

Conservation authorities: Ontario's unsung heroes

SNC visited by speaker from Conservation Ontario

FINCH— THE SOUTH NATION CONSERVATION HELD THEIR 2011 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON MARCH 24 AT THEIR OFFICE IN FINCH. SNC ELECTED THEIR NEW CHAIR LAWRENCE LEVERE AND VICE CHAIR BILL SMIRLE WHILE APPOINTING KEN HILL TO THE POSITION OF PAST CHAIR. AFTERWARDS THERE WAS A PRESENTATION FROM CONSERVATION ONTARIO'S GENERAL MANAGER DON PEARSON.

Pearson has served in that position since 2005. He gave an outline of Conservation Ontario, goals that the organization has and challenges it faces.

Pearson began by outlining the mandate to conserve, restore, protect and sustain water, forests and energy sources. "One area that we are very conscious of is watershed planning. Through this we can ensure there is water sustainability to meet population needs."

One of the main initiatives that Pearson spoke of was tree planting. Pearson explained that there was great cooperation with all conservation authorities, landowners and municipalities on this issue. Pearson also had much praise for the staff at SNC as he explained that they would be planting approximately 150,000 trees in the next year, which accounts for roughly five per cent of the provincial program.

One of the main issues that Pearson stressed was how conservation authority programs can help not only ecology but also the economy. Pearson explained that there is an advantage to having conservation programs as they can help the health of the population, which helps the economy. "The health care system, or what I like to call sick care system won't take care of you if you're healthy. We treat healthy people because we provide them with a place to recreate. Creating that link provides a reason for conserving the green spaces that conserva-



Don Pearson, from Conservation Ontario, was the guest speaker at the SNC meeting on March 24. Pearson spoke about what Conservation Authorities strive to achieve and gave a brief outline of Conservation Ontario as an organization.

Matte photo

tion authorities protect because they are absolutely essential to the health of our population and it reduces costs down the road. "

In addition to trying to save the province money through creating a healthy environment, Pearson also explained that through their various programs conservation authorities protect more than 46,000 homes and save the province \$100-million.

Despite successes that the organization has managed, Pearson still outlined challenges. The main challenge is that there is little recognition for conservation authorities provincially.

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"Conservation authorities are well known locally, but still need to work on establishing a positive image to legislative bodies." To combat this Conservation Ontario has

worked with individual authorities to work on getting information out for better recognition.

The other challenges related to managing the green spaces. But Pearson explained that through the programs that are in place the conservation authorities are prepared to deal with

potential problems.

Pearson concluded by outlining conservation authorities' program priorities, which include stewardship, watershed report cards, developments and regulations, conservation areas, aging infrastructure and floor forecasting and warning.