

MISSISSIPPI MADAWASKA LAND TRUST CONSERVANCY

Official Newsletter

May 2013

PRESIDENT'S NATURE CORNER SHOULD WE TAKE THE WAX OUT OF OUR EARS OR PUT IT BACK IN?

by Howard Clifford

I recall a no-nonsense teacher scolding us, "Take the wax out of your ears and listen!" She never imagined there would be a time when sound pollution might force the use of headphones to help us focus on the task at hand - sound so pervasive that it literally drives people crazy. Teens, even in public places, plugged into their iPods. Ads showing a person in bed with headphones on so as not to disturb their partner. So much for pillow talk!

Ear plugs have not proven to be a successful survival tactic. Our brains are overly stressed, overwhelmed and fatigued from trying to block out noise while processing important information. The brains of distracted children are larger with more nerve cells. Unlike normal brains that shed neurons as they mature in order to work more efficiently, the enlarged brains are perhaps more like diseased enlarged hearts of patients that have been over worked.

Unfortunately the host of medical and psychological conditions resulting from a noise contaminated background operate as a silent killer. We think we have become used to noise but our bodies don't lie. The physiological responses when first exposed to loud and continuous noise continue unabated in our sub-conscious.

The good news is that our brains respond qualitatively differently to natural sounds than to man-made sounds. Most natural sounds calm the mind, bringing deep peace and serenity, and restorative benefits to the over-heated, fatigued brain - a very cheap and effective prescription.

We are a sight-oriented species but sound is vitally important to us. Hearing, as well as the sense of smell, is considered a shadow sense in that you only experience the effects. You can't see, smell, or feel sound but it impacts the nervous system in a variety of subtle and powerful ways.

I will never forget an English visitor wanting to sleep out on top of Blueberry Mountain. At dusk, he was in a yoga meditative position, when a bear let out the loudest, agitated roar I ever heard. He spiralled out of the yoga position in a flash. Neither of us saw the bear but his nervous system couldn't have been more stimulated! I have seen individuals startled by the explosion of a Ruffed Grouse or by the



unexpected slap of a beaver tail. I have lain awake in rapt attention, listening to the heavy breathing of a bear outside my tent in grizzly country.

Sound stimulates our curiosity. Strange groaning and screeching I took to be a bird or animal, turned out to be wind forcing tree limbs to rub together. One evening Chad, Jean and I heard strange animal sounds - suggestive of fierce fighting - outside our home. Chad and I went out with a flashlight. It was porcupines mating.

Nature sounds can be most relaxing. Think back to the gentle, rhythmic patter of raindrops on your tent. How peaceful listening to the drumming of a woodpecker or listening to the distinctive sound of unseen beavers cutting trees nearby. The magical sound of hissing, swirling water underneath my canvas folding kayak has often lulled me into blissful serenity. One of the most magical moments Jean and I experienced in Alaska took place as we were settling down for the evening when for the first time in our lives we heard the absolutely majestic song of trumpeter swans on the lake. How connected we felt to nature.

There are techniques to improve hearing and to cultivate the art of listening which we teach at cliffLAND. The sounds of nature are a wonderful venue for a fuller, richer experience. Robert Kimberly summarizes the experience, "Silence is not quiet, which is the absence of noise; it's the voice of the living Earth unclouded by aural chatter."

Recent findings in the emerging field of Soundscapes contain fascinating insights and open up unique ways to explore nature, much like binoculars did for birders, a finding that will be discussed in the next *President's Nature Corner*.

If you have questions or would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact admin@mmltc.ca or 613-267-4200, Ext. 3403.

Office Hours: 8:30 – 4:30

IMAGINE THIS

Like many people, you may have first learned to appreciate nature growing up at the family cottage. You can probably still recall your excited anticipation as you turned off the highway and on to the gravel road. You could see glimpses of the lake through the trees and the memories of past summers would begin to seep back into consciousness. You can still remember spending hours in your tree fort, reading old comic books and enjoying the rustle of leaves and birds chirping around you. You recall listening to the spooky night sounds the first time you and your friend slept out in the tent. The cottage was where you learned to put a worm on a hook and you could never forget the stillness of the lake as you set out very early in the mornings.

Your parents sold the cottage when your father's job was relocated too far away to make vacationing there feasible. But now your own career has brought you back to the area. One weekend you feel drawn to put the canoe on the roof rack, travel the old familiar route and paddle out to your favourite picnic spot.



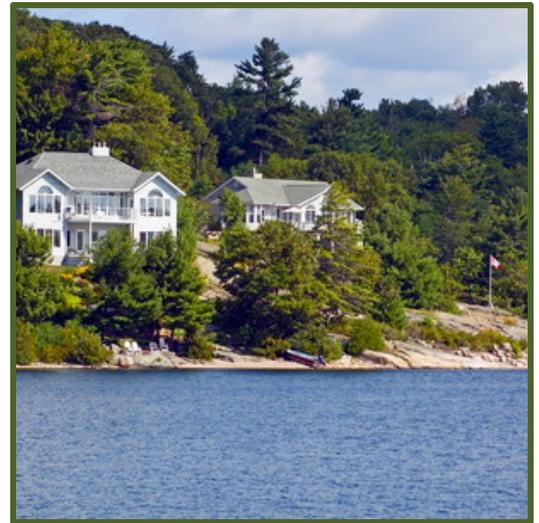
All these years later the highway has widened to a four-lane expressway and your turn-off is no longer marked by the old general store where you used to stop to buy worms. Instead, a large service station and convenience store mark the turn and the gravel road has been paved. Although the trees look bigger, there are fewer of them. Many have been cut down..

With dismay you make your way down the old cottage road through what now looks more like a suburban subdivision than the rustic paradise you

remember. As you finally spot the red roof through the trees, you can see the current owner sitting on the porch. He's happy to listen to your cottage stories and invites you for a drink on the porch.

But you stare out at the view with horror for the shoreline opposite is now crammed with monster cottages, squeezed in cheek by jowl. You always thought that the other side of the lake was supposed to be protected by the municipality from ever being developed. But you're told that the developer managed to get by the regulations, and defeated the Ontario Municipal Board appeal launched by the Lake Association. Here before you is the devastating result.

This once beautiful spot, with a mere handful of cottages and undeveloped rocky shoreline, is no longer an entrancing wilderness with towering pines and isolated coves. What was once a favoured spot for picnickers, berry pickers and kids visiting the Jumping Rock is now despairingly civilized – so much so that the word “cottage” seems a joke.



Just how, you wonder, did this happen? It's certainly not a new story. In scenarios such as this one, it's likely that the property across the lake was privately owned and enjoyed by the same family for generations, no one ever imagining that future descendants would be able to change the zoning regulations. No doubt no one had heard about land trusts and the various options available to protect special properties from this kind of development.

If the grandparents had placed a conservation easement agreement on the property, anyone who inherited or purchased the property would have been restricted by the covenants placed on the property title. Such covenants can restrict severances, buildings, motorized vehicles, logging, or any type of future development. It would then be the responsibility of a land trust to monitor the property to ensure that the covenants are maintained, for perpetuity.

Conservation easements are only one option for conserving those special natural areas for the benefit of future generations. The property could be donated to the Land Trust for legal protection in perpetuity. There is also the possibility of a Conservation Severance which means you can choose to sever and donate just part of your property to a land trust. This could allow you to continue living in your home adjacent to a nature preserve maintained by professional land stewards, without the burden of personal liability. Another option is a Life Interest whereby you could donate your property to a land trust and continue to live there for the rest of your life or for a specified term.

Any of these options might have prevented this imagined scenario, which is all too real these days, from occurring near your little piece of paradise. It is definitely worth exploring when considering your options for estate planning.