

Land trust helps preserve Hypoint farm

By Nate Smelle

Thanks to a collaboration between the Hastings Prince Edward Land Trust and Mary LeFeuvre, 1,000 acres of land adjacent to Egan Chutes Provincial Park will now be protected.

Project partners, along with a faction of local environmentalists, gathered near the trail head at the entrance of the preserve on Nov. 30 to celebrate the protection of the land. During the ceremony, LeFeuvre, and land trust president Stewart Murray, unveiled a commemorative bronze plaque, that highlights some of the land's natural and historical significance.

Murray believes it is important for the community to protect land like this because natural heritage features, such as the Hypoint Farm Nature Preserve, are what make the Bancroft area such a uniquely beautiful and beloved place to live and visit.

"The land trust will protect this land forever in its natural state," he said.

According to Murray, the nature preserve will still be accessible by the public with permission of the land trust. He said it's planning to invite school groups, members of the scientific community to explore and conduct research and host guided hikes and tours of the nature preserve.

One of the main reasons to protect the land, he said, is that the streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, fields and forests within the preserve provide an excellent habitat for a vast diversity of species found in the Bancroft area. Another is that it serves to protect the York River watershed, and the water supply for the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery.

"The land trust is very fortunate in that Environment Canada has a program called the Ecological Gift Program, and we used that to assist Mary in protecting the land. Through that program, the Canadian Wildlife Service certifies that the land as ecologically significant and that it is deemed worthy of protection in perpetuity as a nature preserve," he said.

Murray said one of the best parts of his job is that he gets to work with people like the LeFeuvre, who deeply care about protecting their communities natural and cultural heritage. For LeFeuvre, the feeling was mutual. She said it was a blessing for her to discover an organization such as the land trust that is actively engaging in environmental protection. Founded in 1997 by a group of local citizens, the land trust has been working to protect natural areas that are important to communities for their ecological and cultural values.

"So much of the land is being encroached upon by subdivisions and all the rest of it and we need to protect it," said LeFeuvre. "I'm not going to live forever, so you can see this fast becoming a golf club or something like that. This will protect it in perpetuity. It's unique as far as the properties the land trust are protecting because it is being farmed."

LeFeuvre and her late husband Dennis have a long history of supporting local environmental protection initiatives. The two were instrumental in the creation of the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery. By exploring each and every acre of the land since moving there in 1994, she has developed a deep connection with their home environment. During her time on the land, LeFeuvre has had several close encounters with the wildlife that share the land with her. She recalls meeting a wolf one occasion while walking one of the trails with her dog.

"He was normally a very timid dog; he was not noted for bravery," she laughed. "He got out in front of me, and I wondered what he was doing. When I looked up ahead there was a wolf in the field in front of us. The two of them had a stare off, but the wolf must have thought better of causing a rumpus, so it departed. It's a wonderful place."