



ONTARIO SOIL AND CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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Riparian Project Funded by SARFIP aims to help erosion control and clean water

By Lilian Schaer for the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

A partnership with a local stewardship organization helped Bob and Gail Irvine leverage habitat development funding from the SARFIP program into a significant wetland development and habitat creation project on their Peterborough-area farm last year.

The story has its beginnings in a project the year before when Irvine, who raises purebred Dorset sheep breeding stock on his 90-acre farm together with his wife Gail, needed a solution for a field that had been wet for many years. With the help of some grant programs, he was able to excavate a pond that improved his field by draining much of the water out of it.

“The eyesore after all these projects in 2012 was the berm around the pond. It was being under-utilized and that’s when we decided we would undertake a pollinator project with plants, shrubs and trees, which develops habitats through creation of a riparian buffer strip,” he explains.

He turned to Sue Chan with Farms at Work, a not for profit project that promotes healthy and active farmland in east central Ontario. She played a key role in bringing the Irvine project to fruition, helping him access additional funds and resources through the members of the Kawartha Farm Stewardship Collaborative, a group of organizations working together to help farmers access technical assistance and stewardship funding.

She also helped secure private donors for some of the plant materials used in the project, as well as growing some herself, and it was Chan who designed the layout for the riparian area around the pond with all the pollinator plants. The total site is approximately three acres in size, which includes the pond in the middle and the buffer strips around it; all the plantings both in and around the pond were chosen for their benefit to pollinators, fish, birds and insects. Blueberries, for example, are great sources of pollen and nectar for bumble bees in early spring, and the fruit can be harvested later in the season.

“We always try to work with models for others to follow so the idea is that this project will become a prototype for other projects in the area in the future,” says

Chan, a firm believer in the power of collaboratives to help advance stewardship initiatives.

Irvine is hopeful about the positive impact the project will have, including erosion control and cleaner water as a result of the creation of new habitats in and around the pond, and Chan says the riparian area will definitely benefit the local pollinator population.

“Most of Bob’s property is in pasture and we’ve put in a lot of flowering plants that aren’t typically found in pasture. We’re hoping that we are creating a reservoir of pollinators that can expand their range,” she explains. “Some plants in there, for example, are specialist plants for the specialist pollinators, like Pickerel Weed and a bee that only survives on Pickerel Weed. Others are generalists for all kinds of pollinators.”

“It has become a happy place for our family and grandkids. It has given new life to a marginal area that was just being ignored previously and it has certainly improved the appearance of the berms around the pond. There’s no direct dollar value return to the farmer for doing this but there are other things than dollar signs at the end of the day, like community, health and happiness. Those are all part of being able to sustain a profitable enterprise,” he adds.

SARFIP is a cost-share program delivered by OSCIA and funded by Environment Canada and the Ministry of Natural Resources. The program aims to help farmers adopt Best Management Practices (BMPs) to enhance the farm operation, while supporting local species at risk, improving forests, grasslands, wetlands and wildlife.

SARFIP has been renewed for the 2014-2015 cropping season. To be eligible to participate in SARFIP, Ontario farm businesses must have a completed Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and an FBRN or equivalent (see program guide at www.ontariosoilcrop.org/programs/species_at_risk.htm). Candidates can then select eligible BMP categories from the SARFIP list that relate to an action identified in their farm’s EFP Action Plan, including improved stream crossings, erosion control work, and fencing livestock from sensitive areas.

More information about Farms at Work and the Kawartha Farm Stewardship Collective is available at www.farmsatwork.ca.