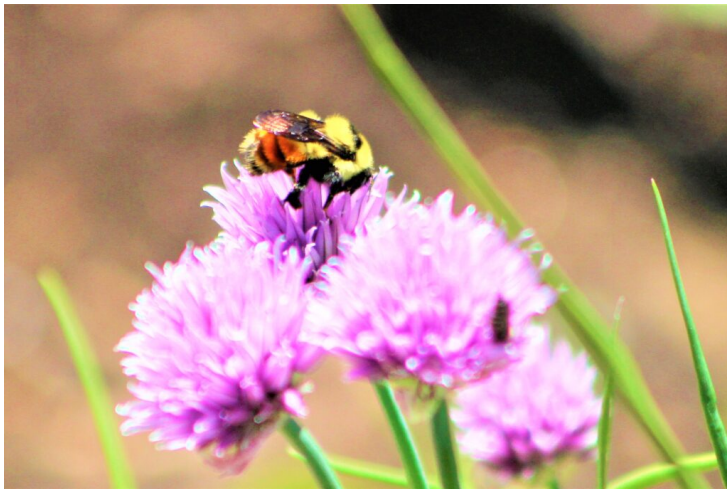


The source of what's special



By Nate Smelle

Whether you live in a small rural town such as Bancroft, or a large urban centre such as Toronto, there are kind, respectful, creative, and talented people in every community. In a similar manner, there are always others who choose to serve themselves and their own interests at the expense of others.

With this simple observation in mind, when I question what it is that makes living in North Hastings a more attractive option than living in a city, the answer for me is clear: nature. As the driving force behind our local economies, the unique natural beauty of our lakes, rivers, wetlands, fields, and forested highlands attracts people from around the world to our area to live, work, and play.

In lake-based economies such as those we find ourselves feeding into and dining on in North Hastings, for the most part our local businesses rely on visitors looking to escape the concrete constraints of the over-populated heat islands, we call cities. Speaking with a couple of these eco-tourists over the weekend I was reminded of how lucky we full-time residents are to live in an ecosystem that brings joy, peace, and good health to millions of people around the world.

Living here year-round, we have the opportunity to step outside and enjoy the outdoors whenever we have a free moment. Instead of being forced by our circumstances to explore a maze of big box stores in attempt to fill our voids with stuff, here, we can casually go for a short walk or drive and immerse ourselves in anyone of our many local lakes and forests to recharge our spiritual batteries.

Some might consider this enhanced access to nature to be a privilege, but not me. I see it more in line with the environmental activist and author Edward Abbey, who once wrote, "Wilderness is not a luxury, but a necessity of the human spirit."

Listening to friends and family share their experiences of riding out the COVID-19 pandemic in the city, it appears that more and more people are starting to appreciate how necessary a healthy natural world is to our well-being and quality of life.

As difficult and depressing as it has been for us to practice social distancing in North Hastings, imagine what it must be like for those living in the cramped quarters one finds in and around large urban centres.

Now that we appear to be exiting the pandemic, we are witnessing a massive surge of people looking to abandon the city life and move to our neck of the woods. Moving through the final stages of the province's re-opening plan and into recovery, we need to remember that we are in control of the growth we are about to experience. We also need to be mindful of the fact that when it comes down to it, all it would take is a short few years of unregulated "development" to erase the self-replenishing source of what it is that

makes North Hastings such a special place to live, work, and play.