

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Natural Edge Program Restores 11,800-Metres of Shoreline in the Muskrat Watershed

Watersheds Canada – The Muskrat watershed benefited from an additional 15,000 native trees and shrubs planted on five agricultural sites in 2020, naturalizing 4,400-metres of shoreline. These plants will improve water quality as they reduce run-off and reduce risks of erosion by stabilizing the shoreline banks while also creating valuable wildlife habitat.

November 6, 2020 marked the last day of the three-year shoreline planting project in the Muskrat watershed. The final year looked very different compared to the two years' prior – COVID-19 has greatly impacted the environmental sector with a loss of funding sources and restrictions on the number of volunteers that could help on each property. Fortunately, strong partnerships with the Muskrat Watershed Council and Algonquin College's Office of Applied Research at the Waterfront Campus allowed the Natural Edge Program to safely follow health guidelines and complete the project on time.

From 2018-2020, a total of 16 sites in the Muskrat watershed saw 11,800 metres of shoreline naturalized using 45,000 native trees and shrubs.



Melissa Dakers from Watersheds Canada (left) and Megan Rae from Algonquin College and the Muskrat Watershed Council (right) prepare to plant on one of the agricultural properties.

“This was an amazing project to be a part of. Working with local partners, landowners, and the community to improve water quality in the Muskrat watershed has been such a positive experience. It’s great to work with a community so committed to improving their environment”, says Chloe Lajoie, Natural Edge Program Manager.

The project used Watersheds Canada’s Natural Edge Program to design and restore each planting site. Participating landowners received a free site visit to discuss the current state and goals of their shoreline. Using the Natural Edge App, a planting plan was created which outlined the planting areas to be restored, the native species chosen, and the financial breakdown.

One agricultural property owner who took advantage of this program was Susan O’Neil. “Working with the Natural Edge Program was a very positive experience: they were friendly and professional and very neat and respectful of our property. Shoreline naturalization is important on our farm to reduce erosion and improve water quality. Also, we feel the need to preserve habitats for wildlife and promote diversity in vegetation”, says O’Neil.

While following strict health guidelines and distancing regulations, a small group of Outdoor Adventure Naturalist (ODAN) students from Algonquin College’s Pembroke campus helped plant native trees and shrubs.

“The project has brought together concerned citizens, schools, and farmers – and caught the attention of local townships – to work together on stewardship initiatives with long-term sustainability goals in mind. Algonquin College’s students learned a great deal through community planting events, water quality sampling, and collecting data on plant health and survival,” says Julie Sylvestre, Algonquin College’s Managing Director of Applied Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship.

“We hope to see more educational opportunities like this in the future where students are able to apply their pro-environmental values and knowledge towards a real cause”, Sylvestre adds.



A student from Algonquin College’s ODAN program plants native trees and shrubs during a physically distanced planting day on October 21, 2020.



Volunteers were instrumental to the success of this program, with over 500 volunteers helping over the three-year program. Volunteers from secondary and post-secondary schools, and local community groups and businesses learned about the benefits of a natural shoreline and why they are critical to protecting water quality and wildlife habitat.

Native trees and shrubs are well suited to filter out excess nutrients and toxins before they enter the waterway, helping to prevent algal blooms while also stabilizing shoreline banks against erosion.

"It has been an eye-opening three years, watching our agricultural community step up to offer lands for planting. We are thankful to all our volunteers, including from Algonquin College and Opeongo High School, who gave their time and sweat to dig and plant. I am proud of everyone involved including Watersheds Canada and local residents who made our water quality a priority. Our future will be better because of this project", said Karen Coulas, Muskrat Watershed Council Chair and Co-Director of Agriculture.

This program was generously funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, LUSH Canada, Whitewater Brewing Company, M&R Feeds and Farm Supply, Whitewater Township, Corteva Agriscience, and Cabela's Canada Outdoor Fund.

Moving into 2021, the Natural Edge team is excited to launch their Shoreline Re-naturalization Starter Kits. These kits provide landowners with the tools and guidance they need to naturalize their shorelines, from planning to planting. Each starter kit includes a site visit, customized re-naturalization planting plan, 50 native plants, 45 coconut fibre pads, tree guards and mulch, and three care guides to help maximize plant survival rate. Those interested in purchasing a starter kit should email naturaledge@watersheds.ca or visit <http://naturaledge.watersheds.ca> to see if the Natural Edge Program is offered in their region.

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