



Photo: Glen Harris

# Preservation and Conservation: The Challenge Ahead

When you walk the Bruce Trail from end to end, you walk a trail that is just over 50 percent secured. That means on average for every two steps you take, one step represents a piece of the Bruce Trail on land that is permanently protected, while the other step is on land that is vulnerable to development, could be held back from public access or be irrevocably, ecologically damaged.

At the Bruce Trail Conservancy we are committed to bringing the remaining vulnerable Niagara Escarpment land into conservation.

This past year – 2014 – was Year 3 of our 50th Anniversary Milestones project, and our year to put a spotlight on the Conservancy’s work in *Preserving and Conserving our Bruce Trail lands*. In the Spring, Summer and Fall editions of the Bruce Trail magazine we highlighted how we go about preserving the Niagara Escarpment through our land securement program, the work done by our staff ecologists and more than 200 volunteers to steward the land we love, the importance of conservation partnerships with like-minded organizations and individuals, and profiled many beautiful properties we’ve secured.

Since we began securing land in the 1970s – 40 years ago – the Conservancy has been responsible for the permanent protection of almost 10,000 acres of land, worth more than \$25 million; incredibly, \$15 million has come from BTC donors.

From our founding as a grassroots organization we have grown and matured into one of the largest and the most active land trusts in Ontario. We’ve protected forests, meadows, rivers, shorelines, cliffhines, birds, amphibians, reptiles, mammals – and we’ve grown our Bruce Trail Conservation Corridor so that this irreplaceable natural bounty can flourish.

The work we do in preservation Niagara Escarpment land is particularly important in an uncertain regulatory

climate. Planning regulations on Escarpment land – whether at the Provincial or Municipal levels – only protects the Escarpment as long as the regulations are in place and adhered to. A change in government policy, public will or economic climate could all pose a threat to the ability of the legislation to survive. Consider, for example, a recent private members bill that asked for the disbanding of the Niagara Escarpment Commission. It was defeated, but it highlights the vulnerability of planning legislation to fully protect land in perpetuity.

The BTC is the only charity working to secure a Conservation Corridor along the entire length of the Escarpment that contains the Bruce Trail. Our work ensures secured and permanently pro-

tected land, now and for the future. What will it take? We estimate – based on land acquisition costs in recent years, and the amount of Bruce Trail Conservation Corridor left to preserve – that the cost of land needed to completely secure the conservation corridor is \$60 to \$80 million. The Conservancy’s success, past and future is tied to our donors determination. Our donors believe in our mission. They see the utmost value in moving vulnerable lands in to public trust, in perpetuity.

Money isn’t the only solution – it’s an important one but it’s not the only one. Landowners that donate their land to the BTC represent an extraordinary triumph for conservation in Ontario. Over the last 40 years, more than 790 acres of land have been donated by 50 landowners. This growth in land donations demonstrates a deeply held belief that the BTC is the best guardians for their lands and importantly, also reflects the positive regulatory improvements made around taxation and land donations. A focus on regulatory improvements – particularly to how easements and severances are acquired – will be taken in the coming years to help us secure access and preserve land more efficiently and at a lower cost.

We know that building our base of support with more donors, securing land donations and working with regulators to streamline Trail and conservation corridor securement processes, making them more efficient and cost effective, represents the best course of action for furthering our mission and realizing a secured Bruce Trail Conservation Corridor.

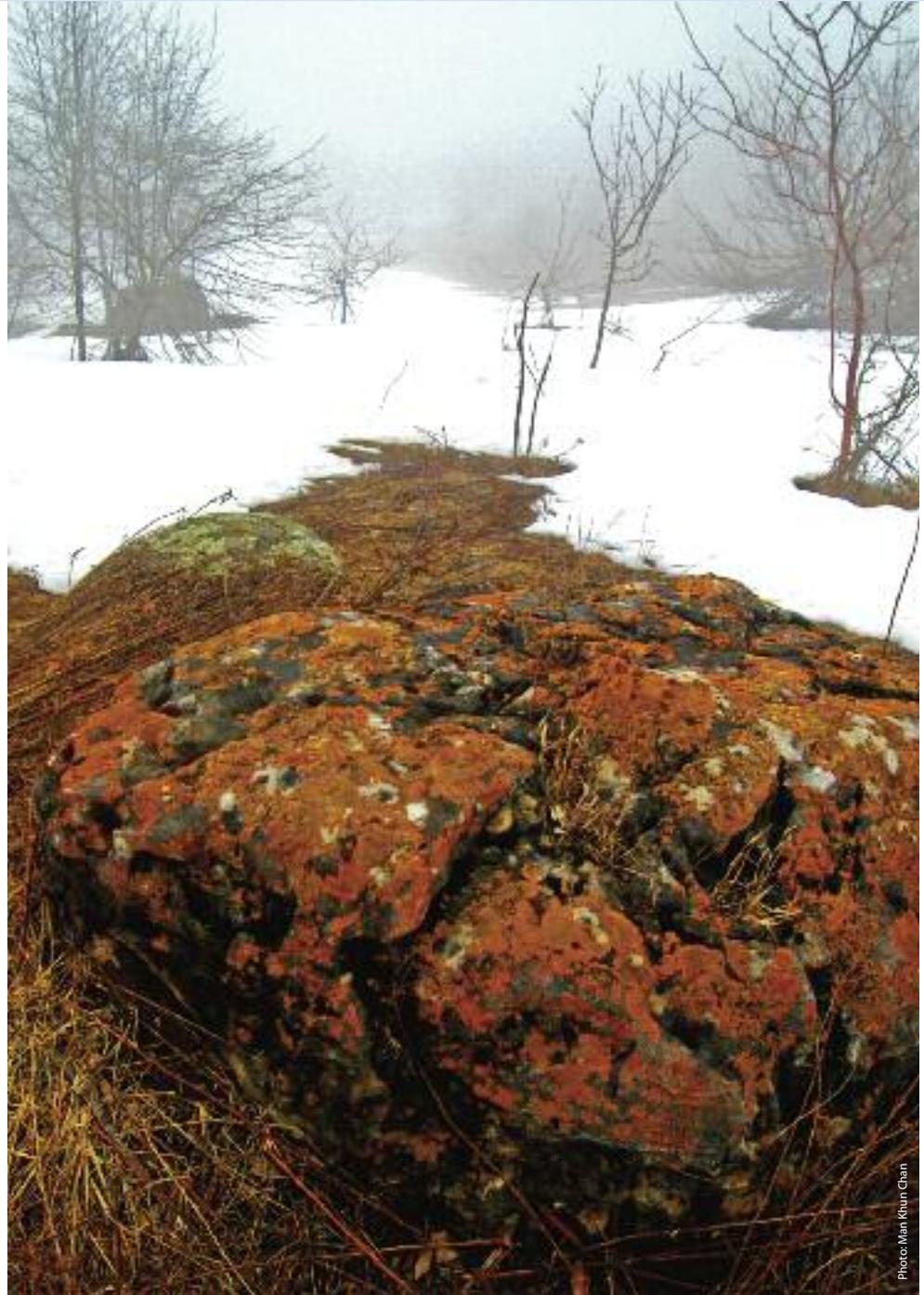
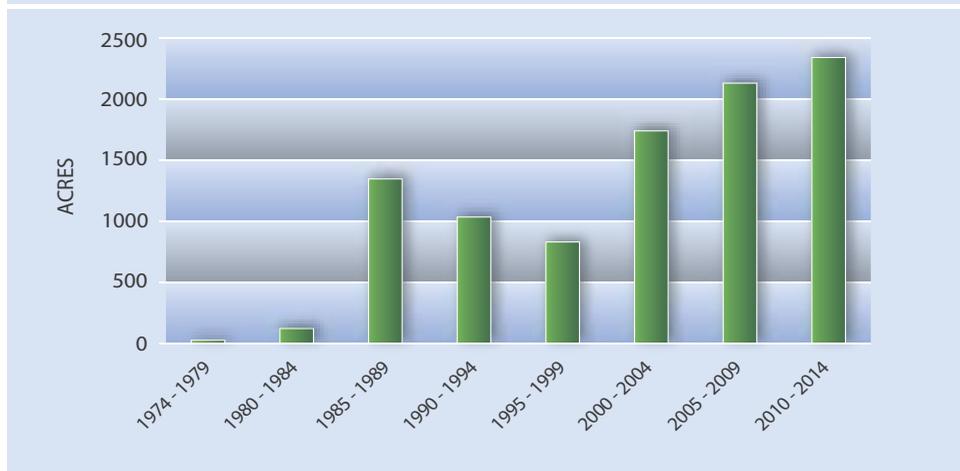


Photo: Man Khan Chan

**Acres of Niagara Escarpment Land Preserved**



Year 4 of our Anniversary Milestones Project will focus on *Planning for our Future*. During Year 4 we will continue our work with legal advisors, regulatory agencies, conservation organizations and other supporters to identify areas where legislative changes can benefit our work and give even greater ecological returns for our donors. We will also contribute to the 2015 review of the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Greenbelt Plan, and ensure that the plans continue to support our work in preservation and conservation of the Niagara Escarpment in the most effective way. •