



# Light Lines

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## CRAA Celebrates 25 years

By John Kendell,

Back in September 1990 CRAA was officially incorporated as a non profit corporation by a group of anglers that cared and fished the river. Many more anglers joined and have carried the torch forward to protect, improve and restore the river. I had just started university when CRAA was formed and I joined that first winter. I personally became involved in 1992 and found myself rebuilding the club in early 1993 after many of those involved stepped down due to the time required. Over the 25 years there have been some amazing successes, some great steps forward and sadly some steps backwards. Few young anglers today or agency staff have any understanding of what we saw in the 80's and early 90's and how the river has changed.

Chinook runs exploded in the mid 80's on the Credit from increased stocking and more effective stocking programs. The charter industry was blossoming at Port Credit and recreational lake angling was growing exponentially. I'll never forget the days of waiting 45 minutes to launch at Port Credit because there were literally 300-500 boats going in each morning in late August. And as the salmon staged in the mouth, hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of anglers would line the pier and the lower river at Lakeshore. Erindale Park, recently built (built in 84-86) was also exploding with anglers where the day after a rain saw upwards of a thousand anglers descend on the park.

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## Steelhead lift underway in 2016

CRAA volunteers have been working hard with MNRF staff from the Aurora district to operate the Norval fishway this spring to lift and transport steelhead once again. The transfer program is vital to the wild steelhead population to ensure enough fish reach prime spawning grounds to help sustain the population. And this spring to date has been nothing short of a roller coaster, with warm weather early, followed by record high water, followed by cold and snow in early April. To volunteer for the lifts please follow up with Chip Gerrard on CRAA's Facebook page. Stay tuned to see how the season finishes.



**Stay Connected: follow CRAA on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube!**



## Credit River Anglers Association

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## CRAA Volunteers in Action!

**Executive meetings** – 20+ CRAA members attended meetings in early spring to discuss plans for 2016 and work to tackle the many programs CRAA is involved in.

**Spring Fishing Show** – CRAA operated a booth and brought in a strong number of new members. Over a 15 CRAA volunteers and our crew leader Quinn managed the booth. A big thank you to Winston, Peter and Joe for organizing and to Quinn for helping with the schedule.

**Sportsmen Show** – CRAA volunteers operated a booth again this year to introduce new members and other anglers and attendees to our work.

**Spring fish lift** – CRAA volunteers are working to assist the MNRF at the Norval fishway in March-April again this year.

**Steelhead transfer** – The transfer of adult steelhead is ongoing this spring. Look for more lifts and transfers once the weathers warms up again. To date we are close to 300 adults moved. Lifts have been difficult due to high flows, a lot of debris and dramatically changing temperatures.

**Spring Volunteer Tree Planting.** Stay tuned to CRAA's Facebook Page for updates when the next tree planting event will be held.

**CRAA hatchery** – The hatchery team continues to volunteer 365 days a year to feed and maintain our fish. This year we only have brown trout and steelhead in the hatchery. Our steelhead collection is going well this spring but difficulty coordinating adult collection last fall meant few brown eggs were collected. The good news is we did manage to get a good quantity of coho salmon eggs.

**Wrap up of major Projects** - November 2015 saw CRAA wrap up our most recent 3 year project. With another 100,000 trees in the ground and countless works by the CRAA crew we have made a massive improvement to the watershed for decades to come. Quinn O'Brien, CRAA's crew manager for the past two years finished his contract in November. However he has been actively volunteering since then with the hatchery and shows.

## 2015 CRAA Tournament Results

Another fantastic tournament in the books! This year all the proceeds were donated to the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society of Canada. Thanks to our generous sponsors we were able to raise \$3000! Andrew Lidkie took bragging rights and a nice prize package from Sony, Irideus & Centerpin Angling with a nice 29 inch Steelhead. Second place taken by Emil Pan & Troy Morris and they went home with some really nice gift packs from Lucky Strike. Third place went to Andrew Callahan & Eric Peterson and they took home some

nice Redwing Tackle packs. The day was enjoyed by all and the weather was perfect. We hope to continue growing this event each year to help fight the cure for Multiple Sclerosis. With so many great prizes virtually every participant walked away with a prize pack. See the 2016 event outline on Facebook for more great prizes!



## CRAA's 25th Anniversary Continued

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The explosion of anglers also brought unethical angling (similar to recent reports in Port Hope). This is what brought CRAA to life. Anglers who cared worked with the City of Mississauga and MNR (now the MNRF) to increase enforcement, reduce poaching and educate anglers. It worked and the record of success led to opening the section from Burnhamthorpe to Hwy 403 in 2000 and opening the lower river below Dundas in recent years.

When I took over leadership of CRAA in 1993 the club had a few hundred dollars in the bank and had participated in a small tree planting with Councillor Dave Cullham (ward 6) planting a couple hundred cedar trees in Erindale Park. Since 1993 CRAA has become a leader of conservation in Canada, raising and completing over five million dollars worth of conservation work. This has been done through some 1.5 million in cash fundraising over 22 years and 3.5 million of in kind from volunteers like you and me. So many people have volunteered their time I don't have an exact figure, but can assure you it's well over 1,500 individuals. And many of those volunteers have given hundreds and thousands of hours to the cause.

I personally have volunteered some 20,000 plus hours to CRAA and the Credit River. And through that time there have been ups and downs, great successes, many hurdles and disappointments. Well, nobody said it would be easy! But the constant flow of new volunteers and their enthusiasm has and continues to bolster my resolve.

CRAA had challenges in the mid 90's and people like Mike Wiedemann, Mike Tost, Jerry Tusa and Aaron Bodium all put in so much dedication it inspired me to do more. What seems recent to me, but still over a decade ago was a new major influx of volunteers became involved, many of whom are still very active in CRAA. Guys like Louis Milo, Dave Leschied, Joe Ward, Justin Elia and so many more. And Mark Polanski who is on the board of the club today, but he started volunteering when he was 12 back in the late 90's. Proof that getting kids involved is a key to protecting the fishery and ensuring a passion for the sport. What's amazing is today we see so many new eager volunteers growing the clubs ranks and allowing us to share the work load with so many.

Over the past 25 years CRAA has planted 500,000 trees, stocked millions of fish, raised millions of dollars, kept Erindale open to fishing, worked with the City and MNRF to open more river to fishing and introduce lower limits, contributed ten of thousands of volunteer hours, helped develop tens of millions in economic benefits to the watershed. We repaired and improved the Streetsville fishway, were a lead partner in building the Norval fishway, worked with land owners and agencies like CVC to remove dams, culverts, on-line ponds and other barriers. We've hired upwards of 100 students over the years, creating jobs for students with a passion for fisheries. We've led and supported many research projects, from temperature studies, genetics and more. Our adult steelhead transfers have helped improve runs and so has improved habitat from cooler water in summer. But we have a long road ahead to finish the job.

The ongoing hurdle as you all know is fish access, dams, urban sprawl and the debate over native and naturalized species. The management of lake run fish, particularly steelhead, chinook and browns has been frustrating. Back in 2001 we made great progress, with a new plan that called for a barrier somewhere below the East Credit (Inglewood) and access for lake fish to reaches below. The plan had a target implementation of 2005. But here we are in 2016 with these most important aspects (to CRAA members) not resolved. MNR is now drafting a new plan and CRAA eagerly awaits an opportunity to comment on it and share with our membership and the fishing public. The demand for a wild steelhead fishery and wild fish of all species (chinook, coho, brown, brook, bass, etc.) is a key concern for most anglers, and having high quality fishing close to home where we can catch numbers of fish. We look forward to working with MNRF towards an updated plan.

Recently we did see some cause for celebration in the fishery. Between 2011 and 2013 the steelhead run was the best in 25 years or more, with an estimated 15-20,000 returning (based on mark-recapture) and 90%+ wild. But the runs are declining as the large year class from 2009 passes on from old age (and harvest), leaving anglers with tougher fishing conditions once again. Still runs are fairly strong and 2013 was a good year class!

After 25 years CRAA has done some incredible work to be very proud of. The river is getting colder and cleaner and the potential is improving. The river is far healthier today than it was 25 years ago and it's getting better every year!

# 500,000 Tree Celebration

500,000 trees in the ground, that is CRAA's legacy in 2015. It has been a long and rewarding project that I have been spearheading for over 20 years. It all started for me back in 1992, as a volunteer with CRAA planting some cedar trees with then Ward 6 councillor David Cullham in Erindale Park. Who knew that morning in May would lead me and CRAA down such a long road to planting half a million trees in just over 20 years.

The real work started as I finished my degree in Biology and Environmental Mgt at UTM. I had focussed my undergrad thesis on the 'Land Use Impacts on Cold Water Fish of the Credit'. So I had a good handle on the key issues, dams, access to spawning grounds, erosion, development, on-line ponds and the gross lack of vegetation and forests along the watershed from top to bottom.

Our first plantings were quite modest, working with Mississauga staff and David Cullham. But in 1994-5 we managed to buy some cedar trees and do a joint project with CVC on Huttonville Creek. The success here was our real starting point. By 1997 the trees were flourishing and it led me to find funding sources and develop some income generation for CRAA to allow us to do more. Key funding from Walter Oster of the Great Ontario Salmon Derby, along with grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and Eco Action kick-started the process. In this time I also negotiated a small acreage from Sheridan Nurseries to grow our own trees that we still operate today, some 20 years later! This initial funding allowed CRAA to hire students and buy trees by the tens of thousands from local growers. It also allowed me to knock on doors to gain access to plant and begin building relationships with dozens of major land owners along the watershed from Orangeville to Mississauga.

Here are just two before and after images of the results of CRAA's tree planting program. We have hundreds of sites and over 10,000 acres planted. Both public and private land, most tributaries and from the headwaters to the mouth, CRAA has planted trees.

Over the years Ontario Trillium Foundation, Eco Action, Ministry of the Environment, MNRF (through CFWIP), the Great Ontario Salmon Derby, City of Mississauga and many more supported CRAA's work. We hired dozens of students and engaged well over 1,000 volunteers. I'll include a more detailed outline of the massive 20 year planting project in our summer newsletter.

We're half way to a million...time to get back to planting!

**John**



CRAA president John Kendell, with the CRAA crew, Quinn O'Brien, Milan Milojevic, Bryan DeSilver, Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie, MPP Bob Delaney, former MP Brad Butt, Ward 11 councillor George Carlson and former councillor David Culham planting the Half Millionth Tree.

