



Hamilton-Halton  
Watershed Stewardship Program

**A Program of:**



### **Landowners Sharing their Stories**

Written in 2011, this story is one in a series of stories told by local landowners who have a passion for protecting the natural features on the land they steward and for protecting the water that flows through that land. Many of these landowners are recipients of the Watershed Stewardship Award. The award is a sign that landowners proudly display on their property acknowledging their commitment to be good stewards of land and water.

# **HIDDEN LAKE GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB**

## **by Robbie and Sharon Robinson**

When we attended our first Audubon seminar in 1998, the Hamilton Harbour Watershed Stewardship Project offered to help us. A resulting visit from Stewardship and Water Quality Monitoring staff of Conservation Halton was

summarized in 20 pages of recommendations for managing these 500 acres. The staff from these two conservation authority programs helped us enormously to attain the Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary designation, the highest environmental achievement award people in our field can get.



Hidden Lake Golf and Country Club

Part of our property consists of Medad Valley. This includes our 40 acre Lake Medad. Our property is composed of a Provincially Significant designation for its Wetland, Life Science Areas of Provincial Significance and Earth Science Area of Regional Significance, as well as Environmentally Sensitive Area for both Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth.

We slowly began to change the property from manicured to naturalized. As with any change, there was a lot of opposition/criticism. Our biggest obstacle was naturalizing the intermittent waterway as it crosses the property and runs into Lake Medad.

We left a 15 foot wide naturalized area along both sides of the waterway. Golfers would walk through the naturalized area, pulling their golf carts behind them. They would also drive carts through the creek bed. We installed signs, telling them what we were trying to achieve. To this day, golfers continue to walk through this naturalized area.



Hamilton Conservation Authority Stock Photo

For many years, there has been a provincial concern about an insufficient water supply. In a 1939 book, titled "Lake Medad and Waterdown", Stanley Mills (United Empire Loyalist) writes of water power being the energy source used by man and beast. He states that a good water supply was a priority for early settlers. He writes of the great pines, elms, and white oaks that covered the country. He writes of how the floor of the forest was porous like a sponge, resulted in the accumulation of snow in the woods.

He wrote of how the shade of the tree trunks together with the spongy floor of the forests permitted the snow to melt gradually. He felt that this slow melting added to the spring and summer rains and this resulted in the rivers and streams always having an abundance of running water.



Once the land was cleared and the winter snows were immediately and fiercely exposed to the sun's rays, the rivers and streams would overflow their banks, do damage for a few weeks and then get down to a trickling stream or dry creek bed for the rest of the season. We continue to see the similar phenomena in the Halton area.



Over the years, Hidden Lake has planted over 5,000 trees. We believe by planting so many trees we have contributed to helping alleviate this problem.

Having Hidden Lake Golf Club designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary has meant a lot to us. It has required years of time, effort, money, and change for everyone. Was it worth it?

Probably one of the most important benefits to Audubon Certification is that we are recognized as competent environmental managers. There has been so much negative publicity about pesticide use and how golf courses are horrible for the environment. Certification has brought a positive change.

During and following Certification, we have worked with, and financially supported, a wildlife conservation group. As recognized environmental stewards, we have spoken at greenkeeper/conservation seminars, and have been invited to plan for and speak at other events. We have spoken to a local interest group about our conservation work. We have had students ranging in age from primary grades to university visit the Course and learn about the actual work that we have done.

When we speak, we try to inform our audience of the benefits of turfgrass. In fact, we say that it is the most beneficial landscape plant, period. We remind our audience that turfgrass is highly drought resistant, filters air and water, provides tremendous amounts of oxygen to the atmosphere while at the same time consuming carbon dioxide, and preventing erosion.

One environmental studies group from Guelph University did their colloquium on water quality on



our ponds. We were part of 2002 Communities in Bloom and had local dignitaries visit our property. We were the first golf course to be invited to speak at the annual Hamilton Harbour Watershed Monitoring and Research Workshop.

Not that certification has been a silver bullet. We have found that educating others about our efforts also includes educating them about the program. The value of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses has been questioned by many people (even people knowledgeable in the field of conservation) because of their misconception that certification is self-regulated. In fact, in order to maintain certification, re-certification is done every two years, with the first re-certification involving a tour and audit of the course by an independent third-party reviewer. This reviewer could be a member of the local government, a non-profit environmental organization, a university science or turfgrass department, etc. The reviewer cannot have any stake in the property or in the Audubon designation. Results of the reviewer's audit and past documentation are then provided by the property owner to Audubon International for review. The decision to award re-certification rests solely with the Audubon staff.



Did we do conservation work before the Audubon Sanctuary Program came into effect? Of course we did. But the program pushed us farther.

We have observed new occurrences and more abundance of wildlife. The naturalized areas on the property are teeming with wildlife from foxes to frogs. Insects abound. Birds feed and nest. It is wonderful.

Another benefit is that the look of these naturalized areas changes throughout the year. The spring is green. Early summer the grass waves in the wind. Later the colours change to red and gold.

Water test results show an improvement in water quality because of the naturalized changes that we have made. We use less fuel, pesticides, machinery, and require less staff.



The Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program is shared by both the Hamilton Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton.

We have been working with private and public property owners in these watersheds since 1994, providing advice on environmentally friendly ways of managing properties with natural features, such as woodlots, wetlands, meadows and creeks.

We have naturalized over 41 acres of our land, reduced chemical use, improved water quality, hopefully water quantity, planted more than 5,000 trees, and provided extensive wildlife habitat. Our Course has benefited the environment. It is not always possible to do this with other land uses. We are proud of our property and welcome everyone interested to visit us.



As I mentioned in the beginning, certification took years of time, effort, money and change. In a world of both problematic economics and weather, doing the paper work requires discipline. Without it however, there is no documentation to substantiate what we have done. If we as a golf course can provide 41 acres of wildlife habitat amongst our fairways, tees, and greens, good for us.

The Pesticide Act is there. Audubon is also. The choice is ours.

**Interested in learning more about natural features on your property? Call to arrange a free on-site consultation!**

Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program  
c/o Hamilton Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton  
[www.hamiltonhaltonstewardship.ca](http://www.hamiltonhaltonstewardship.ca)  
Hamilton Conservation Authority: 905-525-2181, Extension 181  
Conservation Halton: 905-336-1158, Extension 2263

**The Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program acknowledges the generous financial support of:**



TD Friends of the  
Environment  
Foundation



GREAT LAKES  
SUSTAINABILITY FUND



FONDS POUR LA DURABILITÉ  
DES GRANDS LACS

