

Plans unveiled for the pond rehabilitating at Alton Mill

By Bill Rea

An ambitious plan should see the pond at Alton Mill rehabilitated, and that should also improve conditions through the rest of the Credit River.

The plan was unveiled last Thursday at the Mill.

There have been plans for a number of years to rehabilitate the pond. They have been pursued by the owners of the Mill, Jordan and Jeremy Grant.

Rehabilitation is needed to reduce sediment build-up, restore fish passages, improve the water quality and enhance the cold water fish habitat, while improving the appearance of the site.

The new plan includes the creation of island features in the pond, with trail connections. Water would be channelled to the southern portion of the pond and flow down a sluiceway to the river.

Jeremy Grant called last week's unveiling an important milestone for the plan.

"This is a good news story," he declared, adding it's been arrived at in a creative and collaborative way. It will improve water quality and the surrounding eco-system, while enhancing recreational, educational and economic development.

Grant said an Alton Millpond Rehabilitation Committee was formed in June 2009, with representation from community groups, businesses, non-government organizations and environmentalists. He added it was apparent from the start that this was going to be a complex and exciting project.

Funding for the project has been coming from arts and cultural events held at the Mill, such as the annual pond-hockey tournament every January. He also said the Ministry of Natural Resources, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) and the Town of Caledon have also stepped up. Grant added Environment Canada contributed almost \$50,000 about a year ago.

Landscape architect John Hillier observed the pond is a prominent feature in the village and it needs to be put back on line to help the environment.

He said about one-third of the pond is currently open water, and the aim is to increase that.

Bill Touzel of BluMetric Environmental Inc. pointed out towns evolved in the past because there were rivers nearby, with slopes that created energy that could be harnessed.

The aim of the project, he said, has been to restore the ecology, as the pond was artificially created in the 1880s. But they also wanted to maintain the pond, while letting the river go back to its natural flows.

The plan will see more of a separation of the pond from the rest of the river, meaning cooler waters in the stream, which is better for fish habitat.

Touzel said flood flows increase in spring and fall, and drop off in the summer. Regulations require that these flows can be managed safely, he said. The dam that's currently in place can be adjusted to help manage the flows.

Sherwin Watson Leung, program coordinator of aquatic restoration with CVC, commented on the anticipated benefits to the rest of the River.

He said trout need cold and clean water to live in.

Brook trout is the only native trout in the Credit River Watershed. They have been there since the glaciers retreated. The trout are very intolerant of pollution, and Leung likened them to the canary in the coal mine, as they provide the first signs that there's trouble in the river.

Leung said the fish need groundwater for spawning, and gravel in which to make their nests. Rocks and logs in the river are an important part of the habitat too.

"The Credit River has a fever," Leung said, pointing out that when a river is dammed, it heats up in the summer, to between 25 and 28 C. Brook trout prefer temperatures around 19C.

He also said the River is starving, as it needs the flows to keep material and sediment moving. The dams disrupt those flows.

There's been no timeline established for implementing the plan.

Jordan Grant said they still need to raise money for detailed design work, as well as getting the necessary permits. That will take a year or more, and then they will be able to get into actual budgeting. His brother Jeremy said they are looking at a total cost in the area of \$3-to-\$5 million.

One woman at the meeting observed that if people get passionate about the project, it should be doable.

There were concerns expressed about excessive sediment getting into the river during construction. Touzel said there are ways of dealing with that, adding sediment and erosion control will be a big part of the project.

?These things can be done,? he added.

?This is magnificent,? one woman declared. ?It's really moving to see this.?



Bill Touzel of BluMetric Environmental Inc. pointed to some of the features in the rehabilitation plan for the pond at Alton Mill. Photo by Bill Rea