



Restoring the Wainfleet Bog



Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

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The Wainfleet Bog once covered more than 200,000 hectares (approximately 500,000 acres), stretching inland along the north shore of Lake Erie from Port Colborne west to the Grand River. Extensive drainage projects and 80 years of peat extraction have shrunk the bog to 1,200 hectares (approximately 3,000 acres). This bog is the largest, least disturbed bog in southern Ontario! A number of unique plants and animals flourish here including various threatened and endangered species. The bog also has a large forested area that is home to deer and migrating birds and butterflies.

The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) is committed to restoring the bog to a more natural state. Restoration work began in 2000 with the goal to re-introduce living sphagnum moss, retain water and reconnect sections of the bog for plant and animal species. These management efforts are being done on the west half of the property, while the east half is being left alone so that existing species can adapt to the changes if needed.

To start the restoration process, several internal peat canals were blocked and shallow surface indentations were created to help maintain water levels. The surface indentations were planted with native plant material to provide food and cover for plants and animals at the bog. Plantings included seeds, hardstem cuttings and plugs of leatherleaf, Labrador tea, sheep laurel, blueberry, cotton and sphagnum moss. To maintain moisture and minimize frost upheaval, "Weed Free" straw mulch was used on the plantings. Half of the non-native European birch trees have been cut to assist in maintaining water levels at the site, minimize surface temperatures and soil and provide surface cover for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. A monitoring program has also been established to evaluate the rehabilitation activities including groundwater levels, vegetation changes and sensitive animal populations on the site over time.

The NPCA owns the biggest portion of the bog, with smaller pieces held by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and several private landowners. Nothing is done in isolation making sure there is no impact to neighbouring properties. There is a great sense of community spirit in these restoration efforts with neighbouring landowners doing their part to support the bog. There is a great deal of support and understanding regarding the benefits of this natural habitat and the unique species that live there. Local farmers and landowners have created wet meadows and tall grass meadows for wildlife habitat. Residents and farmers help keep animals out of harm's way by waiting for animals to move before completing their land tasks. Area residents are helping with plantings and boardwalk building. Working together, local landowners, conservation clubs, nature clubs, universities, local municipalities and government agencies are all doing their part for bog restoration.



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