

SNC mentors local university students

FINCH – Thirteen university students have joined South Nation Conservation (SNC)'s workforce for the summer.

"We're proud to be in the position of giving talented students jobs," Dennis O'Grady, general manager, said.

The program, which has been in place for several years, offers students an opportunity to gain practical experience in their fields of study along with pay cheques to help with tuition costs in the fall.

This year's group includes Bonnie Boyd, Ben Gallant, Thierry Gibeault, Saxon Ireland, Hannah Jackson, Katie Keenan, Simone Larin, Benjamin Lawrence, Jordan Smyth, Nadine Chambers, Kiersti McMillan, Brent Harbers and Shaun Crook.

Eleven of this season's participants originate in the region, coming from Ottawa, Embrun, Newington, Ingleside, Crysler, and Chesterville. They attend university or college as far away as British Columbia, but most are enrolled at universities in Ottawa and Guelph, where they specialize in everything from forestry and environmental science to journalism and business.

While employed with the Finch-based conservation team, students work in various departments, sometimes crossing from one to another, expanding their experience. Mentored every step of the way, these summer employees also learn about the inner

workings of a fairly large organization through attending various meetings of the SNC board and committees.

"It's a great way to assess future full-time employees," O'Grady said. "For some, SNC becomes their first employer after graduation."

Chesterville's Harbers, a University of Guelph natural resources management student, is keen on raising awareness about invasive species, while Lawrence of Ingleside is taking journalism at Kings University College, and said he feels his experience at SNC is helping him acquire communications skills transferable to his chosen field.

"I enjoy being able to work both indoors and outdoors, and work in my field of study," McMillan, a Carleton University science student from Morewood, said. "It's great to be working in my community to make a difference in the environment."

The conservation authority is the largest student employer in the area, and students hired to help with the expanded summer workload allow SNC to take advantage of environmental programs funded by the federal and provincial governments.

"Our summer hires don't have to be in conservation related fields," O'Grady said. "It's great to have the students around for a few months. Their curiosity and enthusiasm provide an added spark and, of course, they're a big help."