

Membership program undergoing renewal

The Couchiching Conservancy is making some changes to the way it handles Memberships in 2013.

Some of the alterations are being driven by changes to the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, while others are being made to improve the efficiency of our membership program.

Before diving into the nuts and bolts of the changes, it's worth noting just how important your membership is to The Conservancy. Funders often ask organizations to illustrate the amount of community support they enjoy. Membership is a tangible indicator of that support; your act of purchasing a membership directly improves The Conservancy's ability to attract funding for our work.

Members also play a key role in directing the Conservancy. Purchasing a membership gives you the right to vote at our Annual General Meeting and shape the future direction of the organization. Being a part of a like-minded community of people working toward a shared vision brings its own rewards as well.

Okay, now the nuts and bolts.

Currently, membership renewal notices are sent out in waves and you receive a renewal notice around the time you paid your membership in the previous year. For instance, if you bought your 2011 membership in June, you will have received a renewal notice in the spring of 2012. Subsequent reminder notices are sent out after that. In essence, your membership extends from June 2012 to June 2013.

That means staff are currently sending out three to four waves of membership renewal notices, followed by reminder notices, over the course of a year. That's a lot of stamps, envelopes and time being devoted to the task – resources and energy better spent out in the field.

To simplify the system, we will be launching a single membership campaign in March, 2013. The membership will be for the 2013 calendar year, no matter what time of year you make your payment. Memberships purchased after November 1, 2012, will be counted as 2013 membership.

We're also simplifying the Membership form itself. Responding to changes to the Non-Profit Corporations Act, we will be reducing the Membership categories from six to just two. The current six membership levels range from Individual (\$30) to Land Steward (\$1,000). We'll be reducing the categories to just Individual (\$30) and Family (\$50). We will no longer be able to issue tax receipts for memberships.

Because financial support beyond a membership fee is so crucial to the well-being of the organization, we will continue to ask for gifts in addition to the membership, and we will be able to issue receipts for all gifts over \$20.

As we work to unroll these changes, we will be asking you to consider monthly giving through a pre-authorized payment plan with your bank or through VISA. A new form has been posted on our website

to assist you in setting up a monthly payment plan. For those who are comfortable with the method, it is the easiest, most hassle-free way of supporting the work that we do.

Thanks to all of you who make it possible to protect and care for important natural areas in the region through your membership and support. In an era when a bewildering array of environmental problems confronts anyone who cares to look, it's wonderful to be part of a community which works together to make a tangible difference.

That difference can be seen and smelt and touched on almost any of the 11,000 acres now under our protection.

Mark Bisset, Executive Director