

Dorchester Mill Pond EcoTrail

5 Year Plan

Final Spring 2014

By Dorchester Mill Pond Committee

In partnership with

Municipality of Thames Centre (TC)

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA)

Carolinian Canada Coalition (CCC)

Goal: To enrich the **Dorchester Mill Pond** as a community focus for active enjoyment and protection of healthy ecosystems of Thames Centre and the Carolinian Life Zone.



Photos contributed by Ruth John & Mark Helm

Dorchester Mill Pond EcoTrail Vision

In 2012, the Dorchester Mill Pond Committee hosted a community workshop to address the question “What does the Mill Pond mean to me?” Participants identified six broad themes that reflect community values for the site. A long-term vision emerged based on a discussion of goals and opportunities. This vision was presented to council and used to divide the EcoTrail into nine regions. Stories were collected from community members to document community heritage related EcoTrail themes and regions. An EcoShelter was erected and celebrated near the Mill Pond Dam to share these stories and inspire residents and visitors to “Explore, Discover, Share”.

Themes	Goals & Opportunities	EcoTrail Regions
1 Connecting with Nature	1. Broaden base of support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use Mill Pond trail to draw attention to the <i>region’s unique nature</i> - Excite imaginations - Encourage people to care so they have a stake in their region 2. Strengthen <i>connections</i> to other trails & natural areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build Profile - Promote understanding of connections - Strengthen local ecosystems 3. Protect species <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tree protection - Research / Monitor rare species 	Nature in the Village In My Back Yard (IMBY) We’re Growing History
2 Heart of Our Community	4. Improve trail to handle increased use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build awareness that this oasis needs taking care of - Focus use away from sensitive areas - Build a long-range program - Improve trails in ways that will protect the environment 	Under the Boardwalk
3 Healthy Community	5. Enhance Buffers	Turtle Crossing
4 A Place for Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - protect recreational experience + nature + water quality + homeowner privacy - Strengthen connections <i>to economy</i> 	Forest Giants
5 Water Quality		Green & Healthy
6 Our Stories, Our Heritage	6. Make History come alive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create personal connections to the Mill Pond - Use a layered information approach to promote exploration 	Dreamland
	7. Use innovative learning opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capitalize on the rich resources at the Mill Pond - Use new technology tools to engage in the future - Continue to work with schools to reduce vandalism and increase engagement 	The Mill Pond Dam

Dorchester Mill Pond EcoTrail 5 Year Plan Summary

To enrich the **Dorchester Mill Pond** as a community focus for active enjoyment and protection of healthy ecosystems of Thames Centre and the Carolinian Life Zone.



Priorities Year 1				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Role 2. Funding 3. Recruit members 4. Logo 5. Websites 6. Facebook 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guidelines 2. Bench policy 3. Access funding 4. Trail vision / links 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mill Pond Stewards 2. Trail Stewardship 3. Mill Pond Friends 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consult experts 2. Turtle Card 3. Turtle promotion 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heritage committee

Priorities Years 2-5, Pending Funding				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Regular communications 8. Link with other groups 9. Funding 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Trail plan 6. Dreamland plan 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Build volunteer program 5. Build awareness 6. Build partnerships 7. Grow Wild program 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Biological inventory 5. Youth action 6. Watch Out for Wildlife 7. Community Partnerships 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Outreach measures 3. EcoTrail materials / web 4. Schools 5. Promote Mill Pond 6. Mill Pond celebration

1. Healthy Committee

Purpose: Broaden the base of support for the Mill Pond by strengthening partnerships, profile and local capacity.

Objectives

- a. Engage 10 new people in the Mill Pond Committee
- b. Increase exposure of the Mill Pond through a variety of media

Priorities

Status

Year 1

1. Formalize relationship with municipality and conservation authority
 - a. present 5 year plan to council
 - b. report to council regularly – to coordinate with budget, trail issues, 10 year trail plan – report what we have contributed to community – ask for specific support (trail maintenance) Stewart
 - c. Annual tour for council members
 - d. Develop terms of reference – refer to UTRCA examples (Linda)

discussion needed

2. Secure funding for coordinator

Trillium proposal submitted by UTRCA for one year.

3. Recruit committee members – on-going
 - a. Advertise for new members

4 people invited to meeting and agreed to sit on committee

4. Update logo - should be updated to match the name above (Dorchester Mill Pond). All materials should use this name consistently.

UTRCA to draft logo

5. Update website

6. Facebook updates
 - a. Postings from all committee members
 - b. encourage friends to post
 - c. share postings

Years 2-5

7. Raise community profile through regular communications
8. Link with similar groups to raise profile, network and share experiences
9. Secure funding for projects

Awaiting funding

2. Trail Strategy

Purpose: Improve trail to handle increased use while still protecting the natural ecosystem, ensuring safety and broad access to support an active community.

Objectives

- a. Improve trail facilities to protect the environment and to accommodate diverse users, increased interest and growing population.
- b. Ensure no net loss of quality or quantity of existing habitat

Priorities

Year 1

1. Maintenance guidelines
 - a. Review risk and liability issues (utrca)
2. Draft an interim simple bench policy
3. Research funding options for accessibility
4. Participate in a trail vision to integrate with other area trails and surrounding land use planning
 - a. Representation on trail committee
 - b. New Developments – liaise with landowner, consultant, municipality and utrca

Status

get samples from UTRCA

Obtained London example

Initial discussion with municipality

Ask municipality

On-going discussions

Years 2-5

5. Create a trail plan which includes maintenance, signage and accessibility - considerate of natural habitat and increased/enhanced buffers
6. Develop a plan for Dreamland

Awaiting funding

3. Good Neighbour Program

Purpose: Enhance natural buffers between neighbouring properties and the Mill Pond Trail. Strengthen neighbours' connections to water quality, economy, recreation and health.

Objectives

- a. Engage 75% of adjoining neighbours in Good Neighbor program
- b. Engage 50 people in Mill Pond Stewards program from surrounding community
- c. Collect 250 Grow Wild pledges to enhance habitat in Thames Centre
- d. Enhance quality of riparian buffers
- e. Enhance water quality (use indices in the Dorchester Watershed report card)
- f. Initiate 20 on-the-ground habitat restoration projects (wildflower, tree, shrub plantings)

Priorities

Year 1

1. Develop volunteer program to engage community (Mill Pond Stewards)

- a. Ask existing volunteers to visit millpond regularly and report issues
- b. Steward recognition and cultivation – hats, ideas?
- c. Seasonal walk – for new members and supporters - invite Wendy – share your photos
- d. Write articles for Signpost – quarterly?
- e. Annual clean-up

2. Trail stewardship – maintenance & reporting

- a. Issues to be reported to municipality through Ruth
 - take a picture and email to Ruth
 - Ruth will email Liz - copy to Bob /Stewart
 - Coordinate follow up with Ruth - Check that short term work is done
 - Identify on-going concerns that need attention in the spring
- b. Mill Pond fall meeting to prioritize issues / work for following year
 - Hold meeting after clean up (earth week)
 - finalize list of priorities
 - Coordinate with UTRCA, schools and municipality to address issues – eg. Volunteer, student work forces

3. Recruit “Mill Pond Friends” (passionate supporters)

- Article in the signpost / car stickers
- financial contribution?

Status

Invite new members to participate

Give a hat to volunteers

Clean up before Easter

Ruth to coordinate
Wildlife issues to go to
Stewart / Township

To be discussed

Good
Neighbour
Years 2-5

4. Build volunteer program (Mill Pond Stewards) to help achieve goals of watershed report card.

Awaiting funding

- a. Recognize Good Neighbours
 - Good neighbor award / logo
 - Habitat signs – (FEF funding, utrcra design, legion)
- b. Identify measures of environmental quality – from report card and other sources
- c. Promote and demonstrate the benefits of native plants (link with Grow Wild program)
- d. Water monitoring program

5. Build awareness about best practices

- E.g. Topics: native plants, invasives, climate change, citizen science, pesticide-free
- a. Provide resources and assistance to property owners to implement best practices e.g. update stewardship kit
 - b. Educational / stewardship events e.g. workshops, tours, demonstrations, spring talk, invasive species removal, Sheila garden demo
 - c. Roadshow e.g. Canada Day, Dorchester Fair

6. Build partnerships

- a. Engage local groups in various ways e.g.
 - business association – sponsors, friends, speaker
 - highschool – student volunteer time
 - hort society – garden tour, ivy removal
 - library – seminar
 - youth groups – grow wild turtle pledge
- b. Link with regional groups / programs e.g.
 - Middlesex Tourism – Open Doors
 - 1 million trees - replace ash?
 - Carolinian Canada awards, landowner leaders
 - native plant nurseries e.g. St Williams
 - grow-me-instead

7. Grow Wild program - Ask community to help with one action e.g. report a turtle; plant a native plant

- a. Promote it strongly
- b. Measure and track progress through Grow Wild website
- c. Engage local groups to reach goals e.g. youth clubs

4. Frog & Turtle Program

Purpose: Protect wild and threatened species of flora and fauna in their natural habitat. Monitor rare species and strengthen local ecosystems.

Objectives

- a. Identify and manage for life cycle needs of designated* rare species and habitats

Priorities

Status

Year 1

- 1. Focus on reptiles and amphibians as a first step to engage people.** Consult with Species at Risk biologist concerning:
 - a. Rare species list - Provincial and Middlesex rare species defined by MNR
 - b. Identify priorities for action
 - c. Best practices to promote in community
 - d. Host him for a talk
- 2. Turtle card**
 - a. Develop Message - what to do when you find a turtle
 - b. Develop logo
 - c. Develop Friends package - sticker, lawn signs, turtle talk cards, tattoos
 - d. Grow wild action – post on Grow Wild website and share link
- 3. Turtle promotion e.g.**
 - Ruth greeting card fundraiser
 - Talk by Scott Gillingwater to youth – turtle rally on earth day – business sponsor?
 - Video – Steve Sauder?
 - Youth web event / campaign
 - Invite volunteers to promote
 - media coverage to promote best practices when finding a turtle

Ruth requested a meeting

Logo – Ruth draft

Ruth – good success so far with fundraiser / media coverage

Frog & Turtle
Years 2-5

4. **Updated Biological Inventory** with a focus on rare species and habitats and identify life cycle needs at the Mill Pond

5. **Develop partnerships with schools and youth clubs to engage youth in actively protecting reptiles and amphibians**
 - a. Link to programs like Adopt a Pond, Kids for Turtles, UTRCA
 - b. Develop curriculum based education program about native species of frogs and turtles

6. **Develop awareness campaign of rare species (Watch Out for Wildlife) engage volunteers in citizen science programs**
 - a. Focus on encouraging people to report sightings using strategies such as:
 - link to Ontario Nature, Reptile and Amphibian Atlas
 - nest reporting
 - snake phobia workshop

7. **Community partnerships** e.g.
 - a. sightings board at Healthy Lifestyle Store
 - b. protected nesting sites
 - c. trail signage
 - d. Turtle crossing signs – must be approved through zoo, utrca, municipality – based on inventory, road kill data etc (collected above)

Awaiting funding

5. Living Heritage Program

Purpose: Engage Mill Pond community by making history come alive through the creation of personal connections to the Mill Pond and through the use of innovative learning opportunities.

Objectives

- a. Engage 1,000 people in Mill pond programs e.g. volunteers / wildlife watchers/ supporters

Priorities

Status

Year 1

1. **Link with heritage committee**
 - a. Get Mill pond stories into Dorchester Scrapbook
 - b. Historical element – reenactment, dance

Years 2-5

10. **Identify ways to measure outreach impact** see utrc proposal
11. **Develop EcoTrail materials and campaign** Build on stories collected for Ecoshelter
 - a. Collect and promote local stories about Mill Pond heritage (cultural and natural heritage)
 - b. Develop interactive access to trail interpretation and stories through a Living Trail Guide
 - QR codes, TD grant, CCC EcoTrail Live
12. **Continue to work with schools to reduce vandalism and increase engagement**
13. **Develop inspiring ways to promote the Mill Pond and engage neighbours.**
 - Recruit and train community leaders to promote and engage their networks
 - Signpost stories
 - Mill Pond Citizen newsletter
 - Canada Day event- turtles and snakes, face painting, scavenger hunt
14. **Mill Pond celebration – every 2 years?**
 - Community days
 - Sponsors, partners
 - Linda M – check out wood carver – living heritage

Summary of Objectives & Measures

SAVE (maintain existing natural heritage)

1. Ensure no net loss of existing habitat
2. Identify and manage for life cycle needs of designated* rare species and habitats

STEWARD (apply best practices)

3. Engage 75% of adjoining neighbours in Good Neighbor program
4. Engage 50 people in Mill Pond Stewards program from surrounding community
5. Collect 250 Grow Wild pledges to enhance habitat in Thames Centre
6. Enhance quality of riparian buffers through Good Neighbour program
7. Enhance water quality by working with Mill Pond Stewards and neighbours

SEED (grow healthy ecosystems for a healthy community)

8. Engage 10 new people in the Mill Pond Committee
9. Increase exposure of the Mill Pond through seasonal updates/ stories through a variety of media
10. Initiate 20 on-the-ground habitat restoration projects (wildflower, tree, shrub plantings)
11. Engage 1,000 people in Mill pond programs e.g. volunteers / wildlife watchers/ supporters
12. Improve trail facilities to protect the environment and to accommodate diverse users, increased interest and growing population.