Here’s a photo of our 2013 Heritage Mennonite hand crafted quilt.

The pattern is the same as last year’s quilt, but with varied colours of pink, burgundy and shades of green, against a cream background.

2nd prize is a Robert Bateman print of Seagulls.

Tickets cost $2 each, 3 for $5 and $15 per book of 10. (note slight reduction for a book from 2012 price of $17)

p.s. The very happy winner of last year’s quilt was Amanda Hinnels of Burlington.
Provincial Action Puts Springwater Park at Risk: Occupiers Stand Up For the Land

The ongoing April 1st 2013 native occupation of the 193 hectare Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater Township, Simcoe County, was a dramatic response to a Provincial down grade of this wonderful park’s status from “operational” to “non-operational”. These First Nations leaders, led by Elizabeth Brass Elson of the Beausoleil First Nation, have taken a dramatic stand which illustrates how the conservationist achievements of the past are being put at risk today. Their action presents a beacon of hope to those who care for the predominately agricultural landscape of Southern Ontario, appropriately afforested to secure ecological balance by Edmund Zavitz, the “Father of Modern Forestry”.

What the change of status for this park means, is that the gate to the park is locked and vehicles cannot enter. The magnificent picnic pavilion, which in the past was used as a showcase for the wonders of a recreational forest in a former blow sand desert, would have become the parks equivalent of a ghost town if not for the occupation. There is no longer any maintenance of the 12 kilometres of wheelchair accessible trails, 11 of which are designed to facilitate cross country skiing; garbage collection in the park has ceased; and, all the comfort stations have been closed.

One of the basic motivational reasons for the occupation has been the fate of other down graded Provincial Parks, which are now effectively unregulated and empty Crown Land, in heavily populated southern Ontario, where intensive park patrols and maintenance have been removed. In such circumstances Crown Land has been vandalized by criminal elements such as motorcycle gangs. This can be especially damaging in a forest planted on top of re-claimed desert sand and vulnerable to being ripped up by off road vehicles. It is quite reasonable to expect that in such circumstances, situations can arise to encourage the sale of degraded park land.

Most of the 200 “non-operational parks” in Ontario are in the north, where pressures for vandalism are less severe because of the much lower population density. In this regard, it is astonishing that of the 10 provincial parks originally proposed to be closed by the Provincial government in 2012, Springwater was the only southern park that was closed and while the Province backed down on its proposal to make four northern parks “non-operational”, it refused to alter its stance in this case.

Severe Development Pressures in the Springwater Park Area

There are also severe development pressures around Springwater Provincial Park. As I noted in the Spring newsletter I viewed these quite vividly a few weeks before the park closure. Immediately across a road from the park there was a sign on a piece of private land announcing the a new development of Black Creek Estates, which had also been afforested into White and Red Pine by the Provincial Government. It is 261 acres in extent, more than half the size of the provincial park. The sign indicated that the zoning was to be changed from environmental protection/residential to residential and is designated for 101 units, all of which is in direct violation of the Provincial Growth Plan. Development on this scale would require sewers, of which there currently are none, a problem resolved through a “pre-servicing agreement.” This illustrates the concern of Midhurst Ratepayers Association which is battling sprawl in the area, that development here would pollute Willow Creek and the Minesing Wetlands.

The proposal for a subdivision in a forest next to a Provincial park is just one element in the massive urban sprawl proposed in the Midhurst Secondary Plan. This threatens both the park and other areas of land afforested by the provincial government’s conservationist actions over many years and now being poorly managed as Crown Lands. The Plan proposes urban development on 1,700 acres of agricultural land, which would boost the population of the village of Midhurst from 3,500 to nearly 28,000. The Provincial Government did appeal this document to the Ontario Municipal Board, (OMB), however, it did not show up at the hearing this summer, and the Midhurst Ratepayers Association was defeated by the Township of Springwater, Simcoe County and developers.

Mess in Midhurst Reveals Non-Enforcement of Growth Plan.

The First Nations occupation of Springwater Park and the hammer blow of the OMB against the Midhurst Ratepayers Association this summer, reveal the biggest problem with land use planning in Ontario. This is the non-enforcement of the Growth Plan, which was brought in simultaneously in 2005, when the Greenbelt was proclaimed by the Province.

The basic reason behind the Growth Plan is to prevent leap frogging beyond the areas that are supposed to be protected from sprawl by the Greenbelt. It applies to southern Niagara (outside of the Greenbelt) Waterloo Region and Simcoe County. Last month the Provincial Government brought in a slightly amended version of the Growth Plan, which drew the ire of some environmentalists and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture who felt the Plan was being diluted. However, from the viewpoint of those, such as PALS who are engaged in the struggle to protect...
agriculturally and environmentally zoned land from sprawl, the towering barrier to these ends, has been the non-enforcement of existing growth plan policies.

For instance, a cornerstone of the Growth Plan was supposed to be confinement of any urban expansion to the urban centre of Barrie. There was an Amendment One to the Growth Plan introduced, but this was only to provide more room for the Town of Alliston. The Province, in violation of the Growth Plan’s provisions, through the blunt instrument of a Ministerial Zoning Order, then rammed through an urban expansion in Bradford to facilitate box stores along an expressway.

As mentioned before, the Province, to its credit, did launch an appeal of the Midhurst Secondary Plan. However, in a black day for land use planning it withdrew part of its appeal to permit the construction of 5,000 new homes. As a result some 300 hectares are now eligible for urban expansion. In response, the Midhurst Ratepayers Association made an appeal to the OMB, and hired the former director of planning for Simcoe County, Ian Bender, (a former St. Catharines City planner, who PALS had often worked with), as their expert witness.

Bender’s testimony to the OMB vividly illustrates how Midhurst’s carefully restored landscape of farmland and forests are at risk from sprawl. He indicated that until now "development has generally expanded the settlement area to its limits as defined by the adjacent highway and surrounding agricultural and environmental lands." He also testified how the proposed boundary expansion would far exceed the allocations for the area which the Province has established under the Growth Plan.

In making its decision dismissing the Midhurst Ratepayers Association appeal the OMB did not dispute any of Bender’s conclusions regarding the violation of the Growth Plan, but threw his strong evidence out on procedural grounds.

The Midhurst fiasco shows the inherent weakness of the assumptions behind the Growth Plan. This is the folly of relying on the OMB to regulate local municipal planning in the countryside. The only way that these landscapes can be protected is through provincially developed planning as shown by the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act and now the Greenbelt Act. The Growth Plan’s reliance on the OMB is simply a fog around the region of Niagara.

For instance, a cornerstone of the Growth Plan, long known as the ‘jewel in the crown’ is completely ill-suited for major urbanization on the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga Basins that are small and slow moving receiving bodies which simply cannot sustain the environmental impacts associated with what is a Greater Toronto Area scale of subdivision.” Shortly after these comments were penned Doyle was shuffled away from supervising land use planning in Simcoe County.

**AROUND THE REGION OF NIAGARA**

**Fort Erie Motorway Decision Ignores Judicial Precedent**

As many readers are probably aware by now, the only reason Dr. Hugh Gayler was not accredited as an expert planning witness for PALS at the Fort Erie Raceway Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) Hearing - and then at our OMB Appeal Hearing, was because of a ‘perceived’ bias due to his membership in PALS. In deciding this, the OMB Hearing Officers entirely disrespected two relevant judicial rulings. These were Henderson versus Risi and Kusnierz V. Economical Mutual Insurance.

The core reasoning of the two judicial decisions, is that an institutional affiliation with a party does not constitute a bias which serves as a barrier to being an expert witness. Rather than being disqualified at the outset by a gatekeeper based on an alleged institutional affiliation, such proffered experts are supposed to be qualified and their expertise subjected to cross examination and the contrary opinions of those of other parties.

The three parties that fought PALS at the OMB hearing on the qualification of Dr. Gayler did not cite any cases where a proffered expert was actually disqualified for the institutional bias they were alleging against Dr. Gayler. In contrast, the strongest arguments for Dr. Gayler’s qualification as an expert witness were provided in an article published by the Advocate’s Society on the qualifications of expert witnesses.

Surprisingly these were put into evidence by the lawyer for the Canadian Motor Speedway. What the article cites as an "institutional connection" is exactly what the opposition and the Hearing Officers alleged Dr. Gayler had by way of his membership in PALS. This, the article states, may “be treated as a matter of weight” as noted in Henderson V. Risi, rather than a test of being qualified as an expert. The article also stresses that regarding “Bias or partiality in expert evidence which is based on the expert having a connection with a party or issue or possible pre-disposition or approach, this is a reliability issue which is best determined when the whole of the expert evidence is considered in the context of the trial evidence...the issue of one of weight and not admissibility.”
Allegations of both advocacy and institutional bias were also highlighted in Kusnierz V. Economical Mutual. In this decision Justice Lauwers permitted a Physician, Dr. Amesis to be qualified as a witness, despite the fact that he found him to be a “passionate advocate.”

In ignoring such evidence, the OMB decision shows it to be a rogue tribunal not accepting the direction of the courts on the important issue of the qualification of expert witnesses.

**Agricultural Zoning on Fort Erie Speedway Site Still in Place**

Despite the defeat of PALS at the Ontario Municipal Board the agricultural zoning on the 827 acre Fort Erie Raceway site is still in place. This means that the only work that can be done in connection with the development is the realignment of Miller Creek. This has been delayed however, because of archeological studies and finds.

The agricultural zoning stays in place until three farms adjacent to the 827 acre site are purchased by the Canadian Motor Speedway. This will remain until all the three farms are purchased by the developer. After this is done a Public Meeting will be held under the Planning Act to removed the Holding Zone created by the OMB decision. Then the Speedway can be approved by the Fort Erie Council.

**PALS Fights to Green the Black Belt**

The late Peter Grandoni, a founding member of PALS and a dairy farmer, had a vivid phrase to describe lands in Niagara Falls which were arbitrarily excluded from the Greenbelt. He called these lands the Black Belt. One particular area he had in mind was an approximately five hundred acre piece of land bordered by Mountain Road in Niagara Falls, immediately south of the Greenbelt.

The Niagara Falls Black Belt has some of the best soil and climate for grape growing. It has an excellent microclimate and its soil is Class One Oneida Sandy Clay Loam. It is proposed to be urbanized by two amendments to the Niagara Regional Policy Plan. One of these Amendment 196 has been appealed to the OMB by PALS and Peter’s sister Jean Grandoni.

In addition to being excellent Grape land these threatened Black Belt lands contain three Carolinian forests, some of which have extensive wetlands that support rare Buttonbush communities. The urbanization if approved would impact the Beaverdams Creek, the headwater for an important component of the provincially significant wetlands of the Welland Canal Turning Basin.

Threatened species with breeding habitat in this area are the Tufted Titmouse and the Wood Thrush, which require intact forests in rural areas. Other threatened species here include the Barn Owl and the Grey Fox. The proposed urban expansion would in effect eliminate a route for wildlife movement between the Niagara Escarpment and the Welland River, where currently the mix of forests and farmlands between these two predominately forested areas provide an excellent corridor.

With a loss of prime grape land and important natural areas to urbanization, a cement wall will, in effect, stretch from the Welland Canal to the Niagara River. However, in our battle to protect these lands PALS is hopeful of success, as we have a strong Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing letter opposing this development (although no Ministry objection to the OMB) and we are joined by two developers, Warren Woods and Thundering Waters, who recognize that development should be contained within existing urban boundaries.

**Growth Plan Update**

PALS continues its work with the province on our joint appeal of the Niagara Regional Council’s amendment to secure conformity to the Niagara Regional Growth Plan. As a result of this work attempts by the Niagara Regional Council to create distinctive submarket areas in order to attempt to justify urban expansions have been defeated. Any urban expansion that is not "grandfathered" before the Growth Plan came into force will have to be justified on a single regional need basis. This will be difficult to accomplish since the Niagara Region has a 43 year housing supply.

The region and the Township of West Lincoln had to accept that there will be no increase in the urban area of Smithville. Provisions for 60 more hectares of residential land will have to come from other urban designations such as employment lands. PALS is the only party in this process to support the Province, which is being fought by municipalities, the Niagara Region and numerous developers, one of whose lawyers is a former member of the Provincial Legislature, Ron Kantor.
Dear Minister Orazietti,

The Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society (PALS) writes to you as the Minister of Natural Resources in support of the views of the Town of Pelham and the Region of Niagara that “the entire morphology of the Fonthill Kame-Delta (should) be protected,” as an Earth Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). This opinion is “supported by”, or “aligned with”, comments to your Ministry from the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

While PALS recognizes and appreciates the fact that the latest 2013 Ministry ANSI boundary proposal will now protect important acres that were removed in the 2011 MNR ANSI proposal, we are most concerned that a very large part of the Kame, will still be unprotected. Of even greater concern to PALS, much of the proposed area to be removed is the most vulnerable to development pressure in the form of proposals for aggregate extraction.

As we noted in an earlier letter to your Ministry, “PALS has long had an interest in the protection of the Fonthill Kame because the slope conditions here, which create excellent air drainage, are the prime reason for why the area is extremely good for tender fruit production, especially sour cherries.”

There have been several studies and recommendations for the protection of the Fonthill Kame Delta - the most precautionary and far-sighted being those of former MNR staff member John Fraser in the late 1990s and Brock University geology Professor Dr. John Menzies in 2009 and 2011. Both urged your Ministry to expand the ANSI protections of this rare geologically and environmentally significant natural feature.

Although your Ministry staff have given good scientific reasons for their recommendations that the ANSI be enlarged in some places, the exclusion of other areas appears to have no scientific rationale. PALS is of the opinion that if these lands are left out of the ANSI boundaries, this will lead the way to expansions of aggregate extraction operations, which have the potential of not only reducing the fruit land base, but also the ability of lands in the Kame area to grow tender fruit - unique crops that have been under threat from aggregate mining in this climatically favored area for some considerable time.

To conclude, PALS joins the Town of Pelham, the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the Escarpment Commission, the Niagara Conservation Authority, and many others, such as the Honourable Jim Bradley, Minister of Environment, in urging you to ensure that the entire morphology of the Fonthill Kame-Delta be drawn into the ANSI boundary. It is PALS view that only in this way will the totality of Pelham’s unique tender fruit land and the very special and interconnected natural area features of the Fonthill Kame be recognized and protected over the long term.

Val O’Donnell, President
315 Palatine Niagara-on-the-Lake On L0S 1J0
905 468 2058

c.c.
Premier Kathleen Wynne,
Minister of Agriculture and Food.
Dave Augustine, Mayor of Pelham

Web Post of Dave Augustine
Mayor of Pelham

Closer to Protecting the Fonthill Kame

Last week both Pelham and Regional Councils approved a staff report about the Ministry of Natural Resources’ (MNR) “last iteration” of the review of the Fonthill Kame-Delta Area of Natural & Scientific Interest (ANSI).

The “Fonthill Kame-Delta” is our rare, 75-metre-tall landmark that was formed by retreating glaciers 13,000 years ago. At 6 km long, 3 km wide, and nearly 1,000 hectares, the Kame boasts the highest point in the Niagara Region and the headwaters of the Twelve Mile Creek.

The Kame’s microclimatic and soil conditions create an ideal environment for tender fruit production
including peaches, sweet and sour cherries, plums and pears.

The Kame is the “hill” in both Fonthill and Shorthills and the “ridge” in Ridgeville.

The MNR identified the Fonthill Kame as provincially significant in 1976 and as a Provincial ANSI in 1988. This ANSI designation restricts development for reasons of heritage, science or education.

In May 2009, the MNR recommended significantly reducing the ANSI’s coverage to “representative samples.” Pelham Council, Niagara Regional Council, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, scientific experts, dozens of Pelham residents, Tim Hudak, our MPP, and Minister Jim Bradley, St. Catharines MPP, voiced opposition to these changes.

As a result, in early 2010, Pelham received a strong commitment from Donna Cansfield, MPP, Minister of Natural Resources: “Please let me assure you that it is our intention to maintain and, where feasible, enhance the current ANSI boundary.”

Despite that assurance, in 2011, the Ministry proposed reducing the ANSI to “Swiss-cheese” by failing to protect huge portions of the Kame – especially those areas that are under direct threat of new or expanded development. Again we expressed our significant concerns to the Minister.

Last week, Ian Thornton from MNR informed Council about the 2013 proposed improvements to the ANSI boundaries. Mr. Thornton outlined how the MNR plans to expand the Fonthill Kame-Delta ANSI from 376 hectares to 412 hectares.

Both Pelham and Regional Councils acknowledged these 2013 boundary improvements but advised the MNR that we maintain our position that the Kame’s total morphology should be designated as ANSI.

We asked the MNR to provide a rationale for not including all of the Kame under ANSI protection.

Since this appears to be the final review of the Fonthill Kame ANSI, I ask you to write to the current Minister, the Honorable David Orazietti, thanking him for expanding the ANSI and asking him to continue to honour the commitment to “… maintain and, where feasible, enhance the current ANSI boundary.”

**Tribute to Dr. Robert Elgie**

A wise conservationist and former veteran Ontario legislator and cabinet minister Dr. Robert Elgie died in June 2013. He was the founding Chair of the Ontario Greenbelt Council and in his capacity served for five years. Upon his passing Bernard Mausberg of the Greenbelt Foundation observed that, “his vision of the Greenbelt extended past boundaries and lines on a map. He broadened conversation around Greenbelt to include sustainability, a thriving agricultural and rural sector, natural spaces and their importance in species survival- he didn’t see in silos, but interconnectivity and sustainability.”

It is to be hoped that Elgie’s words will be remembered when the province considers the possibility of the public purchase of conservation easements on the unique Niagara Fruit Belt. He went to Guelph to hear Dr. Wanye Caldwell present his lengthy report which was presented as justification for opposition to such a program by the provincial government. He was not impressed by Caldwell words or report. He warned that those who rely upon zoning as the only instrument of good land use planning are blind to political realities which are dangerously brewing in the province. One of the best memorials that can be created to Dr. Elgie on his passing would be for Ontario Tender Fruit Lands Program, killed on the same day that cheques were to go to fruit growers, be revived.