



2019 Conservation Award—Non-Member: Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust



(left to right) Howard Clifford, Bob Betcher, Bethany Armstrong

This award is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution by a non-member in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, with particular emphasis on activities within the Ottawa District.

This year, the award is given to the Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust (MMLT) in recognition of their exceptional work protecting valuable wildlife habitat.

The MMLT was founded in 2003, and soon joined the Ontario Land Trust Alliance, adopting their Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices. Without doubt, one of the best and most enduring ways to protect our native flora and fauna is to preserve habitats in perpetuity. The MMLT focuses on acquiring and protecting land in the Ottawa Valley just west of Ottawa, within the Mississippi River and lower Madawaska River watersheds. Their Mission Statement sums up their goals nicely: “To legally protect and steward private lands having ecological, biodiverse, aesthetic, and cultural value and to foster engagement with wilderness.”

The land trust approach fits in well with this objective. Land trusts “are charitable organizations which are legally empowered to protect lands worthy of long-term conservation.” The MMLT protects land in several ways: by accepting donations of land, by entering into conservation easements with landowners, and by outright purchase of land. At present, the MMLT stewards eight properties encompassing a diversity of habitats from forest to wetlands, meadows and mountains. Four of these properties are open to the public for nature viewing, hiking, and snowshoeing.

Maintaining a land trust such as the MMLT requires considerable time and effort. While there is one paid part-time staff person, everything else is conducted by dedicated volunteers (a comprehensive *Volunteer Handbook* delineates the many important ways in which volunteers

can assist). Acquiring a property is the essential first step, followed by the preparation of maps and extensive documentation of the acquisition to satisfy legal requirements. Complete ecological assessments are also undertaken for each property including surveys of fauna and flora. As part of this process, the MMLT added an innovative acoustic monitoring of some sites during 2018. Plans are then prepared for ongoing monitoring and stewardship.

There are many costs associated with running such an organization. Financing is needed for legal fees, land appraisal, insurance, property taxes, and annual audits, and of course where applicable, buying land. Donations and membership fees contribute a significant amount. MMLT also applies for grants from various agencies for special projects, such as tree planting, the above acoustic monitoring, as well as to assist with the costs of land purchase. The MMLT holds their annual *Go Wild Gala* each autumn, with a silent auction which helps generate considerable funding. A wonderful array of guided walks and other events are held for which a modest fee is charged. There are hikes to see the fall colours on one of their most stunning properties, Blueberry Mountain, and excursions to other properties to discover lichens, watch birds, learn about wildflowers, search for dragonflies, and there is the delightfully named *Festival of the Wild Child*.

The MMLT is a dynamic, energetic, engaged group, completely dedicated to their vision of “wilderness protected for all time, where all species thrive and people engage with nature.” They have been wonderfully successful in their relatively short time as a land trust and it is clear that they will continue to promote the joys and the beauty of nature as they protect yet more wild lands in the years ahead. For all of these reasons and for so much more, we are honoured to present the MMLT with the OFNC’s 2019 Conservation Award—Non-Member.

Prepared by Christine Hanrahan