



Barb Rayner/Courier

In the coming weeks, Eastern Charlotte Waterways (ECW) will be working on a project to restore the river banks of the Magaguadavic River where needed by planting trees. Leading the project will be ECW's field technician Peter Crowley (left) who is pictured with executive director Donald Killam.

ECW's 'Habitat Squad' seeks to improve Magaguadavic River

Barb Rayner

BLACKS HARBOUR

Four local high school students will be part of Eastern Charlotte Waterways' (ECW) "Habitat Squad" working to improve the banks of the Magaguadavic River this summer.

ECW, with the support of Environment Canada's EcoAction program, has hired the students for six weeks in July and August to implement environmental improvement projects under the supervision of ECW field technician Peter Crowley.

Crowley, who joined ECW a couple of weeks ago and whose professional background includes both forestry and aquatics, will provide a wide base of knowledge from which the squad can draw leadership and expertise, said ECW executive director Donald Killam.

Their primary focus will be to plant a collection of native tree species including willow, white spruce, and jack pine in the vulnerable sections of the river banks.

"Our goal is to provide a high quality experience to young people in the area who are interested in the environment and who are, perhaps, looking to continue their careers in the environment. These are all students who took part in the Envirathon."

During the intense flooding of 2010, areas of the Magaguadavic were heavily degraded in places, which has resulted in destabilized riverbanks and increased erosion, explained Killam.

Landowners on the Magaguadavic River are encouraged to contact ECW to take part in the project. Senior ECW staff will visit the property and work with the landowner to chart a suitable course for the river bank area.

"The most important thing is community involvement. With the funding in place and the students in place, doing the work is the final piece of the puzzle.

"We need community involvement. People need to contact us. We are not going to do anything to their land that makes them uncomfortable. Everything will be done in close consultation with the land owner.

"Even if they want to maintain their view of the river, there might be something we can do to help stabilize the bank and keep them from losing land.

"If they choose to work with us we will ensure there are long term benefits. We encourage people to call us and take part in our consultation and then we will be putting the squad to work.

"I am hoping these students will continue their interest in the environment and maybe this will inspire some of them that may not have a big interest in it.

"This (project) has a lot of potential if we can pull it off and there will be long term benefits for the Magaguadavic and the surrounding community."

Crowley said he personally is pretty passionate about the environment and he is hoping to be able to pass some of that passion on to the students.

Following consultations with the land owners, the Habitat Squad will move in and implement the plan. There is no cost for the service, which includes all labour and materials.

Landowners will benefit from the strengthened riverbanks and should see an increase in wildlife, thanks to the improved shade and natural habitat along the rehabilitated coastline, said Killam.

During its six week deployment, the Habitat Squad will also work with the village of Blacks Harbour as part of its continued effort to address illegal dumping within the village.

The students will also be assisting with a wetland habitat analysis in the Magaguadavic watershed, helping to ensure that the GIS maps accurately reflect the watershed's wetland habitats.

Throughout their time with ECW, the Habitat Squad will be keeping the community up to date on their activities with videos and blog posts. These will be available via ECW's social networks and online at ecwinc.org/squad.

This work would not be possible without the support of EcoAction Community Funding Program, said Killam. Since 1995 this program has provided financial support to community-based, non-profit organizations for projects that have measurable, positive impacts on the environment.

The program encourages action focused projects that will protect, rehabilitate or enhance the natural environment, and build the capacity of communities to sustain these activities into the future.