

Grand reopening of McGeachie Conservation Area June 22



By Michael Riley

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McGeachie Conservation Area will be having its grand reopening on June 22 starting at 8:30 a.m., according to the chair of Hastings Destination Trails Inc., Carl Stefanski. It was closed after the derecho that swept through and damaged the area in 2022. The event is free; however, they ask for a non-perishable food donation for the North Hastings Community Cupboard. In conjunction with the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, HDTI will be joined by two mounted units in full regalia from the Ontario Mounted Special Service Unit (Ambassador Patrol) and will feature an educational foraging tour for edibles, herbs and medicinals from Mystic Hollow Homestead. Stefanski, Cindy Fuerth, executive director of the OMSSU, and Ang Moore from Mystic Hollow Homestead comment on this upcoming event. The grand reopening of McGeachie Conservation Area at 363 Steenburg Lake Road North, will begin at 8:30 a.m. with the mounted unit preparation, followed by the opening celebration at 9:30 a.m. The foraging tour, conducted by Moore, will commence at 10 a.m. and go to 2 p.m. HDTI asks all attendees to respect the environment by not picking plants, collecting insects or disturbing natural habitats and only leaving footprints. HDTI is dedicated to non-motorized trails throughout Hastings County for the enjoyment of the environment, health benefits, tourism and increasing economic development. Stefanski says their board members and volunteers give their time for this not-for-profit organization by participating in this and other events. They'll also be involved in Bancroft's Canada Day event, the Madoc and Coe Hill fairs, the Hastings Snowshoe Hustle, the Marmora and area Canoe and Kayak Festival, water trails, and expanding their presence at the Tweed and Wilberforce fairs along with continued educational tours. Stefanski says that the grand reopening has been in the planning stage since early March. The foraging portion required extensive research as to what fits, not only to the season but also the interest of the population as to what grows wild that may be consumed such as chaga, mushrooms, leafy plants and roots. The list is endless, he says. According to Stefanski, the event is moving along well, but there's always room for volunteers. He says at present they're waiting for confirmation of representation at the event from our MP, MPP, Hastings County and Limerick Township. We are going ahead with this rain or shine. McGeachie was chosen for a number of reasons; parking was a priority and with its large parking area at 390 Steenburg Lake Road North, and additional parking at 363 Steenburg Lake Road North. Also, sanitation and refuse disposal units permanently on

site together with a history board at the kiosk," he says. As to why they have the horse mounted units there that day, Stefanski says they felt it would be a much more impressive presence than a static display such as banners, flags, etc. He says he's known the executive director, Cindy Fuerth, of the OMSSU for a number of years, and they both felt it would be an ideal complement to the event. Fuerth told Bancroft This Week that the OMSSU is pleased to provide trail safety during the HDTI foraging event. "OMSSU looks forward to attending more HDTI events in the future," she says. Stefanski says that Loyalist College recommended Mystic Hollow Homestead for the foraging portion of the event and he also did his own research and came to the same conclusion. Moore tells Bancroft This Week that she'll be talking about wild edibles on June 22; their uses, some medicinal properties and how to prepare and store them. "I will have some of my favourite foraging books on hand and possibly some samples as well. Attendees can expect to gain a basic knowledge of some in-season wild edibles and how to harvest sustainably. There will be no harvesting from the area as it's a conservation area. I will however supply my phone number and email for future questions and possible workshops. We have changed our workshops since we first started doing them at our property. We now go to others' properties to show them what they have on their own land. We will also do conservation areas but they are strictly informational, no harvesting," she says. Moore says that Mystic Hollow Homestead is her and her husband Kevin's organic off-grid farm in Faraday Township, and they've owned the property since 2012. "We farm on a small scale to provide ourselves with fresh organic food. On the farm, we raise highland cows with one Jersey cow for milk, pigs, sheep, goats, rabbits, chickens, ducks, turkeys and quail. Along with that we forage for wild edibles and garden. We rarely visit a grocery store. Our goal is to be as self-sufficient as possible. Preserving our food is a big part of our life; canning, dehydrating and freezing through all the seasons. People are welcome to call to set up a farm tour anytime. There is no charge, but we do ask for a donation, which goes back into feed for the animals. For more information, pricing, or to book a workshop, we can be reached at 705-931-3473 or at ang.mooreffd@gmail.com," she says. Stefanski told Bancroft This Week that based on the likes and comments on the Facebook postings, they estimate between 30 and 40 people have shown interest in attending the event. "This is partly because of the re-opening ceremony and the mounted units, and also because of the environmental aspect," he says. "It seems that foraging is the activity to participate in this year."--