



MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

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\$470,100 OTF Grant Is Helping Heartland Forest Expand its Trail Network and Ecosystem Conservation Efforts

Niagara Falls - Niagara Falls and surrounding areas will benefit from a significant nature trail and program expansion, as a result of a three-year \$470,100 grant made by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) in 2016.

At the event on Wednesday were Eric Mitchinson, a volunteer with OTF's Niagara Grant Review Team, Shannon Mitchell representing MPP Wayne Gates, Dan Bouwman, Founder, Doug Kane, Chair of the Board of Directors, Lisa Staton, Forest Discovery Director and Elisabeth Graham, Executive Director.

With this grant, it is Heartland Forest's desire to engage the community through the replacement of a former logging trail into a non-invasive back country trail as well as restore the historical wetland footprint as it existed prior to the industrial impact of the 1990's. The restoration will enhance the buffer zone that protects the core habitat of the Provincially Significant Wetland. The restored areas will serve as outdoor classrooms where ecological principles and appreciation for the natural environment can be discovered. With Heartland's all ages – all abilities mandate there will be many opportunities for partnerships, volunteers and work experience.

With Year One complete, Heartland Forest is proud to unveil the Observation Platform and Boardwalk adjacent to the restored wetland as well as the Boardwalk Trail – a magical trail that was designed with minimal impact to the surrounding wetland. With Heartland Forest's continual desire to be seen as a leading example of accessibility, active living and environmental stewardship, a portion of the new trails and boardwalks are easy access – a passion of its founder, Dan Bouwman.

'Today our Forest Homeschool Program was exploring wetland, meadow and forest habitat from a birds eye view at the newly completed Observation Platform – despite the wet weather' said Elisabeth Graham, Executive Director. 'We are grateful that with the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Grow Grant we are able to create more opportunities for outdoor exploration and educational programs in the Niagara Region.'

An agency of the Government of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is one of Canada's largest granting foundations. With a budget of over \$136 million, OTF awards grants to some 1,000 projects every year to build healthy and vibrant Ontario communities. www.otf.ca

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