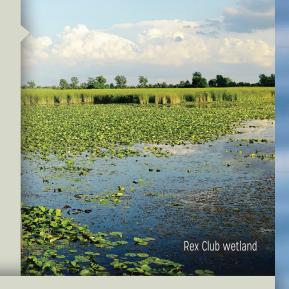
#### **Project Highlight: Rex Club**

The Rex Club 14 property is a 19.42 ha (48 acre) coastal wetland just north of Mitchell's Bay. During the 1980's, Ducks Unlimited created fish spawning access by excavating shallow open areas throughout the wetland. When water levels decreased in the mid 90's, non-native Common Reed (Phragmites australis) and sediment, filled these fish channels impacting fish and wildlife habitat quality. This project focused on controlling Common Reed and excavating the original fish channels created by DU, resulting in 2.24ha of newly created fish access channels with a surrounding 4ha (10 acres) of upland habitat. Also included within the coastal wetland enhancement area were: turtle overwintering basking and nesting areas, snake hibernacula's and a 1.1km nature trail that stretches from Mitchell's Bay and ending at the Rex Club 14 property.





## **Project Highlight: Connor Wetland**

The Connor wetland is situated adjacent to Lake St. Clair and has been an active waterfowl wetland since the early 1900's. A large portion of the wetland was overgrown with non-native Phragmites degrading the habitat quality and accessibility by wildlife. In 2016 and 2017, 23ha of Phragmites was addressed through multiple management techniques. Additionally, 1.75ha of wetland was excavated, created a series of new ponds, complete with littoral zones, habitat structures, snake hibernaculum, and waterfowl nesting boxes; and the establishment of 6 ha (15 ac) of upland habitat. Currently, a healthy population of Eastern Foxsnakes are present on the property.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

**Be a Stewardship Hero** – restore or enhance wetlands to support a sustainable ecosystem

» If you have property that can be restored into wetlands or is in need of invasive species management, contact Ontario NativeScape.

Be a Wetland Protector - protect the existing habitat and its wildlife species.

- » No Littering keep the areas clean and safe from garbage
- » Stay on Trails when natural areas, keep on everyone, including pets on the trail to protect rare plants and wildlife habitat
- » Keep a Look Out watch out for wildlife like snakes and turtles especially in May and June while crossing roads
- » Reduce Plastic Use single use plastics cannot be recycled and end up in landfills or worse in waterways having devastating impacts on water quality

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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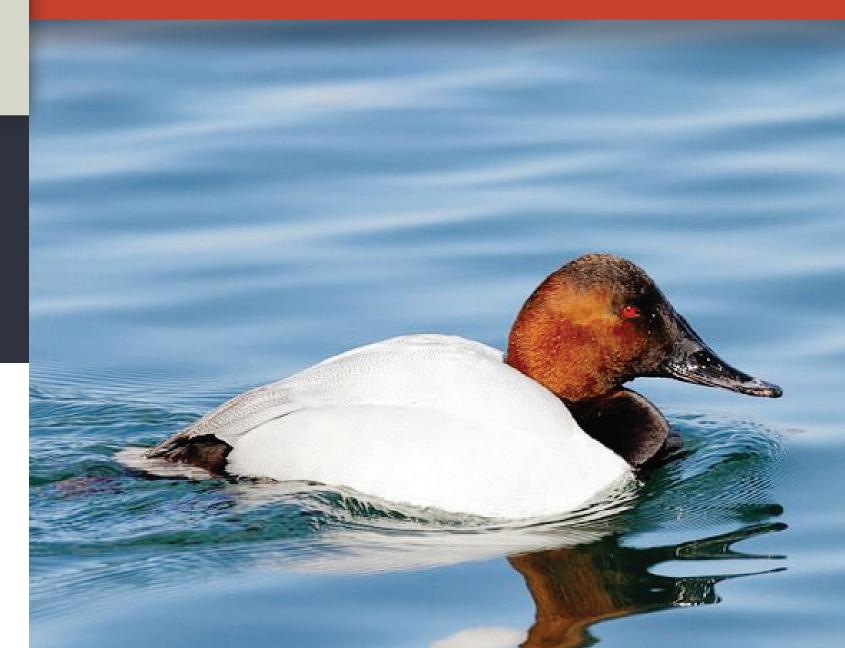
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Ontario NativeScape is a division of the Rural Lambton Stewardship Network and a not-for-profit organization that specializes in managing and completing habitat restoration projects that achieve and maintain a healthy and sustainable environment. Focused on restoring and safeguarding Ontario`s native ecosystems and biodiversity, we have 20 years of experience planning, implementing and managing habitat and water quality restoration projects. As leaders in tallgrass prairie restoration to date we have managed and restored over 1600 hectares of tallgrass prairie habitat in Ontario. In 2015, Ontario NativeScape partnered in the ALUS Lambton program, part of ALUS Canada.

For more information about ALUS Lambton or other programs, please contact or check out our website at: http://www.ontarionativescape.ca/

# COASTAL WETLAND REHABILITATION

ST. CLAIR RIVER AREA OF CONCERN



Wetlands once covered more than 25 percent of the region; today they occupy less than 5 percent.

The Lake St. Clair Coastal Wetlands are one of the few remaining extensive wetland systems in south-western Ontario. They support a high diversity of species, and encompass significant coastal wetland systems, like Walpole Island First Nation (17,000 ha) and St. Clair National Wildlife Area (289 ha). Walpole Island First Nation is one of the largest continuous portions of coastal marsh left in the Great Lakes Basin.





# WETLAND VALUES

Coastal wetlands and their associated habitats of wet meadows and tallgrass prairie carry out a number of very important ecological functions such as:

- » Critical Habitat provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife species – fishes, molluscs and other invertebrates, insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals.
- » Flood Control wetlands hold water in high water flow times preventing flooding such as during the spring season
- » Groundwater Recharge stored water is gradually released over the summer and helps prevents drying out of adjacent streams or rivers
- » Natural Filters wetland vegetation act as a purification system filtering and removing containments such as phosphorus and nitrogen and sediment from the water, improving its quality
- **» PLUS** provide endless human connections such as income, livelihoods, recreation, education and beauty

#### WILDLIFE HAVEN

### **Globally Recognized Important Bird and**

**Biodiversity Area** – The coastal wetlands of the Lake St. Clair region are internationally recognized for providing vital support for numerous waterfowl species during spring and fall migrations and habitat for an appreciable number of species at risk animals and plants.

- » Canvasback (Aythya valisineria) More than a million waterfowl of at least 30 species pass through the Lake St. Clair area each year. At least a dozen species are known to nest here.
- » Wetlands support some very rare animals, protected by Species at Risk legislation. Birds in this category include King Rail, Least Bittern and Black Tern. The Ontario, and indeed Canadian, stronghold for King Rail is believed to be the wetlands around Lake St. Clair

**Rare Plants** – Coastal wetlands and their associated upland habitat support a great diversity of plant species. Due to their sensitive nature, restricted habitat or restricted range in Ontario, many of these species have become rare, threatened or endangered.

**Critical Habitat for Reptiles** – The coastal marshes and associated wet meadows of this region provide critical habitat for the threatened species at risk, the Eastern Foxsnake (*Pantherophis gloydi*). This harmless snake may have a copper-coloured head and will vibrate its tail when disturbed; thus often mistaken for a venomous snake and needlessly killed by fearful people. Historical and ongoing habitat destruction and persecution have greatly reduced Eastern fox snake numbers and especially due to road fatalities in this area.

**Turtles in Trouble** – Great Lakes Coastal wetlands system provides critical habitat for Ontario's native species of turtles. Currently, in Ontario, 7 out of 8 native species of turtles are species at risk. Habitat loss, road mortality, and collection for the pet trade and food remain among the main reasons for their decline.

**Road mortality** is the biggest threat in Ontario to turtles. Countless turtles are run over every year and killed on Ontario's roads. Most of those killed are females traveling to nesting areas during the months of May and June.





#### STEWARDSHIP IN THE AOC

The coastal marshes of Lake St. Clair complex are part of the wider Environment Canada's designated St. Clair River Area of Concern. The Great Lakes Basin in 1987, 17 Areas of Concern were designated due to their impairments to environmental quality.

Progress within the St. Clair River AOC by many government and non-government groups, like Environment Canada, Ontario NativeScape, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ministry of Environment, Ontario Power Generation, Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority, St. Clair Region Conservation Authority, Friends of the St. Clair River, Ducks Unlimited Canada have worked together to restore the function and quality of coastal wetlands along the St. Clair River.

To date, 300.2 hectares of wetlands have been maintained/enhanced or created within the Chenal Ecarte, Walpole Island First Nation delta or along the eastern shore of Lake St. Clair since 2000.



# INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species when introduced, take over a particular habitat, out-compete and displace native species disrupting the delicate balance of the ecosystem. With no natural predators, they can continue to do their damage freely, having devastating impacts on native habitats and ecosystems.

Wetland Invader – Phragmites australis subspecies australis (also known as the European common reed) is an aggressive plant that has been invading wetland habitat and displacing native vegetation threatening the health and sustainability of wetland habitat in south-western Ontario. With thousands of seeds per cluster, it aggressively spreads through seed dispersal and fast-growing rhizomes (underground horizontal stems). Once established it can be difficult to control and quickly invades other low lying areas.

Restoration in Action – Ontario NativeScape and partners, have been restoring the biodiversity and functionality of degraded wetland areas along the Lake St. Clair coast and major tributaries of the eastern branch of the St. Clair River Delta to achieve a net gain of 582.7 hectares of wetland habitat area.