

Keep your vehicles off of new nature reserve: Bruce Trail Conservancy

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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is pleading with community members in Dufferin County to keep vehicles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVS) out of the Pine River Nature Reserve following recent damage to the habitat.

In a press release last Thursday (May 20), the conservancy said several trespassers entered the property on the weekend of May 15 destroying fencing, blockades and signage as well as damaging already sensitive habitat.

"Local residents love this place and have also raised funds to help with its restoration. Local volunteers have donated hundreds of hours to this project and it's sad to see a few individuals purposely undo this important work," said Michael McDonald, CEO of the Bruce Trail Conservancy.

The conservancy added that the OPP are investigating the incident and security has been put in place to ensure no additional damage comes to the nature reserve.

"We intend to press charges once the investigation is complete," said McDonald.

The Pine River Nature Reserve, is 192-acres or 510 m of the Bruce Trail Optimum Route, and is one of two natural areas protected in the Dufferin Hi-Land section. The local nature reserve is home to wetlands inhabited by bullfrogs, salamanders, and snapping turtles as well as forests with trees such as the Eastern Hemlock, American Beech, and White Cedar.

The Bruce Trail Conservancy acquired the property where the Pine River Nature Reserve sits over last year.

McDonald told the Free Press that the conservancy is working to restore the nature reserve to its peak ecological health and open it to the public as a pedestrian footpath.

"What happens when we acquire property is that our ecologists go in and they do ecological inventory, so that we can understand all the different species that live within that ecosystem," said McDonald. "That's the process that we're in right now."

Although no vehicles of any type are ever permitted on the Pine River Nature Reserve, McDonald notes the importance during ecological restoration.

"Before you can properly ecologically restore an area, you have to make sure that vehicular access is cut off, the very first step is securing the property, and from there step two is for us to go in and start to do that restoration work," said McDonald. "The whole goal here is that we're going to be able to increase the biodiversity on this property for this local community."

Several ecological restoration projects scheduled for Pine River Nature Reserve to enhance biodiversity and restore the ecosystem including:

- ? Removing and controlling invasive species (Phragmites and Periwinkle)
- ? Planting native trees, shrubs to expand the forest canopy and understorey
- ? Removal of old building garbage

? Closing and monitoring of off-road vehicle trails

? Installation of a wooden viewing platform at a naturalized pond to enhance wildlife viewings in an environmentally sustainable way.

McDonald said the Bruce Trail Conservancy is looking to have a pedestrian trail ready at Pine River Nature Reserve over the next few months.

?It's something that the local community can look forward to in the not too distant future.?