



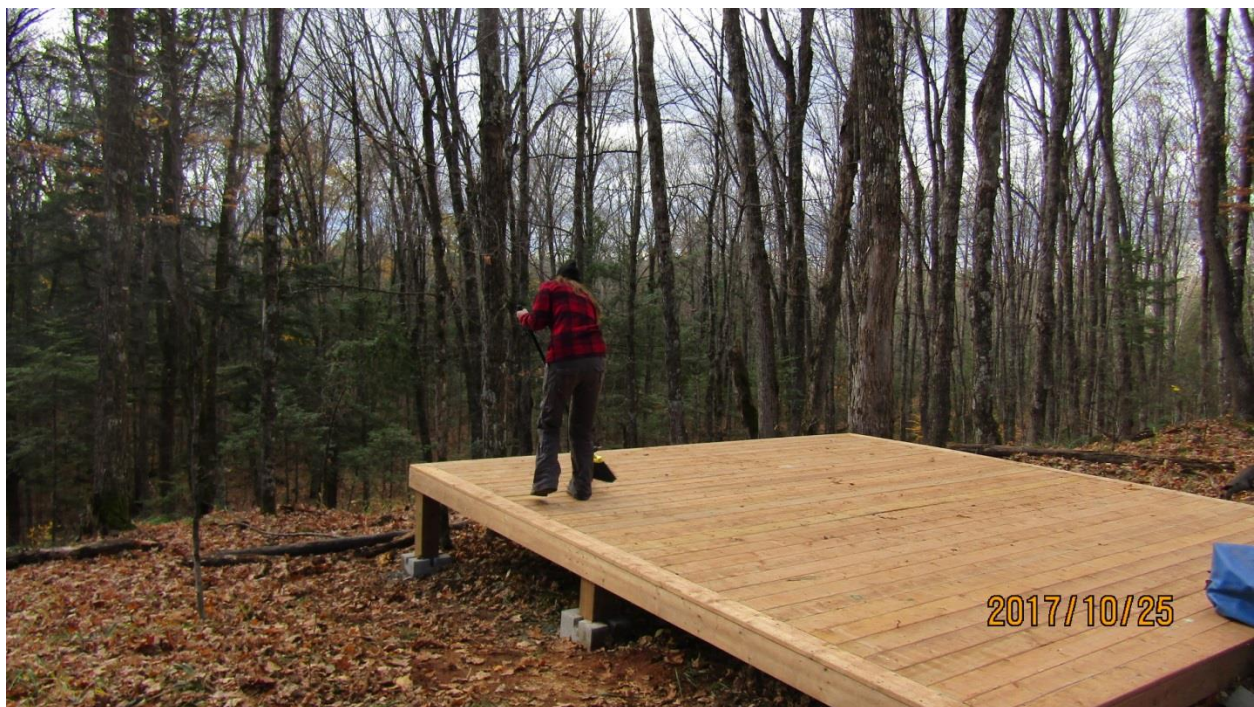
2017 FINAL REPORT FOR



**"AN ENVIRONMENTAL OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE
- A YURT EXPERIENCE"**



The concept of having a yurt as an outdoor education centre at the McGeachie Conservation area was created by a brainstorming session with the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) staff during a staff luncheon. We discussed to either utilize an existing building or building a new building in a different location. Then someone mentioned using a yurt. That was it. The concept was born. Since 2009 the CVCA has been fundraising for the purchase of a yurt and finally by 2013 we reached our monetary goal and the yurt became ours; an addition to the CVCA family. Unfortunately, however, the CVCA was still short the funds to build a wooden platform for the yurt. So, there sat our yurt in the CVCA garage compound until the generosity of the Ontario Wildlife Foundation (OWF) made our dream come true. Many thanks to the OWF, we couldn't have done it without your generous donation. We are so very pleased to be able to offer this unique experience to the public.



Let me tell you a little bit about the McGeachie Conservation Area. When you walk through the trail head entrance towards the hiking trails at the McGeachie Conservation Area it feels like you are entering an unbelievably amazing place. You can almost feel calmness come over you as your mind and body relaxes. You notice your breathing becomes deep and fresh and your sense of smell awakens with the earthy smells of Mother Nature. Your visual senses explode with sights of wild orchids and pink lady slippers. There are predominant tree species like Hard Maple, Leatherwood, Cedar and Hemlock groves which shelter deer and other animals, Spruce, Balsam, Tamarack, Pine and Red Oak which provides acorns for food for the wildlife such as squirrels, chipmunks, wild turkeys and blue jays. You might get a chance to see a ruffed grouse,

a red fox, a white tailed deer, a pileated woodpecker, a yellow-bellied sapsucker, a weasel, a beaver or a river otter. Along the trails you will come across woodpecker holes from a pileated woodpecker searching for grubs in rotten wood in maple trees. During the spring you will encounter vernal pools which are breeding grounds for frogs, toads, salamanders, snails, worms, spiders, water bugs and beetles. There are cedar swamps and beaver marshes to see. The sounds of the Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch and many more song birds will lull you into a world of nature calls. There is a diverse trail system that has been created for the public to either go for a leisurely stroll through the forest or for the extremist who finds it a rush to hike or bike along the trails. There was even forethought of having loops from trail to trail allowing hikers to customize the length of their excursion. You have entered a world we only dream of while we are at our desks in our urban environment. You have escaped into over 500 acres of wilderness, untouched for over 100 years which becomes a virtual classroom that exposes you to a wide variety of experiences.



Through the generous support of the Ontario Wildlife Foundation (OWF), the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) was able to partner with the Norwood District High School Outdoor Education class and also with three elderly gentlemen volunteers. During the week of October 16th, 2017 the volunteers hauled up all the timber for the framing of the deck and the cement blocks for the deck footings. The volunteers were able to stay at the CVCA Conley Drinkwater cottage on the beautiful Steenburg Lake in the Township of Limerick. They put in long hours that week to construct the deck frame but took advantage of the Conservation Area with the magnificent hiking trails and fishing from a canoe on the crystal clear lake. They commented on the beauty and the peacefulness of the place and fell in love with the rustic cottage and everything the lake had to offer. They stated that they would volunteer for the CVCA at the McGeachie Conservation Area again just to be in the wilderness environment and the use of the cottage of course.



Then on Wednesday October 25th, 2016 a school bus pulled up to the CVCA Conley Drinkwater cottage and dropped off 10 Outdoor Class students. Their teacher, Mike Sherwin, arrived separately in a van full of carpentry tools to build the yurt deck. With the use of the CVCA's 4x4 Gator ATV and the teacher's van, we managed to transport students, teachers, equipment,

coolers and food to approximately 1/2km past the McGeachie CA tail head which is located approximately 1km down the road from the cottage. It was an overcast day but the temperature was fairly mild and there was no snow or rain in the forecast. So, with student, teachers and equipment we ATV'd and hiked into the forest to the location already framed out for the yurt and its decking. The location of the yurt is off of the intersection of the "Blue" and "Black" hiking trails. The "Blue" hiking trail is the main trail which starts at the trail head and ends at the large Beaver Dam. This main hiking trail is a leisurely hiking trail to the yurt location. Past the yurt the trail becomes inclined with rugged rocky outcrops.



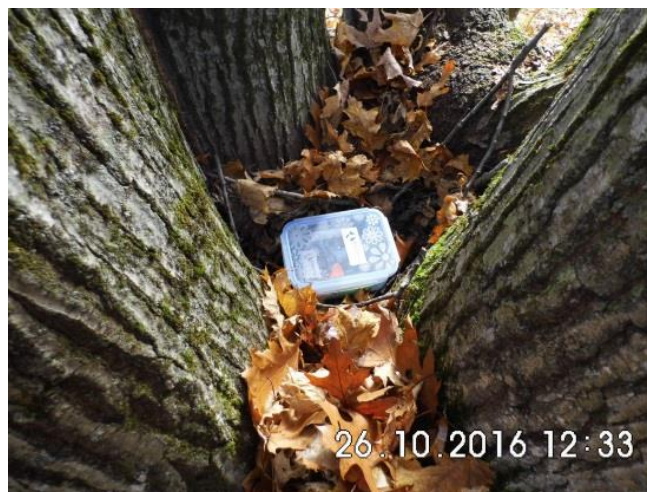
An intense day of physical work and outdoor learning was had by all. The students were able to put their carpentry building skills to good work by measuring, cutting, nailing, screwing and following instructions. In no time, the yurt was erected and ready to use.



All of the work was completed by approximately 4:00 in the afternoon and then the students took to the hiking trails with great enthusiasm. They also wanted to be the first to utilize the outdoor classroom that the Conservation Area has to offer to the public by identifying and classifying the living and non-living components of specific ecosystems. In addition, they wanted to apply their classroom skills to navigate through the natural environment and to use a variety of ecosystem inventory techniques. By the time that they finished exploring the McGeachie Conservation Area and hiked back to the cottage it was dusk and time to make supper. They enjoyed that camaraderie of cooking and telling wildly exaggerated stories of their hikes. They hunkered down at around 10:00 pm after burning off the scrap wood from the yurt deck in the outdoor fire pit.



Thursday morning soon arrived and a hearty breakfast was served to the students. After breakfast they promptly packed up their belongings, cleaned up the cottage and were soon lured back to the hiking trails with the temptations of finding treasure. Their teacher had slipped out during breakfast and hid trinkets at several locations on the trails, took note of the GPS points and then gave the students the coordinates in order for them to locate the treasures. The students utilized their Global Positioning System (GPS) abilities to uncover these hidden treasures. This is a type of “geocaching” activity. Geocaching consists of hiding a geocaching box in the forest and post the coordinates on the Geocaching website at <https://www.geocaching.com>. Along with the coordinates being posted on the website a description of the geocaching box is also posted for treasure hunters to find. The Oxford dictionary describes geocaching as “the recreational activity of hunting for and finding a hidden object by means of GPS coordinates posted on a website”. The cache box contains a log book with pencils and some swag to take with the hope geocachers will also leave a little souvenir for someone else to find.





With hard work and dedication from a wonderful group of Norwood High School Outdoor students and the 3 gentlemen volunteers, the McGeachie Conservation Area now has a brand new yurt as an Outdoor Education Centre. Subsequently, on Wednesday December 6th, 2017, CVCA staff attended the Norwood District High School to present the Outdoor students with Certificates of Appreciation. During this visit, students were asked if they had any comments to make about the whole experience and some of their comments are as follows:

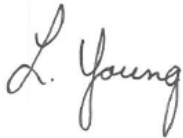
- “that yurt was really cool”;
- “I plan on going up there again”;
- “we had such a blast at the cottage”;
- “I loved GPS’ing”;
- “I want to get a gator”;

“Leave the beaten track behind occasionally and dive into the woods. Every time you do you will be certain to find something you have never seen before” – Alexander Graham Bell.

This is what an environmental outdoor education centre is all about; learning about something new every time you attend the Conservation area. The McGeachie Environmental Outdoor Education Centre is situated on 586 acres of untouched wilderness. The centre has the unique opportunity to share with its patrons flora and fauna that can only be found in 100 year woodland areas. Combined with several beaver ponds, natural rifts, valleys and pristine streams, the educational programs will highlight many natural wonders not soon forgotten. The yurt will make a fantastic education centre as a central location and to encourage students and

the public to use nature's outdoor classroom. The McGeachie Conservation Area Outdoor Education Centre will provide a unique opportunity to inspire the public to challenge themselves on learning about an outdoor wildlife environment, conservation of land, some of the flora and fauna and all the natural rifts and valleys. Stepping outside into nature provides the experience of touching, smelling and hearing all the green space around you. Being healthy by nature will have a positive impact on our communities. Hiking helps keep you physically and mentally healthy. Thanks to the generosity of OWF for supporting this project, the benefits of getting outside and being one with nature will remain with the local community and the visitors to the McGeachie Conservation Area for many years to come.

Respectfully submitted by,



Lou Young, Project Coordinator



P.O. Box 416, 70 Hughes Lane
Marmora, ON., K0K 2M0
613-472-3137 Fax: 613-427-5516
www.crowevalley.com
info@crowevalley.com

PICTURES FROM THE PROJECT

