	Deciduous Forest	Provincially Significant Wetland	
Mixed Forest	Mixed Forest	County Forest	
Forest	Forest	Other Features	
Tallgrass - Oak Savanna	Tallgrass - Oak Savanna	Tallgrass Sites	
Sand Barren	Sand Barren	Natural Cover	

Data Sources:
NCC - Ontario Region, 2011
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2008
Greater Toronto Area Orthophotos, 2002

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