



TEAMING UP FOR SPECIES AT RISK

Big things are happening all along the Trent-Severn Waterway

For boaters – and for turtles – the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW - a national historic site) can be a treat. The Waterway snakes through a diverse southern Ontario landscape of farms, forests, wetlands, towns and villages. It provides excellent adventures for the 300,000+ boaters who visit every year, and rich habitat for rare turtles and other species at risk.

In fact, for the turtles and other species at risk (SAR), who live along the Waterway, things are looking up. An energetic group of organizations has joined forces to protect SAR across the TSW landscape.



Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada

One stretch at a time

At Washago Centennial Park, a municipal park along the TSW, a dynamic team has tackled a major project: re-naturalizing 450 meters of shoreline in the park, and installing turtle basking logs and an osprey nesting platform in the process.

The re-naturalization was taken on by the Simcoe-Couchiching-Severn Species at Risk Regional Team – one of three teams helping Parks Canada meet a major challenge: how do you care for vulnerable species along a waterway 386 kilometres long? The secret is to divide and conquer. Each of three teams is responsible for an area of the Waterway. And once the teams began to tackle their job, big things began to happen, one stretch at a time.

The teams enlisted an enthusiastic cross-section of volunteers. The Simcoe-Couchiching-Severn SAR Regional Team, for example, had plenty of help from Kids for Turtles, the Washago Lumber Company, a local builder, and many others. In just one day, 450m of native plant species were planted along the shoreline, reptile habitat was created, turtle basking logs were placed and interpretive signage was installed.

Learning how to help

As manager of the Waterway, Parks Canada is committed to helping species at risk. Waterway staff knew that an effective recovery would require plenty of cooperation - from municipalities, landowners, boaters and cottagers. Landowners, for example, could become volunteer stewards, and help maintain important habitat on their properties. But how could so many different groups of people be mobilized? By providing them with the right tools and information.

Most people want to do the right thing for vulnerable wildlife, but they often lack the information and necessary tools. With help from the Priority Investment Fund for Species at Risk Recovery, Waterway staff set out to raise public awareness and provide information tools. People needed to know why it is important to protect listed species, and they also needed to know how.



Volunteers of the Simcoe-Severn-Couchiching SAR Regional project © John Challis



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Knowing what needs to be done

First, an inventory of existing information and resources was commissioned. Then, Waterway staff, in cooperation with its partners, developed a [web site](#) to help the public gain a better understanding of SAR and their habitat needs, and to explain ways to reduce human impact on the Waterway and its wildlife.

As well as reaching out to the community, threats to species at risk and their habitats had to be assessed. In partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, vegetation inventories, analysis and modeling were undertaken to map vegetation cover for both wetland and terrestrial habitats within a 5 km buffer of the Waterway.

All these information gathered and shared helped to re-naturalize shorelines by the Simcoe--Couchiching-Severn Species at Risk Regional Team.



The Kawartha Lakes SAR Regional Team built and installed chimney swift towers to compensate for nesting habitat lost © Robbie Preston

Two more Species at Risk Regional Teams

While the Simcoe-Couchiching-Severn SAR Regional Team was busy at Washago Centennial Park, as well as many other places, the other two SAR Regional Teams were busy undertaking partnerships and initiatives in their respective areas.



Eastern Hog-nosed snake
© Parks Canada

The Kawartha Lakes SAR Regional Team built and installed nine chimney swift towers. These structures compensate for nesting habitat lost over the decades. Originally, the birds nested in tree cavities in interior forest areas, but as those disappeared, they adapted to brick chimneys in our cities and towns. With the disappearance of traditional brick chimneys, the swifts needed a helping hand from the Kawartha team. Partners in this project ranged from the Kawartha and Peterborough Field Naturalist project leads, to the Boys and Girls Club and the local police. People throughout the community donated time, material and labour to construct the towers.

In the Rice Lake plains, the SAR Regional Team (the Rice Lake-Trent River Team) removed non-native Scots pine to help restore tallgrass prairie and improve habitat for the threatened Eastern Hog-nosed snake. Over the past century, dense Scots pine plantations in the area matured into monocultures with little biodiversity. Since the Scots pines are prolific seed producers, the species spread. It took over many important habitats, such as rare tallgrass prairie and savanna ecosystems, which are potential hog-nosed snake habitats. Volunteers used non-chemical techniques to clear out the Scots pine, and then used the brush to provide shelter for snakes.

Organizing for success

Projects along the Trent-Severn Waterway show how Parks Canada played a catalytic role with many other partners, in a task that would overwhelm any one organization. Success in such a case requires carefully defined roles. Parks Canada provided important expertise and targeted funding to encourage towns, villages, community groups and individuals to do their part to recover species at risk.

For more information:

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Turtle nesting protection sign © John Challis