

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

ALGOMA
HIGHLANDS
CONSERVANCY



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www.algomahighlandsconservancy.org

Mission and Core Values

"Guided by core values of conservation, silent sport recreation, environmental education and promotion of sustainable forestry, the AHC's vision is to conserve and protect the unique beauty and ecological integrity of key areas within the Algoma Highlands region."

SILENT SPORT RECREATION: to facilitate low impact, non-motorized recreational pursuits such as: cross-country and backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, hiking, trail running, wildlife viewing, nature photography and painting.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH: to realize the full potential of the Algoma Highlands as a *living classroom* where ecological concepts and conservation biology can be learned and observed first hand by current and future generations.

PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT: to balance environmental protection with the economic, recreational, and spiritual benefits humans can derive from forests. The AHC has committed to managing its land holdings primarily for nature conservation, in which natural processes of growth, succession, and species interactions are generally permitted to proceed without interference.

Board of Directors

Elisa Muto, *President*
Kara Webster, *Vice-President*
Bob Beggs, *Treasurer*
Laurie McBay, *Secretary*

Brian Anstess
Dieter Hohnke
Doug Pitt
Gaylen Byker
Ian Phair
Lisa Venier
Kees van Frankenhuyzen

Staff

*Shannon Ramsay, Environmental Education Coordinator

*Jennifer Cross, Executive Director



Far Left: Jennifer Cross, Executive Director.
Left: Shannon Ramsay, EE Coordinator.
Above: From right to left - John Rankin, Lead Conservancy Technician and Assistant Conservation Technicians Dave Graham & Kendra Lavec

Message from the President

Dear friends,

It is with great pride that I have the opportunity to write about one of the Algoma Highlands Conservancy's most significant accomplishments. After 10 years of hard work and commitment from so many individuals and organizations, we officially became debt free in 2017! On behalf of the AHC board, I would like to extend our gratitude to our donors, membership, friends, and volunteers for their patience and support in helping us reach our goal of protecting and conserving the Algoma Highlands.



Several accomplishments towards our core values have also been met this year. Here are a few highlights:

Environmental Education – Under the direction of Shannon Ramsay, our amazing Environmental Education Program Coordinator, the environmental education program continues to be strong! In the 2016/2017 school year, over 1960 Algoma District School Board students from grades 3 through 12 participated in the program. Way to go Shannon! In addition, the AHC is thrilled to announce that Shannon has begun coordinating the Algoma Envirothon competition this year. We look forward to working with the many high school students from within the region.

Ecotourism – We are excited to announce that we have entered into a new agreement with Blaq Bear Eco Adventure Routes to handle Norm's Cabin reservations! Please check out our section on Norm's cabin in the Annual Report for more details.

Silent Sport Recreation – Robertson Cliffs is one of our most popular hiking trails in the Algoma Highlands and it has seen very heavy use in recent years which has led to degradation of the trail. We identified the need to invest in this trail system, a subcommittee of the AHC board was established, and a plan for trail improvement was created. Please read more about this exciting initiative in the Annual Report.

Scientific Research – This year, the AHC has been busy on a couple of research projects including a continuation of the insect pollinator project in collaboration with local power companies; Hydro One Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma Power Inc., Sault College and the Pollinator Partnership. In addition, the AHC updated species at risk territory knowledge for Hydro One Sault Ste. Marie. We are very grateful for the commitment of our collaborators to achieve goals that align with our core values!

Now that we have the burden of eliminating our debt behind us, we have a very bright future ahead! I am excited to see what's in store for 2018. Thanks for supporting the Algoma Highlands Conservancy in 2017!

Sincerely,

Elisa Muto

AHC Highlights – Conservation

Retiring a 10-Year Debt

In early 2017, the Algoma Highlands Conservancy finally laid to rest a mortgage debt incurred in the name of conservation a decade prior. This would not have been accomplished if it had not been for one highly dedicated board member. A career Research Scientist with Canadian Forest Service, **Doug Pitt's** volunteer service to the AHC spanned more than two decades. He began as a technical advisor in 1996 and eventually accepted the role of president in 2006. For five years, he led the organization through many challenges and triumphs, including negotiations with Astina Forest AG for purchase of the 2600-acre King Mountain property. Negotiations were quickly followed by a major fundraising campaign to raise \$1.5 million within a strict two-year deadline. To close on the time-sensitive purchase in late 2007, he further negotiated a mortgage loan of just over \$280,000. For nearly a decade, he steered staff and volunteers to seek out and secure support to pay off this debt, which began with applications to grant programs and foundations. In 2011, our efforts shifted to a unique campaign, known as Foster a Forest, which successfully eliminated well over \$120,000 of the balance.

Doug's personal conviction was to retire the AHC's debt before he himself would retire from the Board. To close the final gap, he worked tirelessly on quantifying the carbon offsets resulting from the AHC's conservation forest, a complicated process that involved exhaustive surveys, statistical analysis, and third party validation to ISO 14064 standards. The goal was that the AHC could sell carbon credits to businesses looking to voluntarily mitigate their environmental impacts. Not only did this initiative wipe out the remaining debt in 2017, the AHC still has nearly 40,000 credits in the "bank" for sale. True to his word, Doug ensured that the AHC was free of debt before retiring from the Board in late 2017.

The AHC Board and Staff, past and present, appreciate Doug's countless contributions and personal sacrifices made to benefit the organization. The organization owes many of its major successes in conservation to his strong leadership and passion for the Algoma Highlands backcountry!



Above: Board members Gaylen Byker (left) and Doug Pitt (right) celebrate the purchase of King Mnt back in 2007.

Below: Doug Pitt surveys one of many spectacular Algoma Highlands viewpoints he helped preserve.



AHC Highlights – Environmental Education

Excelling at Environmental Education!

This year has been a busy one for the Algoma Highlands Conservancy Environmental Education Program. During 2017, over 1960 students from across the Algoma District School Board took part in field trip days of hands-on, active, science-based learning.

Students explored concepts ranging from ecosystem health to animal identification to soil composition in the forest, in the creek, by foot and on snowshoes. Classes from grades 3 through 12 took part in water health monitoring activities by setting up mesh bag nets in Stokely Creek to identify indicator species and deploying animal track traps in order to capture the footprints of visiting wildlife. Students also had the opportunity to plant native shrub species to protect sensitive riparian habitat.

As the Environmental Education Coordinator, Shannon Ramsay had the opportunity to attend the Council of Outdoor Educators fall conference in Orillia in September 2017. This was an excellent opportunity to network with other outdoor educators, and to spark new ideas to apply to her own teaching methods.

This year, the Algoma Highlands Conservancy took on the exciting role of coordinating the Algoma Envirothon competition, a multi-agency hands-on educational initiative for high school students involving four major learning areas: Wildlife, Forestry, Aquatics and Soil Ecology. With the help of local scientists and educators, the fall activity day went exceedingly well. A second activity day will take place in February 2018, and in May the final overnight competition will be held at Stokely Creek Lodge, which will determine the team that will proceed on to the provincial competition.



Above: Shows an elementary school class participating in a day of Env. Ed. learning, planting shrubs in order to stabilize the shoreline of Stokely Creek.

Below: Both photos show high school students participating in an Envirothon activity.



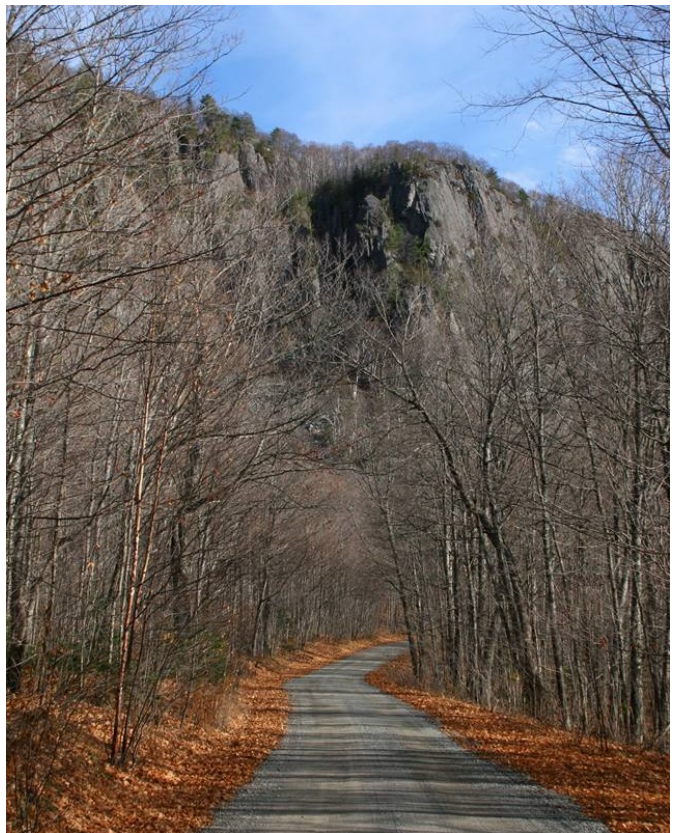
Photo credit: All page 4, Shannon Ramsay

AHC Highlights – Silent Sport Recreation

Robertson Cliffs Trail Sees Heavy Use

The Robertson Cliffs trail offers spectacular views from the top of the cliffs over the Goulais river valley and out to Lake Superior. It is a rewarding trail for relatively little effort. The trail was built by the Voyageur Trail Association over two years (1994-1995). The Algoma Highlands Conservancy installed a trail head sign and created parking space at the Robertson Lake Road trail head a few years later. The trail has been a popular hiking destination for local residents and visitors ever since. Over the past 5 years or so, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of hikers on the trail. It is now starting to show negative impacts of that heavy use, including damage to the understory vegetation, trail braiding around perennial wet spots, and erosion on steeper sections. It is becoming increasingly clear that the trail is being 'loved to death' and in desperate need of some TLC.

Now that our highest strategic plan priority (paying off the King Mountain mortgage) has been achieved, the Board has decided to invest in trail improvement and remediation, as the second strategic priority. A joint committee with members of the AHC and VTA was established in 2017 to create an action plan. A trail camera was installed to quantify use and revealed that 3700 folks used the trail between early September and late November. The busiest day (a sunny day in late October when fall colours were peaking) saw more than 400 hikers on the trail! The committee has identified trail sections that need to be rerouted to avoid wet and steep sections and has come up with a longer term strategy for spreading out the hiking pressure. The plan calls for the creation of additional parking spaces along the 2 km cliff front with new spur trails and loops to access the main trail. The AHC also plans on establishing a family friendly educational/interpretive trail. The plan should be implemented over the next two years. It will enhance the hiking experience while at the same time relieving the pressure on the single access point currently in use. Stay tuned for progress updates!



Top: Voyageur Trail Association group winter hike up Robertson Cliffs. Photo credit Val Walker.

Middle: The road leading to Robertson Lake Cliffs.

Left: Rewarding views from the top. Photo credit Val Walker.

AHC Highlights – Silent Sport Recreation *cont.*

Getaway to Norm's Cabin

Norm's Cabin is a delightful destination throughout the year both for a day visit and an overnight stay.

The AHC continues to provide hosts during weekends in the ski season. Volunteer hosts Mike O'Connor, Paul McBay and Board member Kees van Frankenhuyzen were pleased to welcome many skiers with conversation, tea and cookies. Some day skiers made the mistake of getting parked by the cozy fire and became reluctant to leave.

This year, the AHC finalized an agreement with Blaq Bear Eco Adventure Routes to handle the reservations for Norm's Cabin. During the rental period from May 1st to October 31st Blaq Bear may also provide a shuttle service to take food and gear out to the cabin. There is a different winter rate from mid December to March for the rental of a room at Norm's Cabin. During the winter overnight visitors must be self-sufficient and bring their own supplies to the cabin. However, this is a shared space and use of the main floor is open to day skiers during the ski season. There were 3 bookings in 2017 through Blaq Bear but it is anticipated that once the word spreads about how much people enjoyed their outing, the popularity of the cabin for an overnight stay will increase.



Top: Norm's Cabin is a perfect year-round getaway. Photo credit Carole Blaquiére.

Middle: In 2017, AHC field crews collected data on pollinator insects for the second year on power line corridors. Photo credit Elisa Muto.

Bottom: A monarch butterfly caterpillar feeds on milkweed, a plant often found on power line corridors. Photo credit Elisa Muto.

AHC Highlights – Research

Pollinator Insect Research Project

The pollinator project continued in its second year of data collection in 2017 under the Corridors for Life initiative through collaboration with Hydro One Sault Ste. Marie, Algoma Power Inc. (API), Sault College and the Pollinator Partnership Canada. Elisa Muto, along with Lead Conservancy Technician John Rankin and AHC summer students, Dave Graham and Kendra Levac, documented pollinators on utility rights-of-way (ROW)s throughout the summer. This research focuses on examining how vegetation management on ROWs in the Algoma region influences local pollinator abundance and richness and attempts to identify which compatible flowering plant species can be used to enhance pollinator habitat on ROWs. Deirdre Loughnan, Pollinator Project Biologist, was also hired again in the fall of 2017 to analyse the 2017 pollinator field data and compare that data with the data collected in 2016. The AHC is extremely grateful for the continued support of this multi-agency collaboration and look forward to a final year of data collection in the 2018 field season.

2017 FINANCIAL POSITION (CANADA)

(Notice to Reader)

ASSETS	2017	2016
Current Assets	\$87,107	\$52,485
King Mountain Property, at cost	\$1,522,147	\$1,522,147
Robertson Lake Cliffs, at cost	\$48,412	\$48,412
New Norm's Cabin, at cost	\$252,767	\$252,767
TOTAL ASSETS	\$1,910,433	\$1,875,811
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Accounts Payable	\$22,261	\$14,239
Long Term Debt	-	\$45,940
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$1,888,172	\$1,815,632
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$1,910,433	\$1,875,811
REVENUES	\$152,489	\$133,409
EXPENSES	\$79,949	\$99,998
EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENSES	\$72,540	\$33,411

2017 FINANCIAL POSITION (U.S.A.)

(Notice to Reader)

ASSETS	2017	2016
Cash & Receivables	\$54,592	\$55,825
TOTAL ASSETS	\$54,592	\$55,825
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Accounts Payable	\$1,200	\$1,200
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$53,392	\$54,625
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$54,592	\$55,825
REVENUES	\$50,000	\$52,776
EXPENSES	\$51,233	\$11,383
EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENSES	\$(1,233)	\$41,393