

## **Copeland Forest Friends Association**

### **2022 President's Report - May 7, 2022**

- Since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the Association has conducted its official meetings over zoom. I want to congratulate Brad Turner, who served as President at the beginning of the pandemic, and the whole board for making everything happen so well online. A big congratulations.
- During the pandemic, we were very fortunate to have the Copeland Forest so nearby almost in our backyards for some residents and members. The CF provided:
  - a place to enjoy nature and the outdoors,
  - a place to exercise when other forms of exercise were not available
  - a place to safely meet with friends and visit outside.

### 2021 Challenges

- We also welcomed into the Forest many people who were coming from nearby communities to take advantage of the benefits of the forest. They came to enjoy all the same experiences and opportunities we long enjoyed.
- Increased use of the Forest, though, presented significant challenges to the Association. We found that:
  - Parking lots were very busy, and cars were often parked on the streets (particularly in the winter)
  - New users were not familiar with the trails and had trouble finding their way through the forest and getting back to their cars. They also were not sure what was permitted in the the Forest leading to some confusion.
  - Our trails were heavily used leading to some conflicts between trail users and over-use of some trails. New trails and previously closed trails were opened to provide new opportunities for trail users without any permission being given.

### Projects and Initiatives

- In response to these challenges, your Association undertook several projects or initiatives:
  - A special priority was placed upon maintaining the parking lots off Ingram Rd.
    - With the help of the Township, Georgian Paving repaired the two parking lots last year and plans to do so again this year.
    - With the financial help of the Township, the Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association, and private donations, we contracted with a local farmer to clear both parking lots on Ingram Rd this past winter.
  - New information signage was placed up at major entrances to provide some further guidance to new users. We introduced the concept of QR

codes to our signage to link users back to our web site. We also enhanced the user group information on our web site.

- A moratorium was placed on further trail building activities until we developed a new trail plan. Our trails were built on an informal basis and now is the time to ensure that the trails all fit together and that the trails and forest ecology are preserved for the future.
- At the same time, we established a new trail committee to develop a vision for the trails and a trail plan. We conducted exhaustive interviews with people who wanted to volunteer so that we had a mix of experience, knowledge, and expertise on the committee.

### Impact on the Association

- Your Association was also directly impacted by pandemic, and this presented administrative challenges to the board.
  - Our membership rose quite significantly in 2020 and 2021 and our old systems did not work effectively.
  - We are now just finishing up the implementation of a new Civic CRM system to manage memberships, donations, and communications.
- Due to conflicts in the Forest, we also saw a rise in both verbal and on-line harassment of some members and users. Your Association began work this year on a new code of conduct for the board and volunteers to make it clear that we do not tolerate harassment of any kind in the Forest or our activities.
- We also continued our ecological projects to monitor water in the Copeland Forest and to control the spread of garlic mustard. Despite pandemic restrictions, we were able to go out in small groups or as individuals or families to complete this work. Thanks to Jamie Ross, the lead on water testing and thanks, to Margaret Kennedy and her team leaders for work on garlic mustard.

### 2022 Priorities

- As we look to the coming year, we are going to continue to address the priorities established in the last two years.
  - **Improving access to the Forest for all users.**
    - We will continue to maintain the Ingram Rd parking lots (funds permitting)
    - We plan to submit a work application for an expanded parking lot at #3680 5<sup>th</sup> Line N and will be seeking input of neighbours. This will enhance safety for users and better accommodate increased use at this site.
    - We want to thank the Township Operations staff for help with the planning and management of these projects.
  - **Improving user and visitor information at major trail heads.** We plan to update the new trail head signs to clarify some of the policies and we are planning a new kiosk sign with enhanced information for the large

parking lot off Ingram Rd. We also need to create more opportunities for people to learn about the ecology and natural values of the Forest.

- **Developing a vision for the trails and a trail plan** to provide for the sustainability of the trails and forest now and for future generations. Don McKinnon, the chair of the trail committee, will talk next.
- **Continuing to support our important ecological projects** to monitor forest ecology and protect the forest from invasive species.

### Being Vigilant and Minimizing Risk

- The recent washout of the dam at the trout pond demonstrates our fragile the sandy soil conditions are in the Copeland Forest and how water and erosion can transform the forest. We didn't expect the washout to happen so quickly and so dramatically. In fact, there appeared to be no issues when the trout were stocked a week earlier.
- We are talking to the Ministry about the dam washout and will keep you informed. There are a range of options for the dam, ranging from re-naturalizing the stream to rebuilding the dam. There are pros and cons to both options. But remember the remediation and clean-up is the Ministry's responsibility. The subject of the dam is not part of our Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry.
- Going forward, we must look at how we can minimize the risks in the forest and the impact of increased use on the forest ecology. Increased use may lead to:
  - widening of trails
  - erosion of the steep trails and
  - water flowing down trails carrying garlic mustard seeds into the heart of the forest.
- We need to be vigilant in our stewardship of the Forest to ensure future generations can enjoy the forest as much as we do now.

### Thank you to the Volunteers

- As we go ahead this year, it is more important than ever that we continue to have your support for our planned activities and your involvement in our projects.
  - **The garlic mustard project and water testing activities** are very labour intensive, and we could not do the work without the support of the volunteers that come forward. Last year, we had over 60 volunteers involved in garlic mustard and 8 volunteers involved in water testing. Thanks to all of you.
  - **The single-track trails have been maintained by an informal network of trail crew** who clear the trails, who remove fallen trees and who keep the trails open. We need to build on this work and ensure that the focus encompasses both trail maintenance and ecological preservation going forward. With the heightened sensitivity around risk management, we need to ensure trail crew are trained in trail preservation and have the required skills to do the important work. We look to the trail committee to give us advice on this. Thanks to all the unsung heroes of the trail crew.

- **The board and its committees all involve volunteers.** Thanks to:
  - All the board members
  - All the trail committee members
  - All the ecology and sustainability committee members.

David Kennedy