

Interning at the GRCA - A Lesson in Stewardship

The term “Summer Internship” leaves a somewhat bitter taste in the mouths of many University students. If movies and TV shows are to be believed, the main role of students in an organization is that of a coffee and doughnut fetcher, with the occasional photocopying session thrown in to really diversify the work experience. However, the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority acknowledged and defied these stereotypes from my very first day. Simply put, many conservation authorities are simply too busy and too resource-efficient to allow even a single student to spend their time in an unproductive manner.

As I am currently fulfilling the role of “Stewardship Intern,” most of my day-to-day work focuses on ways to involve the community in projects to preserve the health of our fragile watershed.

Stewardship is an interesting mixed-bag of approaches that all strive toward the same goal, the protection of the environment through conservation and sustainable practices. This can encompass a wide variety of activities, ranging from erosion control methods to raising awareness regarding the benefits of native plants and effective water use. The GRCA is proud to deliver a groundbreaking stewardship program that sets an example for other conservation authorities throughout Ontario.

Two of the programs I was involved in under the Stewardship umbrella were the Clean Water Healthy Lands Financial Assistance Program (CWHLFAP) and the Greening Your Grounds (GYG) initiative.

CWHLFAP provides landowners with the opportunity to apply for grants for any eco-minded projects that they wish to undertake. A common complaint against eco-based projects is that they cost money and provide nothing in return, which is definitively false. Using, in part, CWHLFAP funds, a landowner in Cobourg created a rain garden that looks stunning, manages storm flows in the best way possible, and provides a sanctuary for all sorts of local wildlife like butterflies and bumblebees.

Greening Your Grounds is a workshop series aimed at eliminating overland water flow during storms and incorporating it back into groundwater (a much healthier practice) all while improving the look of a landscape. Examples of projects suggested in the GYG workshops include rain barrels, soakaway pits, permeable pavement, and native plant gardens. The best part is that many of these projects are eligible for funds under the CWHLFAP program!

Although my summer work term draws to an end in September, the learning I accomplished here will stay with me for the remainder of my academic career. It's rare that a summer student such as myself gets to experience such a wide range of challenges in a single term.

For more information regarding the GRCA, CWHLFAP program, GYG workshops, or any other stewardship-related inquiries, feel free to send us an email at stewardship@grca.on.ca, or call at 905-885-8173.

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