

# Carolinian Canada Coalition

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## Elgin Landowners Lead in Nature Conservation

Carolinian Canada Coalition Launches Habitat Factsheet Series in Elgin County to profile local landowners with good ideas. “Caring for Nature in Elgin” is a colourful and informative guide for landowners and communities. The publication features local landowners who are leaders in managing the valuable and unique natural heritage of Elgin. It also explains how land managers, including farmers, are protecting the health of local communities by conserving habitat. To be distributed throughout rural Elgin by post, the factsheet is the third in a series published by the Carolinian Canada Coalition in counties across southwestern Ontario. “Landowners who take care of habitat in Elgin and the rest of Carolinian Canada are protecting air, water and soil quality for everyone,” stated Michelle Kanter, Executive Director of the Coalition. “They are leading the way in conserving resources for human and wildlife communities.”

Elgin County, located in the heart of the Carolinian Life Zone, is a place of vibrant natural diversity. You may not know that besides being home to thousands of productive farms and several busy urban communities, it has many natural gems waiting to be explored from Springwater Forest where Shining Ladies Tresses and the Prothonotary Warbler reveal themselves to the patient naturalist, to the Dutton Prairie where the Dense Blazing Star and rare Northern Bobwhite are found. But the real secret about Elgin County is that most of the thriving natural places are privately owned by landowners who care intensely for the unique nature of the local region. The factsheet tells the story of the Twinems who have planted over 28,000 trees on their 37 ha farm, and of the Johnson family, who are in the process of retiring marginal farmland to natural habitat on their thriving 200 ha farm. David and Darryl Roberts of Sparta manage their 120 ha of woodland sustainably as their family has for generations. They obtain part of their income from ongoing timber harvests, while farming dairy, corn and hay on the remaining 130 arable hectares. Last but not least of the families featured in the Factsheet, the Millers have added 40 ha of natural habitat to their 71 ha of original woodland, utilizing marginal farmland that would otherwise be relatively unproductive. They plan still more restoration work, using the ‘pit and mound’ technology which has recently been introduced in Ontario.

There has been lots of ‘buzz’ about Species at Risk and this factsheet takes some of the mystery out of what they are and what a landowner can do to help. “It all comes down to managing your piece of habitat for your enjoyment and a sustainable income, if you

choose.” According to the factsheet, a healthy landscape provides many benefits for people and helps to prevent species from becoming at risk.

“The publication of this factsheet is only one step in a Big Picture Outreach project,” adds Nikki May, project coordinator for the Coalition. The Carolinian Canada Big Picture is a vision for a healthy, balanced and sustainable landscape in harmony with current land uses. May worked with Bernt Solymar and many local stakeholder groups to develop the factsheet.

“The factsheet will be most useful for landowners who have been wondering about a habitat project but are not sure where to start.” The factsheet brings together information from many sources, so it can save time for landowners.

Carolinian Canada is a coalition of public and community groups aimed at conserving the wildlife and habitats of southwest Ontario’s Carolinian life zone — a unique ecological region lying south of a line from Toronto and Grand Bend. Home to Tulip Tree, Hooded Warbler, Eastern Hognose Snake and other wildlife found nowhere else in Canada, the zone has the richest biological diversity in Canada—and the greatest number of rare and endangered species. The Coalition Board includes representatives from conservation, stewardship, education, farming, forestry and planning groups.

The Elgin County project is part of a pilot for a Carolinian Canada-wide program. Generous funding for the pilot project in this and other municipalities came from Environment Canada, Friends of the Environment Foundation, the Ontario Trillium foundation, the Elgin Stewardship Council and in-kind support came from many groups across Elgin County.

The official launch will take place at the Twinem property at 9:00 am on August 14th, 2007. The Twinem restoration is thriving, and is an excellent example of what can be done by dedicated people who care for their land. .

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