

## Student project helps Land Conservancy group and local birds at risk



### Land Conservancy Project

Mandy Marciniak

*Fleming College student Rebekah Short, Mary Alice Snetsinger, vice-president of the Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, students Elizabeth Travers, Adrienne Parsons and Mitch Kellar.*

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By Mandy Marciniak

News - The Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington is a volunteer organization that works to protect and conserve land in the Kingston area, including their own.

The group, which formed about 15 years ago, recently purchased a 79 hectare piece of land near Bellrock. The land, named the Depot Creek Nature Reserve, is filled with forested areas, a creek, wetlands and grasslands and while the group wants to maintain the beauty of the property, which is open to the public, they also want to make sure they are conserving it in the best possible way.

“There are many factors to take into consideration,” explained Mary Alice Snetsinger, vice-president of the Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington. “There are a lot of grassland birds that are species at risk and being a small group of about 130 members, we were trying to figure out how to maintain the grasslands. We have cattle grazing, but we are worried about trampling of nests.”

These questions lead the Land Conservancy to a partnership with Fleming College in Lindsay, Ontario. The College has an ecosystem management program that requires students in their third year to take on real-world projects at conservation authorities or with land trust groups.

“We submitted a proposal and then a team of four students was matched with us,” said Snetsinger. “It really was a win-win; it is something that we could probably have done ourselves if we had the time or the resources, but with these guys it is good for them and it is what they are studying and it is great for them and their resumes.”

Over the past few months, the students have been reading literature, interviewing experts, exploring the property and assessing what is best for the area. On April 13, they came to Kingston to present their findings and make recommendations to the Land Conservancy group.

“We really focused on the impacts of the cattle on the area,” explained student Elizabeth Travers. “We identified two bird species at risk, the Bobolink and the Eastern Meadowlark, and we were tasked with seeing if the cattle is sustainable and okay for the two threatened species.”

In the end, the students found that having the cattle on the land, because it is not a large amount of cattle, is beneficial.

“There is about one head of cattle per hectare and speaking with specialists they say that is a very good ratio and there is low risk of trampling of nests from the cattle,” explained Travers. “Also, keeping the cattle is the best way to maintain the grassland area so they are beneficial to the land.”

According to Travers, the biggest challenge with the project was synthesizing all the data that allowed them to make their recommendations, but it was all worth it when they were able to visit the reserve.

“The best part was visiting the property. I am from Kingston so I was really excited that we got this project and got an opportunity to visit the area more,” she said. “The whole project was very interesting and rewarding and I hope to work on similar projects in the future.”

For more information about this project and the Land Conservancy of KFLA visit <http://www.landconservancykfla.org/>

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