



# Biosphere News

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

WINTER 2010

## Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve

-Latest News this Winter



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Man And  
Biosphere  
Programme



As the snow settles in over our winter landscape, it gives us time to reflect on the many activities of the past year and to share our plans and projects for 2010.

Last spring, we launched our Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Manual for property owners, a guide to take readers through an assessment of their environmental performance while providing suggestions for reducing impacts on land and water.

This fall, we expanded education opportunities in elementary schools. Our Lessons-in-a-Backpack program connects students with nature through interactive outdoor lessons.

Our work with Species at Risk in 2009 involved special talks and presentations, species monitoring, and community groups installing nesting structures for foxsnakes,



Photo: Kenton Otterbein

chimney swifts, and bald eagles.

In 2010 we will be hosting our first *Life in the Biosphere* event, with workshops, speakers and networking opportunities. We will expand community gardening opportunities with our new "Growing Our Future" program, and will continue to support Species at Risk.

At the Georgian Bay Biosphere

Reserve we are working to protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of Eastern Georgian Bay through environmental stewardship, community education and sustainable development activities.

For details visit our website: [www.gbbr.ca](http://www.gbbr.ca) or call 705. 774. 0978 for more information.

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## Lessons in a Backpack

There is a new program in the west Parry Sound area thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) has received \$50,000 over two years to hire an Environmental Education Facilitator to work with schools from MacTier to Britt.

"When we asked teachers in our Educators Network what they really wanted for their classes," explains GBBR staff, Becky Pollock, "they told us that it would be good to have a person that visits the classes, takes them outside to areas near each school, and leads an environmental education pro-



gram that fits the Ontario curriculum. Then teachers can lead those (cont'd pg. 2)

## Lessons in a Backpack (cont'd)

(cont'd from pg. 1)

same programs again on their own or with community volunteers.”

The goal of the Lessons-in-a-Backpack program is to use areas that students can walk to and study the local ecology. “That could be shoreline habitat along the Fitness Trail, or endangered species in a patch of forest, or a study of winter birds at a maple sugar bush,” noted Glenda Clayton, the Species at Risk outreach coordinator for GBRR.

With the help of the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant, the Biosphere Reserve has hired Martha Martens (néé Mortson) of Parry Sound who started the program this September. She designs the lessons, finds outdoor classroom sites near each of the schools she will be working with, and meets with teachers and students. Her job will also involve recruiting volunteers that are interested in helping with field trips.

Ms. Martens has an impressive background in outdoor and environmental education. She



was previously head of Natural Heritage Education at Awenda Provincial Park and worked at Killbear Provincial Park, leading interpretive programs and nature hikes for the Friends of Killbear. She has also spent summers working for Lake Superior Provincial Park, Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, and has been an adventure guide for Blackfeather Wilderness Adventures on canoe and kayak expeditions.

Most famously, Martha paddled a canoe 9,000 kilometres across Canada (over the course of 11 months) with her friend Carrie McGown. Together they presented their trip on a slide tour called “This is Canada!” to grade 3 and 4 students at 100 different schools.

Before that, Ms. Martens completed a Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, did a Masters in Global Studies at a college in Manitoba, and studied how to teach English as a Second Language, which she later used in South Korea.

“I’m excited about the Biosphere’s education program,” she says, “because I grew up in Parry Sound and there are so many opportunities for students to use their environment as an outdoor classroom.”

The Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of \$50,000 over two years was awarded to a joint proposal between the Biosphere Reserve and the Near North District School Board. Glen Hodgson sits on the Board’s Environment Committee and will be the liaison for this program. He says: “Hands-on environmental education is so important for our students. We want to increase awareness of this amazing ecosystem that we live in, called the 30,000 islands – a United Nations biosphere reserve – and then get students interested in taking care of their own backyard.”

Although most of the program will be tailored to each school (MacTier, Humphrey, Whitestone, McDougall, William Beatty, Victory, Nobel, Shawanaga, Britt, Wasauksing, and the Parry Sound High School) so that students can explore local areas, Ms. Martens will also identify field trips within the biosphere reserve, including the six kilometer Rose Point Recreational Trail.

For the 2009-2010 school year, it is expected that approximately 150 students will participate in the first Lessons-in-a-Backpack and that curriculum content will be developed for three levels (junior, intermediate and senior) including lessons in Shoreline Ecology, Species at Risk, and Forest Ecology. Field trips are planned for at least six schools in the first year, and if enough volunteers are found, then twice per year.

“Not only do we have an outstanding natural environment to use,” says Ms. Martens. “We also have a rich cultural history, with First Nations, farmers like my great-grandfather, the railway and shipping history, hotels, fish camps and cottages. Part

of my job will be to learn from elders and old-timers and then share that history of how people have lived and worked in this environment. For example, we can take students to the Fitness Trail and we can look for evidence of pollution and the old oil spill.”



The main idea of the Lessons-In-A-Backpack program is to learn what stories the animals, plants, and rocks have to teach our students about the Eastern Georgian Bay. By using schoolyards and nearby natural areas as outdoor classrooms, students have the opportunity for first-hand learning about forest ecology, shoreline ecology and Species at Risk.

“I have a black bear skull donated by Gord Darlington. At a quick first glance, the skull seems quite normal. But when you pick it up and hold it between your hands looking down at the crown of the skull, you notice that the snout twists remarkably to the left, that the right canine tooth is an inch higher than the left, and that the platelets of the skull wind with the deformity.”

“It leaves you wondering: what happened to this bear? Was it hit by a car at an early age? Was it born this way? Did the twisted snout have an impact on the animal’s ability to hunt and catch prey? What was its story?”

The bear skull - in addition to the skulls of a raccoon, fox, wolf and many others - is used for “If Teeth Could Talk: Examining Mammal Skulls,” a lesson which looks at what can be learnt from skulls of local animals by examining the teeth, eye sockets, nasal passages, and inner ear structures. From these things, we know if an animal was a meat or plant eater, predator or prey, had excellent or poor abilities to

hear and smell, and more. The Grade 1's in Mr. Crafts class at Victory School, the Grade 3-4's in Ms. Corbett's class at Whitestone School, and Ms. Aldworth's class at William Beatty were fully engaged as they put their detective skills to work in sleuthing out what skulls belong to which local animal.

Stories of death, decay and dung beetles were excellent for Halloween time exploration. Ms. Thomson, Mr. Jenkins and Ms. Fells' Grade 7's of William Beatty School examined the variety of fungi, insects, sowbugs, earthworms, and mosses involved in decomposition of fallen logs in the lesson "Death, Decay and Decomposition." In addition, these students studied how plant life takes hold on the bare rocks of the Georgian Bay,

creating soil to sustain our enormous white pine, learning the story of natural succession in our area.

The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve would like to create a small network of volunteers that would be able to help with the program. If you are interested in volunteering with the Lessons-In-A-Backpack program, here are some ways to be involved: assisting with field trips, developing lesson plans, developing props, sewing costumes, donating cleaned animal skulls or bones, and volunteering with gardening projects.

A special thanks to the Parry Sound Rotary Club, the Rose Point Trail and members of the community for their involvement through the donation of local mammal skulls, wasp nests, and

photographs of our animals and environment, as well as those individuals that have volunteered to assist in the classroom.

For teachers, lessons created will be available to you on the "Education" section of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve's website [www.gbbr.ca](http://www.gbbr.ca), as well as other excellent on-line resources for teaching about the natural world.

"If you are interested in learning more about the Lessons-In-A-Backpack program, have ideas for lesson plans on the local ecology that would fit nicely into your curriculum needs, or would like to have me come to your class to co-lead a lesson, please contact me at 774-0978 or [education@gbbr.ca](mailto:education@gbbr.ca)."



Photo: Kenton Otterbein

## Research & Monitoring –Stinkpot Turtles in Massassauga Provincial Park

By: Laura Fullerton, Communications Coordinator, GBBR

For the past two years, Jolene Laverty, a Masters of Biology student from Laurentian University has been tracking and monitoring Stinkpot turtles in Massassauga Provincial Park.

She has been working to gather data about the impacts of water-based recreation on the movements of the Stinkpot turtle. Data generated from her study will be used to develop conservation recommendations to Ontario Provincial Parks to reduce impacts experienced by the turtle.

Using radio telemetry, 32 turtles were tracked and monitored between May and October of 2009. Each turtle was regularly located, measured, notched and weighed.

"The purpose of this data

collection was to determine the movement ranges of turtles from high to low impact sites, and changes in body mass and health. The Massassauga is an ideal location to study water-based impacts on turtles as the area is unique because there are no roads present within the park," says Jolene Laverty.

"My research will provide the park with information on movement patterns, nesting and hibernation locations of Stinkpots. So far research has revealed that the Stinkpots have large home ranges and move extensively throughout the park."

The Stinkpot, also known as the common musk turtle, are small turtles that typically reside in aquatic habitats with slow currents and soft bottoms, such as in lakes, ponds, marshes,



Jolene Laverty monitoring Stinkpot turtles in the Massassauga exterior



streams and rivers. They spend the majority of their time underwater although often can be seen sunning themselves by the waters edge. When feeling threatened, these turtles release a musky odour from glands under the edge of their shell to ward off predators. They hibernate underwater in muddy areas and can live for up to 50 years.

Stinkpots are currently listed provincially and federally as a threatened species, primarily due to increased shoreline development and mortality from outboard motors.

For more information on the Stinkpot or other Species at Risk, please visit our website: [www.gbbr.ca](http://www.gbbr.ca).

# A Helping Hand for Local Species at Risk

by Glenda Clayton, Species at Risk Coordinator, GBBR

There are 32 species considered to be at-risk in Parry Sound and Muskoka. This year a number of individuals and groups are taking actions to help these species recover.

Some of these actions seek to improve nesting habitat. This includes a Bald Eagle nesting platform, which was built by volunteers from Skerryvore with donated materials and installed with the assistance of *HydroOne* volunteers.

Bald Eagles are regularly seen in the winter months in the Parry Sound area however there is only one confirmed record of a nest along the eastern Georgian Bay shore.

The Skerryvore area platform will hopefully entice a pair of Bald Eagles to build a nest and raise a family. Southern



Photo: Kenton Otterbein

Ontario's Bald Eagles are a species that are showing good signs of recovery. Their at-risk status has been recently down listed from endangered to special concern.

The threatened Chimney Swift is a small, insect eating bird that has declined

by 95 percent over the past forty years. Like their name implies, they like to nest in chimneys. Before the area was settled, they nested in large hollow trees.

The change of chimney styles from masonry bricks to stainless steel has left swifts with few places to nest. Both the Parry Sound Nature Club and the Muskoka Field Naturalists have recently constructed nesting towers to help provide the swifts with an attractive nesting structure. Hopefully, we will be able to report successful nesting in the next few years. Both of these projects would not have been possible without the help of a number of volunteers in both Parry Sound and Bracebridge.

The Eastern Foxsnake is considered an endangered species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Seventy percent of their global range is found here in Ontario and that is divided among three separate populations; two in south-western Ontario and one in eastern Georgian Bay. Foxsnakes are known to nest in rotting logs, leaf piles, compost, wood chips or in rock crevices.

Volunteers from the Madawaska Club of Go Home Bay, West Carling and Twelve Mile Bay Cottage Associations have pitched in and built large wooden boxes covered with fencing wire (5 x 7 cm openings). These boxes were filled in the spring with a combination of leaves, straw and wood chips. We also had special temperature gauges placed in the middle of each box to record the temperatures all season. Ideally, as the materials decompose they will provide a steady heat supply in the 30°C range which is the perfect temperature for hatching foxsnake eggs.



Sheila Macfeeters & Michael Williams install a foxsnake nesting box

The wire covered boxes also help protect the eggs from some mammal predators. Over the next few years, we will learn if these boxes are able to provide the conditions necessary for the successful hatching of foxsnakes. If so, this would be a low cost way to improve nesting opportunities for the Eastern Foxsnake.

Volunteers from the Wood's Bay area are involved in another type of "citizen science" project. A small group are committed to regularly surveying their bay for turtle species from May to September for the next five years. There are five at-risk turtle species found in this area including the Spotted, Common Map, Stinkpot, Blanding's and Snapping Turtle. The benefit of a monitoring program is that consistent searching methods applied over a number of years can help identify changes in the populations and to the local environment.

Many of Parry Sound and Muskoka's at-

**“Helping species at risk can be as simple as learning more about the needs, habits and habitats of these species.”**

risk species have now retreated for the season. This winter, take some time to learn a little more about these species and how you can help in conservation efforts. Helping species at risk can be as simple as learning more about the needs, habits and habitats of these species. By learning more we become aware of the actions we can take to make a difference. You may want to start at our web site [www.gbbr.ca](http://www.gbbr.ca) or call 746-0978 for more information.

These projects were implemented thanks to funding support from Ontario’s Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Canada’s Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, the Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council and the Parry Sound and Muskoka Stewardship Network.



Photo: Scott Gillingwater

## Simple Actions to Help Species at Risk

Snow has finally arrived and many of the 32 species at risk found in the Parry Sound area have retreated for winter. Winter is an excellent time to plan a few outdoor projects around our properties for next spring. Try to take a look at your property from a wildlife point of view. Does your property help provide the basic habitat requirements of food, water and shelter? Can you improve what’s available for wildlife?

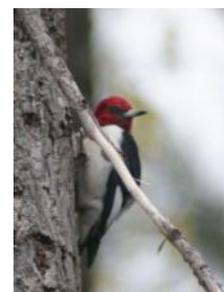


Photo: Ted Krug

### In Your Backyard:

Leave space for wildlife. Try planting more native plant species. They need less care than grass and you'll have extra time to enjoy the view and visiting wildlife.

Leave logs where they lie. On land, they provide shelter for salamanders, insects and some snakes. In water, logs may create fish habitat or basking sites for turtles.

Leave dead trees standing if it is safe to do so.



Photo: Jeremy Rouse

Dead trees provide valuable food for woodpeckers and homes for many animals. If you need to pick up dead branches gather them in one area as a brush pile to provide shelter for small animals.

Avoid the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides in your home and on your property, especially near water!

### On Your Waterfront:

Keep your lot well treed and plant a buffer strip of native species along the shore.

Use only phosphate-free soaps, detergents and cleaners in your home.

Pump out your septic tank regularly.

Use a small floating dock.

If you own a motor boat, consider upgrading to an electric or fuel efficient 4-stroke motor and be sure to keep your wake low near shore and wetlands.



Photo: Rick Snider

### In Your Neighbourhood:

Attend or host a presentation to learn more about these species.

Watch out for wildlife on our roads and waterways.

Help stop the spread of invasive species. Learn what invasive species are a problem in our area, what they look like and monitor for their presence. Check out [www.invadingspecies.com](http://www.invadingspecies.com) for more information.

Support efforts that enhance or protect habitat.

Report your sightings of at risk species on our web site or to the Parry Sound Ministry of Natural Resources office at 7 Bay St. Parry Sound, P2A 1S4. Attention SAR Biologist 705-746-4201.

As individuals, we can take actions to help maintain and restore wildlife habitat on our own properties. If other residents join us in these actions, we can collectively foster healthy, natural neighbourhoods.

# Growing Our Future -Community Garden, Workshops & You

By Laura Fullerton, GBBR



The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve has received funding from Sobey's Earth Day Canada Community Environment Fund to increase gardening opportunities and skill development in Parry Sound.



The program, titled "Growing Our Future" will support the extension of the community garden, six free hands-on gardening instructional workshops for adults and children in the community, a March Break "Kids Can Garden" gardening program, and the planting of a native wildlife demonstration garden.

**"By learning how to grow food locally, we can reduce our carbon footprint, save, and enjoy fresher healthier produce."**

"By learning how to grow food locally, we can reduce our carbon footprint, save money, and enjoy fresher healthier produce," says Glenda Clayton of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve. "Residents who are connected to their land and food are more likely to care for the long-term health of their environment and community."

The Parry Sound Community Garden, located on Waubeek Street behind the daycare centre, was created by Community Living in the spring of 2009 to provide residents in the area with a space to garden. In its first season the garden was very successful at increasing gardening opportunities and providing fresh produce to the Harvest Share food bank.

The garden was divided into ten equal plots, with each plot given to an individual or group for the season to grow vegetables, fruits, and flowers. Gardening tools, natural fertilizers, and a rain barrel were provided in the garden for all gardeners. All community garden members agreed to donate a minimum of 20% of produce grown

on their plot to the Harvest Share Food Bank.

Free gardening workshops planned for the 2010 season include: growing seedlings; starting a vegetable garden, caring for soil; composting and compost construction; rain barrel water collection and use; and planting native wildlife gardens.

Techniques such as: composting, companion planting, and using natural fertilizers will also be taught in workshops and practiced in the community garden. These techniques not only work to reduce waste, but also serve to nourish the soil, control pests and strengthen plants.



A mentoring program will be organized through the community garden to connect beginner gardeners with experienced gardeners. "There are many people in the community who want to get started with growing their own food but don't know how to take the first step. This program will help to support learning and the transfer of knowledge in an informal and relaxed way," notes Gloria Marshall of the Biosphere Action Group.

For elementary school students interested in gardening, the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve will be offering a March Break "Kids Can Garden" program from March 15th-19th at the Parry Sound Library. This hands-on program will teach kids how to grow and care for herbs, vegetables, flowers and houseplants. Students will also learn special gardening tricks for growing healthy plants year-round.

A wildlife demonstration garden will

be planted this spring with help from members of the Parry Sound 4-H Club. The garden will include a variety of native plants from the region and information on how these plants support at-risk species.



"Wildlife gardens can be an excellent way to support species at risk," explains Glenda Clayton. "Two species of special concern, the monarch butterfly and the west virginia white butterfly can benefit from the planting of specific native species in our landscaping. Not only will this benefit these two species but that of other species as well. Another benefit of growing native plants is that they require less care, for example, they don't need to be fertilized and watered as frequently as other plants, which is better for the environment."

If you would like to get an early start this season, our first hands-on gardening workshop of 2010 will be held on March 6th at the *Life in the Biosphere* conference at the Stockey Centre. This workshop runs from 3-5pm, is open to the public and will focus on growing native plants from seeds and cuttings.

For more information on upcoming gardening programs, or to become involved, please contact the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve at: 774.0978 or email: [info@gbbr.ca](mailto:info@gbbr.ca).

# Canadian Biosphere Reserves Attend Gathering in Slovakia

Georgian Bay was represented at a recent meeting of biosphere reserves across Europe and North America. Becky Pollock travelled from Parry Sound to Slovakia at the end of October to meet with 115 delegates from 22 different countries.

The meeting was held in the remote village of Stara Lesna in the Tatra Mountains on the border between Slovakia and Poland. It was designed to bring biosphere reserve coordinators and researchers together to exchange ideas.

The group worked on a Strategic Action Plan to improve website communication, set up partnership projects – like school twinnings – and learning exchanges. Delegates shared activities from their regions and made recommendations for conservation research, for sustainable development projects, and for environmental education.

“It was an amazing way to learn from countries where the biosphere reserves are strongly supported by provincial and federal

governments, such as in Germany, where they just celebrated the Year of the Biosphere Reserve and had huge banners on buildings and paintings on the side of trains,” Becky said.

A cultural evening was held the first night so that participants could showcase their nationalities. The Slovak hosts organized a performance of traditional folk dancing. “I wanted to bring smoked fish from Georgian Bay, but I wasn’t sure how it would travel in my suitcase,” said Becky. Instead she brought maple sugar cookies, dried cranberries, and a map of Canada.

She tried Polish sausage, Swedish crackers, and smoked cheese from Greece. “I wasn’t tempted to try the lamprey – a sea snake that is a delicacy in Latvia but an invasive species in Canada.”

One of the common themes was how to use a “biosphere brand” to support tourism. In Europe, the biosphere reserve brand is used in hotels, restaurants and bed and



breakfasts. “Tourists like to support local products and people, so having a biosphere reserve label helps them plan their trip and keeps more money in the community.” Businesses can apply to use the label for a small fee and follow a few criteria for environmentally-sensitive tourism, which is something that biosphere reserves in Quebec have started.

The 15 biosphere reserves in Canada are among the 531 that make up UNESCO’s World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The next European meeting will be held in Sweden in 2011.



## McKellar Pioneer College

By: Wave Weir

For those interested in getting back to basics, the McKellar pioneer college offers a variety of hands-on workshops to teach skills of self-sufficiency. To date, four inaugural courses have been offered by the Township of McKellar Economic Development Committee.

The first course this fall was taught by Jack Hay on how to raise Shitake Mushrooms. This course was geared to the home grower as well as to someone who may want a viable home business. Several students acquired logs that have already spent a year incubating the mushroom spore and are looking forward to their first crop in early spring.

Evelyn Harvey Moore taught a course on knitting with two and four needles. Topics included how to knit, how to follow patterns and how to make socks, mittens and sweaters.

Wave Weir taught the technique of hand-dipping beeswax candles. These long burning tapers provide a clean burn with no petroleum residues released into the

air.

The final course this fall was taught by Maureen Bell on Kitchen Basics to a very enthusiastic group of students. One student exclaimed that she learned more in one hour than what several years in the kitchen had provided. To everyone’s delight, all food was sampled for lunch each day and everyone went home with small jars of products including: home-made ketchup, mayonnaise, pickles, jams, and relish.



Photo: Wave Weir

The Economic Development Committee of the Township of McKellar is offering these courses in conjunction with their development plan to support the local community food producers by sponsoring a farm producers market. The market will be opening this spring, featuring farmers and crafters

from within 100 miles of the village. As well as increasing the diversity of products available to consumers, the intent of these courses is to share skills, learn from others in the community, and increase the skill base in the region.

Courses being planned for the New Year include: Soap Making, Felting, Book Binding, Bread Making, and a second Candle Making course.

Anyone with a skill can offer to teach, and anyone with a particular interest can request a course. The committee searches for an instructor and advertises the potential course. If there are enough registrants to cover costs, the course can be offered. If you happen to miss a class, please put your name on a call back list at the township office, as several of the courses will be offered again. (cont’d pg. 8)



Photo: Joy Allan



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Editor: Laura Fullerton

# Become a Member of the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve!



Join the GBBR and help protect the natural & cultural resources of Georgian Bay.

Individual Membership \$40  
Student Membership \$20  
Corporate Membership \$100

Members will be kept informed of the activities of biosphere reserve, will receive seasonal newsletters, and will be invited to attend workshops and activities of GBBR. For more information on becoming a member, contact us at: 705.774.0978 or visit our website at: [www.gbbr.ca](http://www.gbbr.ca).



Cartoon: Jonathan Mahood

## Life In the Biosphere

*What does a healthy community look like?*



Saturday March 6th, 2010  
Charles W. Stockey Centre, Parry Sound  
9:00am—5:00pm

**Workshops Include:**

- Naturalizing Your Property
- Fisheries Ecology & Restoration
- Green Buildings 101
- Biosphere Branding
- Starting native plants from cuttings and seedlings
- Caring for Our Wetlands



**Special Presentations on:**

- Shifting to Green Energy
- Sustainable design
- Protecting Our Wetlands

Protect the *Environment*  
Create vibrant *Communities*  
Build a healthy *Economy*

Tickets: \$20 for adults (includes lunch)  
\$15 for students & seniors  
\$10 for afternoon workshops

For tickets, call the Charles W. Stockey Centre at: 1-877-746-4466

(cont'd from pg. 7)

There is no doubt that there is a strong movement to "get back to basics". People are concerned with what they are eating, where it came from, how to decrease the environmental footprint that they leave, and how to reclaim the skills that their grandparents took for granted. There is grow-

ing interest in learning how to cook, sew, knit, garden, and preserve food. McKellar is fortunate to have people with these skills who are willing to teach others.

Start dates, times, and fees are flexible and are posted on the McKellar Township website un-

der the Economic Development Committee:  
[www.township.mckellar.on.ca](http://www.township.mckellar.on.ca)

For more information or to register for a course, please contact Wave Weir at: (705) 389-9847 or town Councillor Tamara Black at 389-2842.

