

Colborne Chronicle

Rare habitat restoration marks 20th anniversary

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FOR NORTHUMBERLAND TODAY

CRAMAHE TOWNSHIP — The unique Red Cloud Cemetery, the only prairie grass historical cemetery in Ontario, is marking its 20th anniversary. Prairie is one of the most endangered habitats in Ontario.

Project manager Ed Heuvel highlighted the achievements of the site for the public and Cramahe Township Council on Nov. 3.

"The site is a living testimonial to the history of this area," Heuvel said. "The cemetery preserves a record of the original resettlement vegetation and soil conditions for this area. In terms of rare plant species, it contains more than any other site in Northumberland County, including Alderville Black Oak Savanna."

The soil at the site has never been ploughed. Although the prairie grass habitat once extended over several hundred square kilometres, 30 to 40 kilometres wide at points, today less than one-tenth of one per cent remains.

"It was so easy to plough," Heuvel explained. "There were no trees."

One of the initial challenges for the natural habitat restoration was the removal of red pine trees which had been planted at the site. In 1994-95, when Heuvel was approached to lead the restoration, \$10,000 was raised to begin the work. There is ongoing weeding of non-native plant species, including three weeding projects with the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON). Every three to four years, there are prescribed burns of the grassland overseen with the fire department. Attention is paid to control or remove

and prevent the proliferation of invasive species: dog strangling vine, crown vetch, European buckthorn and four-seeded vetch.

"There are beautiful wild flowers at Red Cloud," Heuvel enthused.

Red Cloud Cemetery has the attention of scientific communities. The site is monitored with the University of Waterloo, under direction of Larry Lamb, for rare plant species and also for insects.

The cemetery was once part of the now-defunct Rural Ramble public tours. Heuvel said the event is much-missed for its public education: more than 3,000 people participated in guided tours. Other groups which visit include the FON, Nature Conservancy of Canada, North American Native Plant Association, Oak Ridges Moraine groups, local naturalist groups and nature tour guide groups.

In 2012, Red Cloud Cemetery was awarded the Margaret and Nichola Hill Cultural Heritage Award from the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

Red Cloud Cemetery has expanded to include a small parcel of unopened road allowance to the west and work is underway to restore this property to the prairie habitat. The Nature Conservancy has recently acquired land to the south and east of the cemetery.

"We hope to establish an effective partnership," Heuvel said.

The "enthusiastic support" of the municipal council and the volunteer board and members of the public means "we're accomplishing the long-term, stable management of this rare habitat in a cost-effective manner," Heuvel said.



MANDY MARTIN PHOTO

ABOVE - Members and helpers of the Red Cloud Cemetery Board supported a presentation to Cramahe Township Council on Nov. 3. Front, from left: Patrick Johnston, chair; Elwood Jones, vice-chair; Sharon Dodds, secretary/treasurer; middle: Cecilia Heuvel, helper; Susan Johnston, member; Roseanne Quinn, member; back: Barry King, helper; Russell McComb, member; and Ed Heuvel, project manager. Absent: members Marvin McComb and Margie Dingwall.

LEFT - Red Cloud Cemetery project manager Ed Heuvel outlined the highlights of the successful prairie grassland habitat project at Cramahe Township Council's Nov. 3 meeting.

