

New Nature Discovery Backpack lending library now at HHPL



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Hastings Highlands Public Library teamed up with the Lake St. Peter Property Owners' Association (www.lspboa.ca) and Watersheds Canada (www.watersheds.ca) to launch a Nature Discovery Backpack lending library on May 24. These backpacks can also be lent out with the three Ontario Parks passes that HHPL has available. According to Wendy Sue Keating, the CEO and head librarian of the HHPL, the partnership will support environmental sustainability knowledge and action while also giving students and educators an engaging and fun learning experience.

The Nature Discovery Backpack lending library is now offered through the HHPL beginning on May 24, and the backpacks were developed by Watersheds Canada. These packs are filled with all necessary activities and field equipment so students will be able to increase their engagement and identification skills pertaining to local species by using these backpacks, and will also contribute to local sustainability knowledge and action. According to Watersheds Canada, the goals of the program are to decrease financial, geographic, experiential, and knowledge-based barriers for children and youth to participate in community science data collection, native species identification and environmental stewardship. Aside from Hastings Highlands, the program is being run in Greater Sudbury and Madawaska and in two communities in Manitoba; Winnipeg and Carman.

Throughout COVID-19 and its lockdown precipitated online meetings replacing in-person contact, Watersheds Canada had several webinars that LSPPOA attended to further education on healthy shorelines, water quality, freshwater ecosystems and how people can be proactive in preserving the future of our freshwater and those who rely on it. In 2022, Monica Seidel, communications and fundraising manager with Watersheds Canada, developed a sheet for families called Outdoor Play: Resources to Help Families Safely Explore Nature at Lake St. Peter, and asked the LSPPOA if they'd be interested in getting the Nature Discovery Backpacks. Procuring 15 of these backpacks, Watersheds Canada then approached Keating and the HHPL who agreed to disperse them along with the Ontario Parks passes they had in stock.

Nicole Dube, freshwater health coordinator with Watersheds Canada, says that the nature theme was already being displayed at the library with many books and resources available.

?Library programs were already in place engaging all the grades from the Maynooth Public School and the home school families too. With Wendy's experience and the connections with the surrounding community, she was a great asset to help launch this great opportunity. We are very appreciative to be given this opportunity working with our extended community as it certainly aligns with

our stewardship goals; to connect community, learn and put into action the best practices that support a healthy ecosystem, and to build a community legacy that preserves the history and health of our lake lands for generations," she says.

They can be borrowed for a week at a time for the kids and their families to learn and enjoy with them. In addition, the HHPL also has three Ontario Parks' passes; vehicle permits for day use access to over 100 provincial parks that would complement these backpacks well. Both the backpacks and the park passes are free to borrow with a valid HHPL card.

TD Friends of the Environment provided funding support for this environmental sustainability initiative.

www.td.ca/en/personal-banking/solutions/environment/friends-of-the-environment/.

On the day of the Nature Backpacks launch, students from the Maynooth Public School came over to the HHPL to try out the various items contained within the backpacks. These include the following items; a 44-page activity book, field guides (reptiles and amphibians, trees, bugs and slugs, geology, animal tracks, lichens, birds and fungi) and science field tools (binoculars, water quality test kit, collection jar, dip net, and magnifying glass).

Seidel and Dube were there to explain the new backpacks and their purpose to the students and their teachers, while McCleery Sclanlan and Ann Judson were there with the LSPPOA, who also provided a "grab and go" snack for the students. After Seidel's presentation, the students broke into groups and went to the different tables set up to test out the various components of the Nature Backpacks and familiarize themselves with them.

"They can get comfortable using the tools and that way when they check them out, they're experts and they can tell their parents what to do," she says.

Seidel told Bancroft This Week that she thought the event went well and that it looked like the students had a lot of fun testing out the equipment from the backpacks.

"It'll be nice when they get to go outside to enjoy it with their siblings and families," she says. "You can take those Ontario Parks passes out at the library too, so it's a good combo."