

SWWA Information Day and Bus Tour 2023 - Part 1

Fifty registrants for the 2023 Annual Information Day and Bus Tour met at the Warwick Conservation Area and shared coffee and cookies before boarding the bus at 9:00 am.

First point of interest was the assisted migration experimental area at Warwick Conservation Area. Rob Davies, Board Member of the Forest Gene Conservation Association (FGCA) and Forester with the Essex Region Conservation Authority, explained the concept of assisted migration and drew our attention to species planted from local seed vs from seed sourced from Pennsylvania. Species include Swamp Oak and Red Oak, and others such as Norway Spruce and Sycamore as fillers.

The farm of Frank Smeekens was our next stop. In addition to older windbreaks and plantations, Frank maintains a recently (2018) planted field, taken out of crop production, in conjunction with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA). Participants viewed this plantation, started with 1500 seedlings of four species of Conifers and nine species of Deciduous trees. Ian Jean, Forester with the ABCA, spoke about the project and answered questions about funding, pests, and the ongoing maintenance.



Ian Jean talks about the plantation as Frank Smeekens looks on.



At the Smeekens' Site

Lambton County Heritage Forest, a 580 acre dune forest/oak savannah owned by the County of Lambton and managed by the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) was viewed from the bus. Tim Payne, Forester with SWRCA summarized various management projects at this site.

L Lake is a 30 acre coastal lake within the Port Franks Wetlands and Forested Dunes Provincial Area of Natural and Scientific Interest. At this point on the tour, Nancy Vidler of the Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group boarded the bus and described the work of her group, with help from various organizations including the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, to control phragmites in L Lake. Viewed from the bus, participants were able to see the results of their tremendous efforts, using manual labour, machinery, and herbicides to restore L Lake and thus support the native species of turtles, fish, and aquatic vegetation.



Nancy Vidler and Ian Dean, talking about the L Lake Project.



Nancy's license plate shows her devotion to the L Lake control of Phragmites.



During our lunch stop at Lambton Heritage Museum, Curator Dana Thorne, gave a presentation of the natural history of the region, specifically the 1875 diversion of the Ausable River and the draining of Lake George and Lake Burwell, forming "The Cut", which empties into Lake Huron at Port Franks. In 1892, another Cut was excavated at Grand Bend at the site of the former portage between the Ausable River and Lake Huron, creating better drained farmland for the region.

From the Lambton County Museum website: Map showing the new course of the Ausable River after construction of the Cuts at Port Franks and Grand Bend.....

