

Conservation Monitors at The Pond – The Caldwell Carver Conservation Area (Urban Natural Area 176) – In Rockcliffe Park, June 18 – September 5, 2011

We used a grant of \$10,000 from Parks, Recreation, and Culture to pay and equip three Conservation Monitors to work between 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. to maintain posted swimming hours; to educate the public about conservation issues which impact the Pond; help with invasive species control; and help keep the area and paths free of litter. The Monitors were paid \$11 per hour and the cost of salaries deductibles and equipment etc for the period June 18th – September 5th was \$8,978.19. A financial report is attached; further details are available if needed.

Who used the Pond?

Our conversations with swimmers show that they come from all over Ottawa including: Orleans, Kanata, Alta Vista, Island Park, Hunt Club, Vanier, McKellar Park, Manor Park, New Edinburgh, Gloucester, and the Market, etc. Out of province and U.S. license plates are regularly seen parked on the streets around the Pond. Many swimmers told us that this was the first time they had come here, showing that the popularity of the place is still growing. Cars come and go continuously from the area, and so do bicycles and pedestrians. Approximately 200 – 300 people swim on a hot day between 7 a.m. and 2 p.m. Many bring picnic baskets, drinks, and use the bushes as a toilet area.

How effective were the Monitors?

The Monitors became very effective within a few weeks. In the beginning, they had to establish their authority after three years without Monitors. They explained the effects of over-use of the Pond on wildlife, the shoreline and vegetation, and on the proliferation of *E. coli*. Swimmers were heard to explain these issues to others after first learning about them from the Monitors. The cars began to leave the Pond area at 2 p.m. and residents reported a real decrease in after-hours swimming and noise. In short the Monitors re-established a culture of respect for the area.

There are always some people who push limits, and so By-law Services made pro-active calls, especially after the Monitors' shifts ended. This year there were 72 proactive and reactive visits from By-law Services; last summer 149 visits were made. The Monitors called By-law approximately 10 times; they found that it was virtually impossible for By-law to get here in time to have an effect, and they tried hard to avoid asking for help. We appreciate the proactive support from By-law, especially from Craig Calder. Constable Ryan Pierce, our Community Police Officer dropped by several times and briefed the Monitors on ways to deal with difficult people.

What were the important incidents and actions this year?

- ⤴ Vandalism included destroying large portions of the fence around the Pond on at least two occasions. The fence was replaced.
- ⤴ Signs were vandalized and stolen.
- ⤴ A sexual assault took place during daylight hours. The police were involved.
- ⤴ Alcohol was used in the open by underage teens and the Monitors called the Police.
- ⤴ Marijuana was openly used and the Monitors called the Police.
- ⤴ Once before the Monitors arrived, a man exposed himself in the Pond while small children were nearby; the Police were alerted.
- ⤴ Goods (wiring, etc.) likely stolen from a construction site were wheeled through the UNA one evening in a baby stroller. A resident called the Police.

- ⤴ A woman fell on the path and suffered a head wound requiring a trip to hospital. The Monitors phoned 911. One directed the ambulance to the Pond; the other stayed with the injured woman.
- ⤴ The Monitors reported and arranged for disposal of a large, dead raccoon floating in the water.
- ⤴ Parties occurred in the middle of the night, awakening nearby residents. By-law was involved.
- ⤴ Cutting down the birch tree which was a magnet for unsafe diving helped to change the tone at the Pond.
- ⤴ The Monitors helped remove the invasive buckthorn shrubs from areas nearest the public entrance to the water, opening it up to increased visibility and making it less attractive as a public toilet. Maple and cherry seeds were then planted and they will sprout in 2012.

Recommendations for the future

Continuing a Monitor Program is vital to maintaining the Caldwell Carver Conservation Area, keeping a family atmosphere at the Pond, and decreasing inappropriate behaviour.

- ⤴ The City should take responsibility for this program because the volunteer commitment from the RPRA was hundreds of hours, and the Caldwell Conservation Area, (UNA 176), belongs to the City.
- ⤴ The Monitors should begin June 1st because the winding down of the school year brings younger swimmers and more after-hours issues.
- ⤴ Monitors' shifts should also be longer.
- ⤴ Police and By-law officers should conduct random patrols especially after the Monitors finish their shifts. This proved to be very effective this past summer.

There are a number of conservation-related actions that are needed, including the following:

- ⤴ Attending to eroded shorelines and stabilizing boulders which have been purposely loosened along the shore.
- ⤴ Continuing to trim branches that become large enough to serve as “diving boards” will help to eliminate both bad behaviour and possible injuries.
- ⤴ Signage could be improved, and the entrances to the Conservation area need some repair especially the “stairs” at the 40 Pond Street entrance.
- ⤴ Some other areas that have been trampled from overuse require regeneration through plantings and seedlings as part of overall conservation and preservation.
- ⤴ More frequent emptying of the garbage cans (at the Pond St. entrance and the swimming area).

Thank you to Councillor Peter Clark for being our champion on this issue; Dan Chenier and Alex Lacelle for providing the assistance that enabled this grant; Craig Calder for By-law assistance; Bruce Hoskin for the prompt repairs to the fence; Cst. Ryan Pierce; the City’s Forestry Division for removal of the birch tree, and everyone from the City of Ottawa who in so many ways, made this project both possible and successful. And a special thanks to our three Monitors.

Submitted by Brian Dickson, Iola Price, and Marilyn Blattel
Rockcliffe Park Residents Association, September 15, 2011