

Ecological Gifts: Donor Profile



John Mitchell

Canadian Wildlife Service

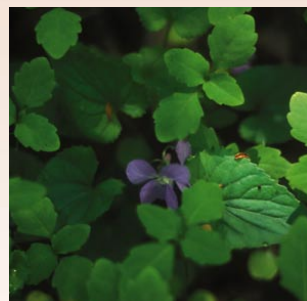
Steven Waring A Conservation Easement in Caledon

“No one feature of the landscape is any more important than any other. They all are of equal importance, equal validity. So when you take away a whole swath of landscape for building, you remove a significant part of its ability to regenerate itself. I hope that we don’t keep extravagantly using land. We must realize that the landscape is worth keeping, worth looking after. It is not just land waiting to be developed. That was the old view of it.”

STEVEN WARING

There is something delightfully hidden about this property nestled along a curve of the Credit River in Caledon, Ontario. Perhaps it is the unassuming lane that slips away from the sideroad, or the way the log cabin blends beautifully into the woods. It is a site that offers respite and a sense of natural continuity.

Steven Waring has a long connection with this place. “I started renting here in 1955,” he recalls. “I bought it in 1966, the year before Expo, and I moved the cabin up here in ‘74.” In the 1950s, the 4.25-hectare property (about 10 acres) had fewer trees and much of the area up to the house was mowed. Cattle had watered directly from the river for many years, causing damage to the banks. Under Mr. Waring’s restrained hand, the property has developed into a complex ecosystem of forest, wetland and riparian habitat. The forest floor is covered with leaves, branches, ferns, fungi and mosses right up



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to the house. “I can’t imagine me mowing now,” he remarks.

The property contains three major zones: a hardwood bush; old open pasture; and a cedar bush-wetland. There is also about 300 metres of natural riverbank. The wetland and hardwood forest are designated Niagara Escarpment Natural Area. The small forest, once dominated by elm trees, is now mainly maple and beech, mixed with a variety of other native growth including eastern hemlock, black cherry, basswood and Canada mayflower. The former pastureland hosts more than 1,000 hand-planted trees, mainly white ash and oak growing up nicely under a cover of pine. Along the river’s edge, vegetation and fallen logs provide refuge for the many trout and other fish species present.

As one of many actions he has taken to care for this place,

For qualified donations, the Ecological Gifts Program allows donors to claim an enhanced tax benefit from their donation of land or a conservation easement, and also offers further protection to the donated lands and assurance to donors. Recipients of ecological gifts could be subject to a substantial federal tax (50 percent of the value of the fair market value of the property) if they transfer or otherwise dispose of such gifts, or make changes in use, without prior written approval from the federal Minister of the Environment.



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Mr. Waring donated a conservation easement in 1999 through Environment Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). This action protected the property in perpetuity, while allowing him to retain title. The easement is a legal agreement, registered on the title of the property, that dictates allowed and restricted land-uses and activities. As the holder of the easement, the NCC has a right and obligation to inspect the land and enforce the agreed restrictions, if needed.

“As you drive north up Highway 10 to Caledon,” Mr. Waring observes, “you can see that land is being lost to development and it seemed to me that equally there has to be a preservation for landscape. So that was really the motivation.”

He was inspired by the book *The Perfection of the Morning*, a personal memoir of a woman’s discovery of nature that guides her family to preserve an expanse of prairie through careful stewardship and by donating their ranch to the NCC. “That is really what got me going,” he says. He also received guidance from local conservation groups, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, and the NCC itself.

The conservation easement remains on the title of the property, even if it is sold. Considering the potential impact that restrictions on land-use may have on the selling price, Mr. Waring is clear: “The landscape is more important. I am nearly 82 and I shall be gone quite soon. Most people long to get out of the city and visit the country, and why do they? Because it is regenerating. We feel better in the countryside, it regenerates us all.”

To find out more about making an ecological gift or about conservation easements, contact:
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