

# TALISMAN LANDS: BIODIVERSITY & SUSTAINABLE USE

**MAY 2021**

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**Facebook: Love the Beaver Valley**

The Talisman Lands lie in the heart of the Beaver Valley Corridor along the Niagara Escarpment, in traditional Saugeen Ojibway Territory. Formerly the location of a popular public ski resort, they are now at a turning point and open to new decisions about their use. We, the Friends of the Beaver Valley, are considering how best to balance the natural, cultural, and economic assets of these lands and their potential for maximum community benefit in the current era.



Ingrid Remkins © Snapping Turtle - *Special Concern*



David Turner © Golden-winged Warbler - *Special Concern*

*Thank you for the contributions from the Friends of the Beaver  
Valley including;*

*Nadia Dubyk, Mary Ferguson, Joyce Hall, Stacie Howe, Jane Mei,  
Linda Reader, John Scott, Lorainne Sutton, Sarah Tacoma,  
Jeanette Walters*

## Ecological Significance of the Beaver Valley

*"Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better."* Albert Einstein

*"To love a place is not enough. We must find ways to heal it."*  
Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*

The Beaver Valley was carved deep and wide by ice and water over the millennia, creating towering limestone cliffs that effectively curtailed development for centuries. Some consider this phenomenon a happy accident that preserved habitats from the lower grasslands up to the fragile Queenston Shale of Old Baldy and other outcrops. The natural corridor of the valley contains a variety of key Niagara Escarpment habitats including interior forests, coldwater streams, wetlands, talus slopes, cliffs and crevices.

If not for the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the protective forest canopies and fragile waterways may have been ravaged long ago. The limestone bedrock presents Karst topography across the entire region, creating both stability and groundwater sensitivities incompatible with most types of development. Land trusts and individuals protect small pieces of sensitive ecology in this internationally recognized UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Even so, the forest cover is mostly second growth, as early logging took its toll.



Ingrid Remkins © Monarch Butterfly - *Threatened*

Today, endangered butternut trees stand in patches, sheltering the rare Harts-tongue fern, both species considered rare and protected by law. Other species include the Woodthrush, the Eastern Wood Pewee, the Monarch butterfly, and the Milksnake. The Loggerhead Shrike found just 20 years ago breeding in the Valley is seen no more. The cliffs and talus communities along the Escarpment are considered rare ecosites in Ontario which provide critical habitat for many species including bats, several of which are species at risk in Ontario, and snakes, which use the boulder talus slopes for hibernacula. Turtle nesting areas are found all across the bottom of the valley, especially at the base of the Talisman properties. Migrating birds use this North/South corridor every spring and fall.

The Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) protects 17 species of concern on over 800 acres of nature reserves in the valley. Records indicate that there are 353 observations of 20 different species that are of conservation concern in the Beaver Valley.

Eighty- four species at risk have been recorded on Bruce Trail Conservancy - managed land and their ecologists made 48 observations of 13 Species at Risk this past year alone.

The discoveries and learnings about this unique and environmentally sensitive land is a continuous process. Some biologists even believe that the exact extent of the species found in this special place is not yet fully known. Planning, monitoring and active management are required to maintain and enhance biodiversity, improve connectivity of natural corridors, and protect Species at Risk and unique habitats.

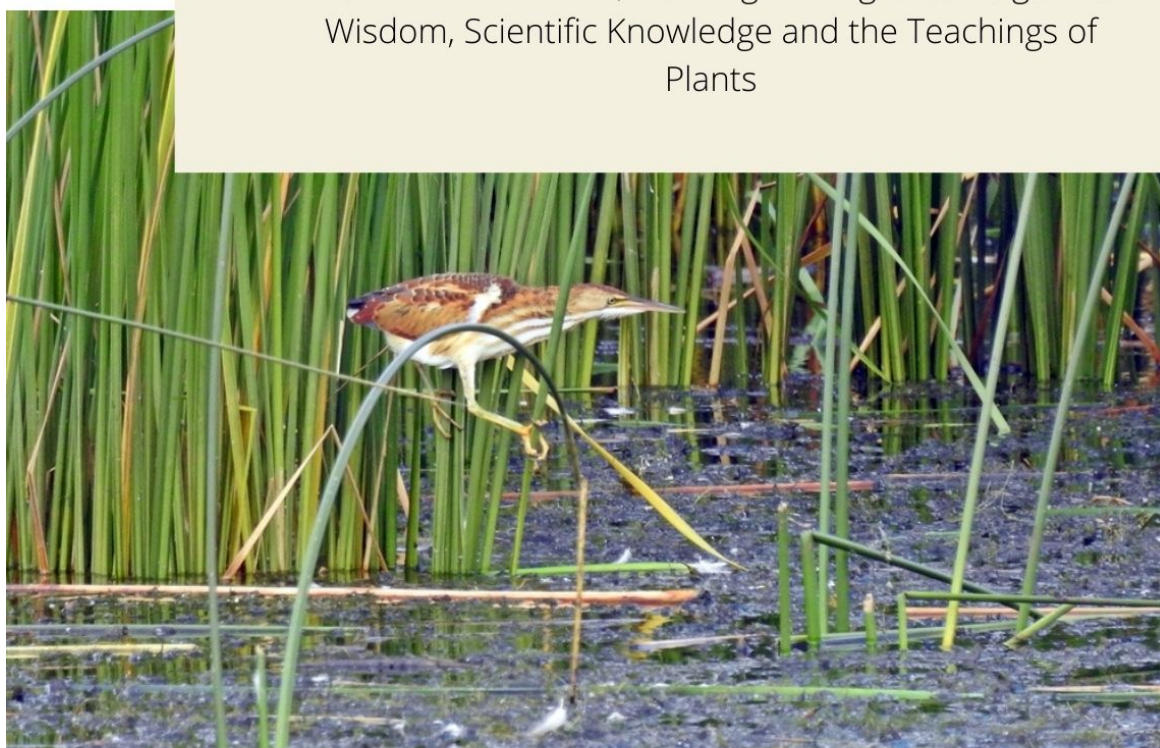


David Turner © Red-Headed Woodpecker & Bald Eagle - *Both Special Concern*

## Talisman Properties and Ecological Protection

*"For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children's future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it."*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*



David Turner © Least Bittern - *Threatened*

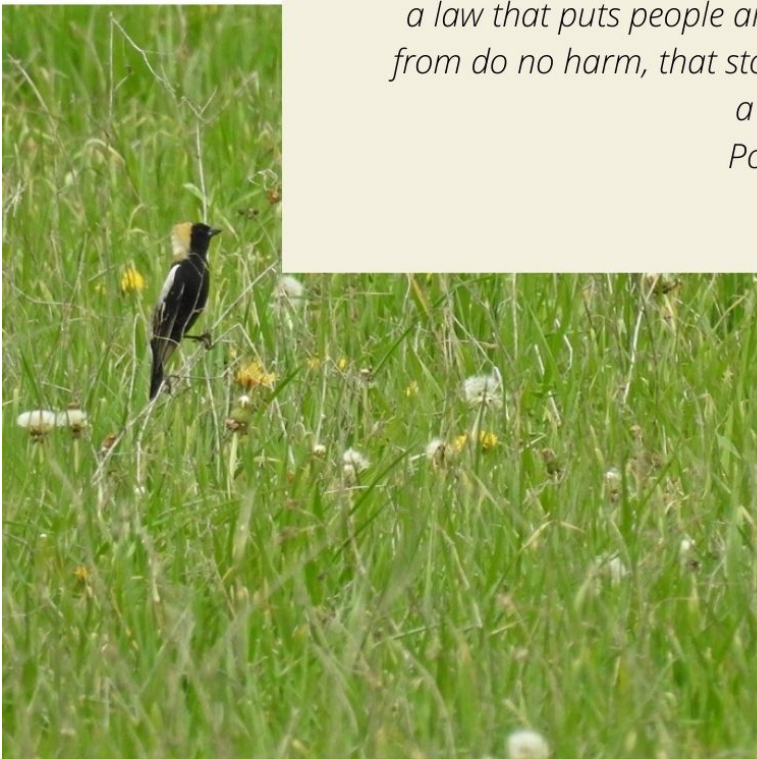
Under the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP), the Talisman properties have the designation of Escarpment Recreation Area. They were given this designation because at the time of establishment and approval of the NEP by the Ontario Cabinet in 1985, the land was already in recreational use as the Talisman ski centre. The Escarpment Recreation Area designation allows for quite a broad array of land development uses, much more than is permitted on the lands adjacent to Talisman, which sits entirely in the two most restrictive and protective land use designations in the NEP--Escarpment Natural Area and Escarpment Protection Area.

Many of the citizens who live in the Beaver Valley as well as frequent visitors have expressed a desire to realize a vision for the Talisman properties that return them as much as possible to a natural state. The current designation leaves the property vulnerable to development, which could degrade the unique and valuable characteristics we now associate with this valley. In fact, re-designation of the Talisman property from Escarpment Recreation Area to a combination of Escarpment Natural and Escarpment Protection is possible at the request of the landowner. In addition, organizations such as the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy can place any land, even land that is privately owned, into a reserve with a conservation agreement that gives property owners capital gains tax benefits while preserving the land forever, with no cost to the landowner.

## Municipality of Grey Highlands and the Climate Crisis

*“The rules of our world are laws, and they can be changed. Laws can restrict or they can enable. What matters is what they serve. Many of the laws in our world serve property – they are based on ownership. But imagine a law that has a higher moral authority... a law that puts people and planet first. Imagine a law that starts from do no harm, that stops this dangerous game and takes us to a place of safety.”*

*Polly Higgins, 2015*



David Turner © Bobolink - *Special Concern*

Over the past three years the threat of a climate crisis has triggered a profound and dramatic shift in both public attitudes and government policy, with respect to natural assets. The Municipality of Grey Highlands declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, placing us on a path to create a made-in-Grey-Highlands Climate Action Plan.

With this action the Council acknowledged a new era for municipal governance, where a climate lens must be applied to all decisions made by Council, including those involving land use and tourism.

The immediate costs of ecosystem restoration are small in comparison to economic benefits when viewed through the lens of climate change. Ecosystem services can actually be given a real monetary value to establish the economic benefits or losses of elements of nature. For example, for 2.47 acres of forest has the highest value (\$25,843), followed by wetlands (\$15,171), and fencerows (\$1,023) (Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources SIG Study 2009). The climate crisis is revealing an urgent need to acknowledge the real value of lands in a natural state.



Ingrid Remkins © Eastern Meadowlark - *Threatened*



## Trends in Eco-tourism

*"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."  
John Muir*

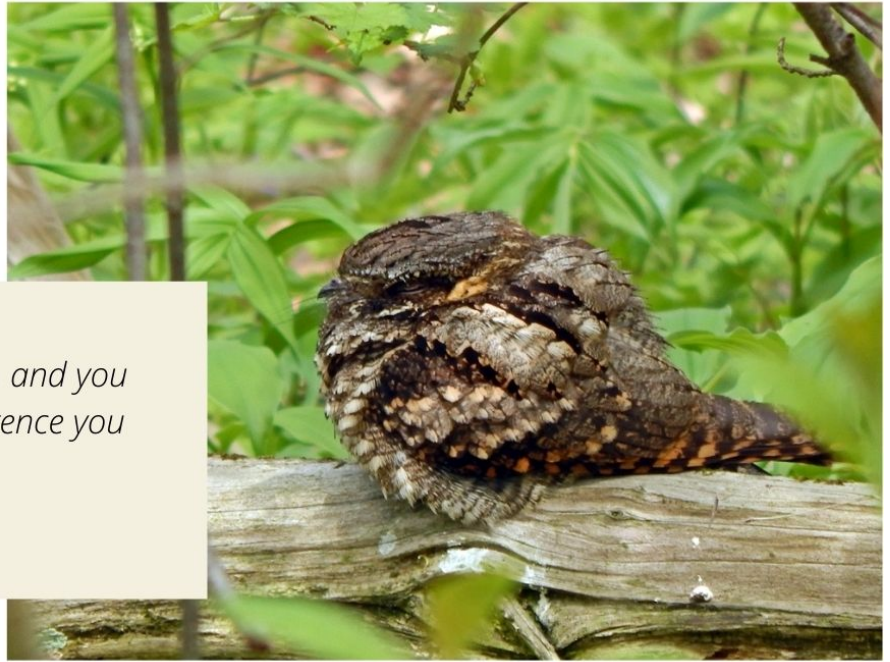
It has not gone unnoticed that the Beaver Valley is rich in nature. The time of the sale to Brian Ellis of Talisman as a luxury ski resort seems long ago in the light of evolving trends in sustainable tourism. The pandemic has dramatically increased pressures on the Beaver Valley, which was already booming, and the stream of tourists who have discovered and visit the Beaver Valley corridor has grown exponentially. Increasingly, people have become aware of the importance of the natural world and have been drawn to low-impact ecotourism activities such as hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. The trails are populated more than ever and the Beaver Valley Bruce Trail Club has seen a 23% increase in membership year-over-year. Tourism services in the Greenbelt have a value of \$236 million for birdwatching, and \$872 million for hiking, climbing, and riding (Source: Friends of the Ontario Greenbelt Foundation 2016). The numbers reflect a trend which will continue for nature-based tourism, offering us both opportunities and challenges. In order to maintain current levels of eco-tourism, we need to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use.



David Turner © Canada Warbler - *Special Concern*

## Nature and Well-being

*"What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."*  
Jane Goodall



David Turner © Whip-poor-wil - *Special Concern*

Well-being can be described as a state of good health, happiness, fulfillment, and purpose, judging one's life positively and feeling engaged in life. But do we need to look to science to investigate the positive connection between nature and enhanced well-being? We know this intuitively because when we experience nature, our breathing slows, deep breaths and long exhales are more effortless, we feel a sense of calm and connection. And we also know this observationally when we see others in nature experience more aliveness, more creativeness, and joy, particularly children. Being in nature enlivens us.

In 2005 Richard Louv wrote "The Child in the Woods" and was credited with coining the term "Nature Deficit Disorder." At that time, he could find about 60 studies about the effects of less exposure to nature. By 2020, there were 1,000 studies. Mr. Louv states that all these studies point in one direction, "Nature is not only nice to have, but it's a have-to-have for physical health and cognitive functioning."

## Conclusion

The wealth of Grey Highlands can be measured by the wellness of our land--the plant and animal species, the watershed, the unique karst topography, the section of Bruce Trail that ties us by a long green thread to other communities on the Escarpment--and the wellness of our communities. What creates a “vibrant community of communities,” as our official plan envisions? When do citizens become more than a collection of individuals? The answer: when given the opportunity to foster and share their collective resources for mutual benefit. The Talisman Lands need to be managed as a long-term public asset for the best and common good, for the lands themselves, for us as we enjoy them now, and for future generations.



Ingrid Remkins © Evening Grosbeak - *Special Concern*