

Williamsburg Forest celebrated

WILLIAMSBURG – The “National Treasure” that is the 400 acre Williamsburg Forest, was last week celebrated by South Nation

Conservation, its owner and manager. Formerly owned by the Williamsburg Township and then the



Jim Henry, team lead, property, for South Nation Conservation looks on as Brian Barkley unweils an axe of the late Art Heagle, symbolically bringing past and present together while looking forward to the future of the Williamsburg Forest.

Municipality of South Dundas, it was handed over to the conservation authority in February.

August 22, SNC officials, local dignitaries and community members gathered at the property.

The Williamsburg Forest, located along County Road 8 in South Dundas, was tendered for sale, back in 2011 as South Dundas was divesting itself of surplus lands. That decision was made without the municipality realizing the importance of this public land to the community.

When the community made council aware of their use of this public land, council then moved forward in a different direction, working to get the land in the hands of SNC which has the staff, expertise and knowledge to properly manage this forest, while keeping it available for public recreational use.

At last week's event, Brian Barkley, who had been involved with the effort to keep 'The 400' under public ownership thanked

South Dundas for doing the right thing, and for working with SNC and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to make this happen.

Barkley spoke about the historic use of the forest by 'old time characters' like Art Heagle, bringing Heagle's axe to the dedication. He spoke of the recreational importance of this public forest that continues today, and he hopes will continue for at least the next 50 years.

"With South Nation Conservation in control of this land, and through our work with the friends group, we have come a long way from where we were," said South Dundas mayor Steven Byvelds. "This partnership will ensure that recreational activities will continue."

The Williamsburg Forest Conservation Area includes spruce plantations, lowland hardwood forest and regionally and provincially significant wetlands.

It is prime bird and waterfowl habitat, and even has a small resident moose population.

The property is open to the public for recreational use. The size and condition of the forest allows for excellent bird watching, and the property will be open for hunting opportunities, through SNC's regular hunting permit process.

This land adds to the 11,000 acre inventory of land managed by the SNC.

According to Bill Smirle, who chairs the SNC board of directors, they are always accepting land donations, and would like to grow their management inventory to 20,000 over the next 10 years.

He spoke about the importance of forest cover in maintaining water levels.