

Natural and Cultural Heritage Preservation

Richard Downing, Foxboro

University of Guelph 3rd Year Zoology

Natural Heritage Education Staff, Bon Echo Provincial Park 2009

Public knowledge towards problems regarding natural and cultural heritage both on a global and regional stage are of major concern in today's society. Events occur daily across the globe that impact people both physically and emotionally. One of the most important tools that we as a society possess against the destruction that can be caused is through education. It is practically impossible for a person to alter their actions or their opinions on a particular issue if there is not a way for them to learn about the issues directly. With the modern media techniques it is impossible to escape the damages that have been caused by our actions. Steps have been taken to show people the problems but little is done to show people the solutions. One of my goals through my schooling is to learn about the problems directly affecting the wildlife with which we share this planet and to educate people on the actions that can be taken to change our current pattern of destruction. My goal through future education is not only to familiarize people with the natural environment but to teach them to appreciate it.

Since beginning my study of Zoology at the University of Guelph, it has become evident to me that it is impossible to reverse the hardships that have already happened but that a balance can be reached between nature and current human activity. While working at Bon Echo in the Natural Heritage Program, I have learned not only about the need for change but the desire of the majority of the population to do what is right. It is easy to say that one will make these changes but it is completely different to actually integrate change into our daily lives. Suitable habitat for animals is something that is constantly decreasing and by balancing our needs of housing and development with the needs for the natural environment we can make a better tomorrow, today.

Cultural preservation is another area of focus here at the park which is important to maintain. As a whole, society has become focused on where we are now and where we can go without taking into account where we have been. With the developments of the TV and the internet, people talk about things without ever experiencing them first hand. Getting people involved and getting them out to experience true beauty first hand is a great step to educating society about the importance of nature and culture.

The possibility of continuing in the Ontario Parks system with the goal of one day becoming Park Superintendent here at Bon Echo or of becoming a school teacher specializing in the area of Biology, are potential career choices that I continue to consider. Regardless of what I do for a living I feel that the experience gained here at Bon Echo and through my schooling will allow me to influence others to see that a balance can be achieved. Through the education that is provided to campers, both kids and adults, alike, through the programs offered here at the park, and through the school system gives the everyday person the appreciation and the power to make a change.

Sonya Krause, Toronto

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I am very excited to be starting a specialist program in Conservation Biology at the University of Toronto this fall. I have been admitted to the Biological Sciences Department and will be declaring my Specialist in Conservation Biology at the finish of first year. This bursary will go directly towards my education.

Part of this university excitement comes from working in the Natural Heritage Education department at Bon Echo Provincial Park. This park has a rich natural history, starting with the range of ecosystems such as the Bon Echo Creek to the Nature Reserve Zone on the top of Bon Echo Rock. These are significant features within the park but they also play a larger role in nation wide conservation efforts, for example, providing a safe nesting area for the endangered peregrine falcons. Bon Echo plays a very important role in the conservation of species at risk. The peregrines are especially important because they are environmental indicators as well endangered. Park visitors are interested in park wildlife and want to engage in conversation about what is being done for biodiversity. The first step and most important step in conservation is engaging people and informing them about environmental issues. This way information about important issues is readily available for the general population and this way, everyone can help in the conservation effort. Through studying Conservation Biology I will be able to engage in conversation with park visitors about conservation, in a deeper level than before.

The special thing about working in a park is being able to apply what I have learned in a meaningful way. Ontario Parks has a mandate to protect and conserve Ontario's significant cultural and natural features. Conservation Biology ties in with Ontario Parks goals perfectly. The Natural Heritage Education department at Bon Echo provides the perfect environment for me to continue to be inquisitive and learn more about conservation in the field, because of the effort made to protect and to help everyone understand the importance of protecting the environment. Studying Conservation Biology will help me engage with visitors, help shape better evening and children's programs. Also, with more education it is possible to help improve conservation programs in the park itself. For example monitoring studies on the impact of visitors in certain regions such as on the Cliff Top trail or on popular campsites.

It is important to remember that even Merrill Denison, the donor of part of these park lands was a conservationist and it was his dream to make Bon Echo a hub for conservation and people who enjoy nature. By staying true to his dreams and important values, Bon Echo will continue to inspire and educate people through it's rich history, and natural features. Through studying Conservation Biology I believe that I can contribute to the cultural and natural heritage which is central to making Bon Echo the successful park that it is.