“Each season has its own wonder, its own special place, and purpose in the pattern of creation.”
Author Unknown

In this issue:
- Conservation from the Ground Up
- Risk Management - Tobogganing
- Waste and Recycling in Parks and Open Spaces

Winter 2016
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Message from our New President 4
Thank you for 80 years 5
Surviving the Holidays 6
Musings for a Winter Day 8
Members Page 11
Waste and Recycling in Parks and Open Spaces 12
Talk About Town 14
OPA Holiday Message 15
Risk Management - Tobogganing 16
From the Parks Bench 19
Conservation from the Ground Up 21
OPA Foundation Scholarship & Bursary Award Program 23

Advertisements

Bleacher Guys 2
Simplistic Lines 7
Ure-Tech Surfaces Inc. 7, 9, 19
Kubota Canada Ltd. 10
Congress Ontario 11
Molok North America Ltd. 13
Brett Young 20
Sutera 22
Turf Care 24

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Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of OPA.
Charitable No.: 12725 7509 RR0001
Publication Mail Agreement #41066026

Submissions deadline for Spring 2017: February 24, 2017

Cover photo courtesy of Robert Howes
November 5th was Guy Fawkes Night, or Bonfire Night, as it is more affectionately known in Newfoundland. In 1603 a band of thirteen ‘conspirators’, Guy Fawkes among them, plotted to blow up the Parliament buildings in Britain. A warning letter was sent to the King and his forces were able to thwart the plan. Bonfires were set across the nation to celebrate the safety of the King and ever since that night, November 5th has been celebrated with fireworks and bonfires. My teenage memories of this particular night in Newfoundland always included digging a fire pit... in the snow! I have no memory of a bonfire night being quite so warm as it was this past November 5th. So to celebrate we invited friends over for a backyard bonfire. It is hard to believe the forecast of below normal temperatures this winter when we were outside in sweatshirts in November! However the Old Farmer’s Almanac (which has been around since 1792 by the way) predicts ‘winter will be colder than normal, with above normal precipitation and snowfall.’ At the same time it looks like 2016 is on track to be the hottest year on record with a new high for the third year in a row. I don’t know about other municipalities, but where I live our Park Operations Division is simply not set up to deal with summer like weather this far into November. As the Operations Manager, I continue to do a snow dance every evening in hopes of waking up to a lovely blanket of snow in the morning!

November was also a great month to see the Supermoon, the point in the moon’s orbit when it is closest to the Earth, causing it to appear up to 14% bigger and 30% brighter. I was lucky enough to be up north a few days before November 14th and could see the moon against a dark sky backdrop. Did you know that artificial light can have devastating effects on wildlife and plant life? Did you know that the International Dark Sky Association works with all levels of parks organizations to provide information on eco-friendly lighting? As parks operators this is something we can all get behind.

So by now you are probably wondering what any of this has to do with the Ontario Parks Association... Everything! Our mandate of Protecting Tomorrow Today® has everything to do with climate change and the impact of changes from a rural society to an urban one. Who better than our parks professionals to help develop policies and strategies to protect our natural ecosystems? To expand our natural areas networks, restore habitat, bring back native species and share best practices across the province and our country? To improve our understanding of climate change as it relates to natural habitat impacts and to find solutions for parks and protected areas?

‘Climate change poses a serious threat to ecosystems. At the same time, protecting healthy ecosystems can provide natural buffers to the impacts of climate change...while also providing other benefits such as protecting biodiversity... Known as ecosystem based adaptation, this approach is recognized internationally as an important part of climate change adaptation.’ (Government of Canada 2010)

As parks professionals we know the importance of protecting our environment. It is encouraging to see the Federal Government sees it too. At the OPA we strive to provide relevant training so that parks professionals at all levels can contribute to this important mandate of protecting our natural environment. I am proud and honoured to be serving as the next President of the Association and look forward to sharing professional information as well as some personal stories about my life as it relates to parks. I have been ‘in the industry’ for longer than I care to admit and still to this day say I love my job. I love parks, visiting parks across the country, taking pictures of garbage cans (you know you’ve done it!), talking to parks professionals everywhere and comparing policies, procedures, best practices and of course sharing our own personal stories of life in the parks department (have you seen the TV series Parks and Recreation???). I hope you join us here at the OPA for a course or two or at our upcoming annual Forum on March 1st. Come and say HI...I love meeting new people!

“Life is Good”
Dianna Clarke
Thank you for supporting OPA for 80 years!
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Surviving the Holidays

Special meals, tight budgets, and not enough hours in the day: so many factors can affect our nutritional choices during the holiday season. For some parks professionals the issue can be difficulty in getting enough nutrition and for others overconsumption is the problem. The holidays can be complicated!

So let’s look at some ways to fuel yourself through the holiday season to save your waistline and your wallet:

• Exercise portion control – especially in the meat department. A meal-sized portion of meat is less than you might think. Limit your portion to a deck of cards and fill your plate with vegetables. Your waistline and wallet will benefit.

• Eat regular meals and have a healthy snack (apple and a few almonds, or a slice of whole grain bread with peanut butter, or a small salad with chick peas, or some plain oatmeal made with milk and topped with sliced banana) before attending parties. “Saving your appetite” for a party later in the day by skipping meals is likely to lead to overeating later on high calorie nutrient-poor choices.

• Avoid nutritionally deficient (and expensive) “party” food like pastries, sausage rolls, cheese balls, chicken wings, cheesy dips, pizza bites, and other high fat hors d’oeuvres. Consider a lighter appetizer course like vegetable soup, fresh salad or a plate with sliced vegetables and whole grain flatbread with hummus if you need a pre-meal nibble.

• Focus on quality time spent with family and friends (think: games, sing-alongs, reviewing old photo albums, family storytelling) rather than making eating the main event at celebratory get-togethers.

• Opt for potluck and prepare a healthy dish (might I suggest a super healthy, low cost and tasty veggie ratatouille as an option?). Serve yourself one plate of food and avoid going back for seconds.

• Limit the special holiday treats for the actual holiday celebration and avoid stretching the treats out into an entire month of binging. Once again, easier on your grocery budget and your waistline!

• Remember that there are a number of seasonal vegetables that will remain low cost and available throughout the winter. Please consider adding potatoes, carrots, onions, rutabaga, and cabbage to your grocery carts. With the exception of cabbage, all of these vegetables have a wonderful flavor when cut into ½ inch chunks and roasted in the oven with a little vegetable oil for 40 minutes at 400°C. Bagged apples, oranges and bananas are often well priced fresh fruit options and don’t forget that fruit canned in its own juice (or light syrup) is a healthier budget friendly choice as well.

• Choose one special celebratory item (like an entrée or dessert) for your special meal and fill out the rest of the meal with simple and healthy staples like steamed or roasted veggies and whole grains such as pasta, brown rice or bread. Add a festive garnish like homemade cranberry sauce on the meat, chopped herbs and lemon zest tossed with the grains or a baked apple with cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves for special seasonal flavour.

• Don’t forget to pack meals/snacks along with your winter gear when heading out of the house for work, school or running errands. Brew your own coffee and bring it from home. This will help you save the added expense (and calories) of stopping at the coffee shop or eating out.

• With heating and housing costs rising, setting aside extra cash for the holiday budget can
Surviving the Holidays (Continued from page 6)

be a challenge. If the Food Budget runs out, know where to go for emergency food supplies in your neighbourhood. You might consider emergency food pantries, community kitchens, soup kitchens, food banks, church groups, the Good Food Box or Food Share programs. Contact your local Health Unit for a list of community food resources in your area. Call Eat Right Ontario at 1-877-510-5102 to speak with a Dietitian who can assist you to locate food resources within Ontario. Please know that you are not alone. Food Banks Canada reports that 850,000 Canadians access food banks each month. 1 in 6 of those assisted are employed. 1 in 4 Canadian households pay more than they can afford in housing expenses leaving less money available for healthy food. The holidays can be an especially difficult time of year with added financial pressures and the demands on available food resources can become strained.

• If you find you have room in your budget this holiday season, please consider donating to your local food bank so everyone can access nutritious holiday fare.

Wishing you a healthy holiday season!

Renee Bernardi-Ronan, RD
OPA Consulting Dietitian

Submitted by Dianna Clarke
“To love and be loved is to feel the sun from both sides.” - David Viscott

Wow, what a long hot summer. The humidity and high temperatures must have made it really difficult for outside workers. Industry often has a benchmark where they send the workers home and that must have been reached for our outside parks workers several times. What do you mean you don’t.............? The number of days over 30 degrees C were approaching records in September when the heat continued. 1959 experienced 43 days of over 30 while 2005, the hottest summer on record, saw 41 days of over 30 degrees. July was the hottest month in 136 years in our area and probably in yours as well. The humidity seemed like the most unbearable as it added what felt like 7 – 10 degrees to each high temperature. And the warm above average temperatures went right into mid November. Cutting grass in November still.

A 94 year old spry former fastball player says, “It’s not what I eat, it’s what I don’t eat. I don’t drink alcohol or eat hot dogs, hamburgs or fries” when asked how he did it. He played until he was 65 and then has volunteered for the CNE Lion’s PeeWee Baseball Tournament every year since. An amazing man who loves life and is still going strong.

Consider planting complimentary plants when you do your bed layouts. They may be similar texture or contrasting colours but two that go together well will make each one much more impressive than if planted alone or even in groups. Some good ones include Dark Physocarpus with Calla Lilies or light coloured Dahlias ... nice combination and tend to be similar in height after a few weeks. Planting Junipers around the base of trees makes a nice easy to maintain combination. Occasionally close colours of different plants can blend together nicely as well. Examples are geranium and Thousand Bells with different variety/type of geraniums. BTW … if you need assistance when it comes to identifying plants there is an app available that has been developed by Allan Armitage. It is a handy, very good listing of plants with their growing requirements. It is also quite inexpensive, look it up if you are in the plant business or just a practising gardener.

Education and training is still gaining in importance in today’s work world. The safety rules and regulations require more and more training and experience to ensure safety is paramount and so the University of Guelph and Humber College have forged a program where the internship or practical training part will be done with Humber and the theoretical will be provided in Guelph. This program is similar to the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture where the practical training in various aspects of the field, with higher end horticultural education, has been a pattern for over 80 years.

A huge staff shakeup occurred in Brampton during the fall, when 25 non union staff were all relieved of their duties. A new CAO was brought in as an “agent of change” and eliminated 20 positions to get more direct and quicker access to him, because the development industry suggested it took too long for decisions. After a $4 million payout, they will save $2 million per year. Experience shows that this type of action will bring change, but not always necessarily for the better.

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.” Maya Angelou

We live in a tough business because the value of what we do and provide seems to be slipping away. Alex Henderson of the Royal Botanical Gardens at the Rooted in the Garden presentation that took place in Niagara in September said, “People in North America can recognize over 1,000 logos and trademarks, but could only identify 10 common plants.” The value of parks and horticulture to citizens and councillors doesn’t have the same presence and impact it did 25-50 years ago. No doubt the shrinking dollar has a lot to do with that, but the common complaint is roads, sewers and bridges all get significant funding while the spending on flowers, plants and parks gets reduced in many instances. The aboriginals valued plants and Mother Earth for providing food and medicine to make their lives more comfortable. In fact a recent archaeological dig on the RBG property found native settlements and remnants of plants that had been changed and or hybridized from their original state.

BTW the fall colour was outstanding this year. In spite of predictions that the drought would limit the time of colour, it lasted well into November in the Central Ontario areas. The Burning Bush Euonymous was outstanding. Do you plant for fall colour? The season was great this year and it is nice to see as the flowers are burnt off by the frost. We sometimes seem to ignore this highlight and don’t plant for this impact.
Did you see the **park proposal in Toronto** for a 21 acre “**Deck Park**” on the railway lands downtown? They are hosting a design competition for the estimated $1B project. At the same time Mississauga announced a **large waterfront park** involving the city, the province, private enterprise and the Credit Valley Conservation Authority as part of a major reclamation of where an old power plant existed for 50 years. The 250 acres of reclaimed industrial land will house mixed use neighbourhoods, a 1.5 kilometre beach and lakefront space the size of 48 football fields. It will also include two wetlands, three islands as break-walls, forests and trails.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa, also the local MPP, said, “There probably isn’t another city in the world that has this much space on the waterfront to do what we’re going to do here.” Mississauga already has a number of impressive parks on the waterfront as well. NICE to see this kind of thinking, which is rather rare in municipalities these days.

Another study I wrote about in previous Musings, selected the **Red Tailed Hawk** as the candidate for Canada’s bird, as it was common right across the country, is a significant, majestic bird of prey and can easily be seen along our highways. That is still my choice.

Close to 50,000 Canadians nominated and then voted for the bird they felt would best represent Canada in Royal Canadian Geographic Society’s **National Bird Project**. Then the selections were reduced to the top five bird species - the common loon, snowy owl, gray jay/whiskey jack, Canada goose and the black-capped chickadee. The popular vote was for the common loon which is on a coin, and also is Ontario’s provincial bird.

The next phase was an expert panel debate, where five celebrated Canadians from different fields advocated for the declaration of a National Bird and the species they believed most worthy of the honour. The winner, announced in mid-November, is the **whiskey jack or gray jay** (indigenous name Wisakedjak) because it mirrored Canadians in its traits. It is found in northern Canada and bushlands. The Society’s hope is that our Government will name it as National Bird during the 150th celebrations.

Merry Christmas to you and yours, with time for family and a Happy, Healthy Year in 2017.

Tom Clancy, NPD, Bsc., CMM III
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Jacob Cumbo
Amy Gardiner
Nicole Greshuk
Vincent Javet

**St. Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre**
Chad Asselstine
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**Town of New Tecumseth**
Dan Murnaghan

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OPA’s 61st Annual Education Forum
Holiday Inn Burlington Hotel & Conference Centre

**June 2, 2017**
Dave Gower Memorial Event
Location TBC

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Have you booked your 2017 training sessions yet?
Email Angela at training@ontarioparksassociation.ca to discuss your training requirements before our training calendar is filled up.

If you have any comments or suggestions about the Green Sward, our training sessions, or any of the work the Association does, please email opa@ontarioparksassociation.ca. We are here for you, please be sure to let us know how we are doing.

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Waste and Recycling in Parks and Open Spaces
Challenges and Best Practices

Waste, recycling, and the circular economy continue to present global challenges. As the global population prediction reaches 9.7 billion by the year 2050, effective management of waste and recyclables is of growing importance. Collecting, processing, and feeding that material back into manufacturing is integral to meeting future growth needs without adversely affecting our global supply of non-renewable raw materials.

Despite this, Canada consistently rates at or near the bottom in terms of waste generation and recycling when compared to other modern industrialized countries. While increasing consumer pressure within the past 10-years has created a much greater awareness of the environmental benefits of recycling, processing infrastructure for recyclables and organics have lagged behind the demand. Further, “for profit” industry service providers must maintain their profitability, putting the burden of developing collection infrastructure, processing facilities, and post-processing commodity markets on the municipal tax base.

Additionally, parks and open spaces face the challenge of increasing diversion expectations from environmentally conscious users. This, added to normal operational pressures of seasonal use and access, lack of capacity, intense special events, urban wildlife issues, and budget pressures are putting constant pressure on the finite budget and staffing resources.

At the July Parks Forum on Waste and Recycling, which was co-hosted at the Earth Rangers Centre in Vaughan by Molok North America and the OPA, industry professionals were brought together to present their challenges and best practices to an audience of municipal parks professionals. Presentations from municipal park design and operations, including passive and intense day uses, along with representatives from agencies such as the Niagara Parks Commission and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, set the tone for excellent discussion from all attendees.

Janis Olbina, Manager of Park Development from the Town of Oakville, talked about the importance of design considerations and stakeholder input into park design to ensure that park design and park operations are working in concert. She further talked about assessing the future needs of the park and ensuring that the appropriate volume, placement, and appearance of the waste receptacles are met.

Mary George, Supervisor of Centralized Services within Park Operations for the City of Mississauga, shared how the city had introduced LEAN principles to seek efficiencies within park operations, with waste and recycling collection being one of the first areas to be examined. They looked at the type and placement of the containers being used, pairing containers to accommodate recycling, appropriate labeling, and audits of waste and recyclable materials for compliance.

Niagara Parks Commission’s General Manager, John Lohuis, talked about the challenges of meeting their mixed commercial and open space waste and recycling needs in an intensely used, world-class destination that welcomes millions of visitors a year. Operational challenges, of managing post-consumer or visitor waste, include having the capacity of collection containers to deal with the intense daily volumes of material in a timely and seamless manner, that won’t impact the daily activities and movement of the guest, while maintaining the high standards expected of this world-class destination. With their own operational waste and recyclables, including their offices, operational yards, commercial and restaurant sales, and other points of sale, every emphasis is made to divert recyclable waste while working in concert with Niagara Region solid waste.

Warren Hoselton, Supervisor of Operations for the Toronto Islands, discussed how the best practices they have implemented help them to deal with the waste and recyclables generated by the 4-million plus visitors they have annually. With over 1200 private event bookings and over 100 large special events, concentrated primarily from Victoria Day to Labour Day, their challenges are unique. Coupled with the fact that they are on a series of islands with ferry access only, and you encounter a unique set of challenges. They begin the process by having very tight control over the events from the planning stages moving forward, keeping strict about what is permissible, and detailing organizers’ responsibilities to ensure that the areas are kept clean. Having the staging room on the islands to bulk up the mass of waste and recyclables collected into compactors, bins, and roll-off containers allows them to meet...
these unique challenges while minimizing the impact to the island’s users.

Dana Fountain, Coordinator of Corporate Sustainability for the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, presented on the Authority’s approved strategy to ultimately have zero-waste. Operating a number of active and passive recreation areas, campgrounds, and educational centres, current waste audits range from 17% to over 80% of recyclables diverted from the waste stream. He shared that they believe that a combination of education, container placement, and incorporating organics collection into their routines will help them to achieve their goals.

An open and active discussion among all attendees helped to clarify items related to the most effective use and type of signage, data management options and benchmarking for effectiveness, the use of semi-underground Deep Collection™ containers for efficiency, compactor monitoring and level measuring systems. The importance of Niagara’s data benchmarking and waste and recycling auditing information was discussed at length as a tool to assist senior management and elected officials in long-term planning and decision making. One item that was consistently discussed, and should be considered for a future “Best Practices” session, is that of dog waste and off-leash areas within parks.

The day culminated with a presentation from Molok North America Ltd. highlighting the benefits of the Molok® Deep Collection™ system in terms of appearance, convenience, and capacity of the system and the benefit that they provide in the municipal park sector.

Mark Hillis – VP of Business Development
Molok North America Ltd.
OPA Past President 2000/2001

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Congratulations to all the members of our OPA family who are now (hopefully) enjoying some leisurely strolls through our parks without having to think about budgets or geese or maintaining the greenspace for others. On behalf of the OPA Board of Directors, OPA members, and all the patrons who have enjoyed the fruits of your labour as you followed your passion for parks and open spaces, thank you! We wish you a very happy and healthy retirement!

Our sincere thanks and congratulations go out to:

Andy Wickens  
Manager, Parks Operations  
City of Mississauga

Dale Macleish  
Arena Manager  
Township of Brock

Dave Hamelin  
Parks & Harbour Manager  
Town of Midland

Mark Warvill  
Facilities Coordinator  
Township of Brock

John Howard  
Manager of Parks and Open Space  
City of Owen Sound

John Lohuis  
General Manager  
Niagara Parks Commission

Congratulations to the 2016 OPA Student Award of Recognition Recipients

Jessica Marcinov  
University of Guelph, Ridgetown Campus (pictured below)

Mike MacGregor  
Forestry Technician, Algonquin College (pictured below)

Michael Smeja  
Niagara Parks School of Horticulture  
Jesse Yacoubov - Fleming College

A Visit with Past President (1957) Bill Browne  
Submitted by Dan Costea, Past President 1973

On a recent trip to the west coast, my wife Marg and I had the opportunity to visit with Bill Browne, a past president of OPA from way back, and at age 90, still a strong supporter of our association. Bill lives in Coquitlam BC, only five or ten minutes from a cousin of mine whom we also visited. He was very happy to see us and we had a great time reminiscing about OPA and his career over the years. At age 90 his health is starting to give him a few problems here and there, but he still lives in his own home, although he gets help from a caregiver who comes two times a day to help him out and make sure everything is okay. His children are very good to him and they visit him often.

While we were reminiscing he recalled the days...
of OPA's re-organization in the nineteen fifties and how after joining up with CPRA in 1952, things were not working out the way everyone expected, so there was a movement afoot to re-organize OPA. He said he recalled getting a phone call from Bill Bennet in Guelph inviting him to a meeting that Bill was putting together. That was probably in 1955, because there was an official gathering in Brantford in 1956 and Bill (Browne) recalled the OPA Conference in Windsor in 1957. That is where I first met Bill Browne. I was a young hopeful in the Windsor Parks & Rec Department at the time. Bill mentioned names such as Percy Hill (Richmond Hill I believe), Len Joylen (not sure if it was Jr. or Sr.), Bill Palmer (at the time I believe in Sarnia), Charlie Cook (from Windsor), and people he couldn’t recall the names of from Toronto and Kitchener as old OPA stalwarts who were involved at that time.

Bill talked about his career in Scarborough, and how Alf Savage talked him into moving out to Edmonton where he worked for Alf for a number of years, but where he felt he couldn’t use his horticultural knowledge because of the severe weather which dictated the very limited number of species of trees that could be planted. When the opportunity presented itself he moved himself and his family to Vancouver. He spent twelve years in Vancouver as Manager of Arboriculture and Horticulture. However, a very unfortunate fatal incident occurred involving a four year old boy in Stanley Park. Bill had made recommendations to management regarding this particular location but his recommendations had been ignored. This situation affected Bill so adversely that he felt he could do nothing but resign. He did so and entered his retirement. He very quickly purchased a two acre parcel of land in Maple Ridge and started up Browne's Tree Nursery. He is very proud of the fact that every tree that he grew in his nursery was grown from seed. He said that he wasn't worried about profit or about how many trees he could sell, he was just doing what he absolutely loved to do, which was “grow trees.”

Bill is very proud of the fact that he remains an OPA supporter, and he is doubly proud of the fact that he is a donor to the Legacy Garden in Niagara. He was quite pleased to know that the dedication had taken place and that donors were recognized as part of the design.

We left Bill with hugs and good wishes (kisses from my wife Marg). He didn't want us to leave. He had tears in his eyes.
The rush of sliding down a hill makes tobogganing an outdoor winter activity that both youth and adults enjoy. Although it is a favourite winter pastime, it can also be very dangerous. Every year thousands of people are injured sledding down hills in city parks, streets and resort areas.

There are three main causes of tobogganing accidents:
1. A collision with another sled or vehicle;
2. Loss of control of the equipment; and
3. Falling off of the equipment.

Statistics
- 80% of sledding accidents are predictable and preventable.
- 70% of accidents take place on non-designated hills.
- 51% occur under adult supervision.
- 33% of the accidents result from collisions.
- 28% of accidents are due to falls in icy conditions.
- 16% occur from going off jumps.
- Most injuries occur in the late afternoon and evening.

Managing the Risk
Your organization has a duty, as an occupier, to keep the property in a safe condition to accommodate its intended purpose. In order to ensure safety on sledding hills, there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce risk and liability:

Designation of Hills
- Designate specific hills that are for tobogganing.
- Educate the public on which hills are designated.
- Tobogganing hills should have run-offs long enough for the sledder to come to a natural stop.
- Hills should be free from obstacles such as rocks, fences and trees.
- Hills should not end on roads, parking lots, or frozen bodies of water.
- Tobogganing should only be allowed in the evening if the area is well lit.
- Communicate to the community which hills are designated for tobogganing.
- Inspect and maintain the designated hills.

Maintenance and Design of the Hill
- The hill should have six to twelve inches of cover snow prior.
- Hills should have an even surface clear of rocks, brush, trees and knolls.
- Create a protocol for opening and closing the hill. If possible, the hill should be closed at night and following an ice storm.
- To ensure the safety of participants, safe areas should be marked outside of the primary sledding area.
- Hay bales should be placed at all points of impact to lessen the chance of injury.
- Telephones should be located in the area of the hill for emergency use. It can’t be assumed that everyone has a cell phone.
- Mechanical means of climbing the hill should be discouraged. The clothing that children generally wear to toboggan, such as scarves, can be easily caught in mechanical lifts and this can cause severe harm.

Supervision
- On busy days, supervision may be required to ensure safe tobogganing.
- Position spotters at the top and bottom of the hill to help reduce accidents. Have them look for hazards and warn patrons of dangerous behaviour.
- Supervisors can also do “spot-check” inspections of the hill while they supervise, or close down the hill immediately if something is wrong.

Inspections:
- Regular inspection of all tobogganing hills further helps to reduce risk.
- Daily inspections should take place whenever possible.
Facts
A 13 year old boy was out tobogganing with his brother and some friends at a hill near their home. The hill was in a City park that they often used year round. They were unsupervised and no one was wearing a helmet. The boy collided with a pole and was temporarily knocked unconscious. The pole had been a part of a set that surrounded an old tennis court. The fencing around the court had been removed.

At the hospital, they found out that the boy had fractured his skull and bruised his brain. After the accident, he suffered from ongoing issues such as headaches and fatigue, uncontrollable emotions and difficulty concentrating.

Legislation
The boy and his family claimed that the City was negligent in their maintenance of the park. Relying on the Occupiers’ Liability Act (OLA), RSO 1990, they claimed that the City had a duty to maintain the area in a safe condition for the enjoyment of the public and that they failed to lessen or alleviate the danger and failed to keep the park in proper repair. They didn’t take reasonable steps to prevent injury to persons on the premises. They claimed that the injuries from the accident contributed to the boy’s ongoing academic difficulties. The family was looking for $5 million in damages.

Outcomes of the Claim
The City believed that there was contributory negligence in that the child was a frequent visitor to the park and knew that the pole was there. The City also claimed that there was no proof of the child’s ongoing medical issues. However, as doctors in this claim indicated, the problem with head injuries in cases like this is that even minor head injuries can have troublesome side effects months or years after the event. The claim ended in a settlement for $50,000 (not including OHIP costs, lawyer fees and interest).

Lessons Learned
Under the OLA, a municipality has a duty of care as the occupier of a premise. Section 3(1) states that an occupier “…owes a duty to take such care as in all the circumstances of the case is reasonable to see that persons entering on the premises, and the property brought on the premises by those persons are reasonably safe while on the premises”. Municipalities need to take care and mitigate the risk of exposure to liability claims. Proper inspection, maintenance and record keeping can help minimize liability. Consider the tips in our Risk management Considerations for Tobogganing when looking at strategies for managing tobogganing on your municipal hills.

Findings
The City had no polices or procedures in place concerning the inspection or maintenance of parks, nor did they maintain any records for their inspection or maintenance of the hills. Although there was no organized program allowing individuals to specifically use the area for tobogganing, the City staff admitted that they were well aware that tobogganing did occur on the hill and that they were expected to observe potential hazards or dangers and identify them.

There was no tape or fencing around the posts. There was no signage in the park warning of tobogganing or other sliding activities or signs recommending safe practices such as mandatory supervision by an adult and wearing helmets. Although there had been no previous complaints or issues with people using the hill for tobogganing, that does not release the municipality from their duty to keep the area safe for those who use it.
ABC’s of Toboggan Hills

Alcohol should be forbidden.

Bales of hay should be placed at all impact points.

Close the hill after an ice storm.

Discourage mechanical means of climbing the hill – scarves can become entangled.

Encourage the wearing of helmets.

Frozen bodies of water, roads and parking lots are not good end points for toboggan runs.

Ground surface should be even with no rocks, trees, brush or knolls on the hill.

Hours of use should be clearly defined.

Inspect the area regularly and document all inspections and maintenance.

Jumps and ramps should not be allowed in sledding areas.

Keep garbage off the hill by providing waste receptacles.

Lighting should be provided if the hills are open at night.

Mark the safe areas for tobogganing.

Not everyone has a cell phone – note the nearest telephone in the event of an accident.

On busy days provide spotters at the top and the bottom of the hill.

Parking area should be large enough to accommodate the number of vehicles. Locate the lot far away from the hill.

Quality toboggan runs can only be achieved through a system of inspection, maintenance, appropriate signage and public education.

Rules of Conduct should be posted at the entrance to the hill.

School assemblies are a great way to educate kids and parents on toboggan safety.

Twelve inches of covered snow on a hill is recommended before the hill is opened.

Unsupervised hills should have signs stating this fact.

Vandals can cause damage, so regular inspections are important.

Waivers should be considered for special events such as school outings.

X’act run lengths are difficult to measure but it’s recommended that hills have run-offs long enough for a natural stop.

You own the property, so you are liable.

Zone your hills i.e. Forbidden; Age Appropriate; All Levels Welcome.
The world we live in is very fast paced these days, and in trying our best to keep things in balance we quite often find we are managing our precious time right down to the minute. Maintaining this balancing act can have a negative impact on our lives as our nutrition, health, family, relationships, and mental health all suffer, as does our ability to do the best we can at work. I write about this because in the last month I have spoken to a wide range of people who have experienced at least one of the above.

Along with this fast pace comes rapid change and the realization that we can now expect to experience things we never expected to face. The greatest angst I have seen lately is work related, where reorganization and downsizing or rightsizing is alive and well. Whether you are going through it or know someone who has been affected, it can take its toll on everyone involved. Having had first-hand experience with this I can tell you there are ways to manage through these difficult times or be ready for them if you think they are coming.

Parks and other departments across the province are in a constant state of change with major transformations occurring at all levels. One of the things to consider as you look at your own situation is, while you are busy doing your daily duties are you engaging with as many of your staff and stakeholders as you reasonably can? This is very important as it is what is expected of you from your senior management team. This can get complicated if you are understaffed or do not feel supported. If that is the case it is important to have a discussion with your superior to come up with solutions to the issues being faced. Without that conversation your superior may not be aware of your challenges and will therefore be unable to help you. Also, without that conversation you may start feeling insecure about your own abilities which can only lead to negative outcomes.

Another very important action is to keep your skills and training up to date with current sector standards. This can be done with support from your employer or on your own. Making sure you stay in tune with what is happening in the industry will help you be more confident in your own situation and, should you need to move on, will enable you to hit the ground running. Although it may be hard to accept, change can often mean a new and rewarding experience is waiting for you. Being able to move on in a meaningful and productive manner requires you to have a positive attitude and willingness to keep an open mind. One thing about our parks business, it is a growing sector, pardon the pun, and there are many jobs available in municipalities from front line to senior management. Please stay prepared by embracing new training and learning opportunities so your career continues to move in a progressive manner.

As municipalities go through many different iterations of where parks should fit we must make sure we continue to have a strong voice. Our parks business is still very much in the forefront of our communities and, according to all polls and surveys, remains one of the most valuable elements to the families living in our communities. Whether you are a front line worker dealing with the public on every issue imaginable on a daily basis or you are invited to participate in a staff group to do strategic planning for parks or you have the opportunity to attend a public meeting to discuss an emerging parks issue, remember that you are the champions for our parks. And more than ever we need champions with strong voices providing leadership for our parks sector.

We look forward to seeing you at our 61st Annual Education Forum in Burlington on March 1st – a day devoted to parks related education, discussions and sharing of challenges and successes.

Until next time, thank you for the great support you have given OPA over the past year. On behalf of the President, Board of Directors, Angela and Shelley, I wish you and your family a safe and Merry Christmas.

Paul Ronan

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Conservation from the Ground Up

Restoration biologists aim to return ecological function to degraded landscapes, by using plants to recreate healthy ecosystems. Landscapes that have been actively disturbed are restored by planting trees, meadows, wetlands and gardens. There is increasing interest to reshape the spaces we have disturbed into healthy and productive ecosystems, with a focus on the use of regionally appropriate native species.

Though we have gone to great lengths to shape the land, plants are the original ecosystem engineers.

Restoring native plants is a critical first step for conserving ecosystems. Avoiding the use of non-native plants, especially well documented invasives, in our landscapes will also help to prevent further ecological damage.

The greatest threat to native plant diversity is loss of habitat from development, and the associated spread of exotic plants species. Some of the most invasive plant species in Ontario were introduced with the best of intentions to provide forage for our domestic animals, and to make our neighborhoods more beautiful. The cost of these invasions is more than space; we are paying for these mistakes with the loss of distinct and diverse communities of native plants and their associated fauna.

Restoring native species to our landscapes increases the quality of forage and habitat for wildlife, but it also helps us plan for and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Since native plants are adapted to the local environment, they can tolerate regional variations in moisture and temperature better than many traditional, introduced, cultivars. While also being more attractive and rewarding to insects, native wildflowers, for example, are more drought tolerant and cold hardy than their cultivar counterparts, or non-native analogues.

Natives are species which occur in a region naturally. They have evolved over generations to exploit resources and cope with challenges found within their home region. Because they have evolved in the same ecosystem, native animals often prefer and sometimes depend exclusively on native plants.
Conservation from the Ground Up (Continued from page 21)

We can use this to our advantage, and plan landscapes of native plants that require fewer inputs, and in the end lower costs to create and manage. There are even native plants adapted to harsh environments that mirror our disturbed urban and suburban environments, such as roadsides and other infrastructure corridors, rooftops, construction footprints, and old fields -- native plants that thrive on river bluffs, alvars, sand dunes and fire-prone prairies.

Though they are hardy, wild populations of native plants are increasingly fragmented by development. This makes migration extremely difficult for many plant species in Ontario. Without the ability to migrate, these plants may not be able to cope with a changing climate, and without reconnecting populations through assisted migration, they may fail to adapt to the change. Land stewards who are interested in restoring native plant ecosystems can help by enhancing native plant population sizes and creating gene flow between populations by establishing new patches.

Whether you appreciate nature in the water, casting off the side of your canoe, or you appreciate it in the air, through the lens of your binoculars, conservation begins in the ground with the seeds and roots of native plants.

For more information on how you can help our environment by selecting native plants for your community please visit the St. Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre website at stwilliamsnursery.com.

To learn more about invasives and Phragmites and how to deal with them be sure to join us at our 61st Annual Education Forum on March 1st where we will be hearing from a member of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council.
THE ONTARIO PARKS ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION (OPAF) PROVIDES FIVE SCHOLARSHIPS/BURSARIES ANNUALLY TO SECOND YEAR STUDENTS.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?
FUNDING IS AVAILABLE TO ONTARIO COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WHO ARE IN THE PROCESS OF COMPLETING THEIR FIRST YEAR OF STUDIES IN ANY PHASE OF PUBLIC PARKS WORK, RELATED HORTICULTURE OR LANDSCAPING, CONSERVATION, OR ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.

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