

Lanark County scientist urges local climate action

Dr. Keddy's passion began at an early age, writes Tom Shoebridge

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Dr. Paul Keddy

Dr. Paul Keddy loves Lanark County, and he wants to help protect its natural environment for our grandchildren's grandchildren and beyond, but he knows that old ways are hard to change.

After many years of distinguished teaching and the publication of numerous books and over 100 scientific articles on wetlands, ecology, climate change and related subjects, Paul is continuing his work as a scientist and author while living on a large acreage where he carries out best practices for preserving what nature has offered. He has signed a Conservation Agreement with the Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust (mmlt.ca) to ensure that the conservation values of his property will be safeguarded for generations to come.

"Wetlands are some of the most effective of nature's climate control mechanisms. Wetland plants conserve and purify water, encourage wildlife and collect huge amounts of carbon dioxide. Lanark residents must be vigilant and preserve wetlands rather than drain them," he says.

His interest in and passion for the natural world began at a very early age. When he was beginning his studies in the scientific realm, Paul had to decide which avenue of research and study to follow. The industrial world offered the most lucrative careers, working for big companies like Dow Chemical, but he joined the newly emergent field of ecology. "I was excited to join this new movement of hard science designed to protect life systems. It was like what it must have been for the scientists who were around Newton or Galileo, on the cusp of a new era," Paul explains.

After a university teaching career which has taken him across North America, he and his wife, Cathy who is also an ecologist, now live near Carleton Place. “After we saw a piece of land with a rookery of Great Blue Herons, I thought about who was going to look after that land so they could survive. We were hooked and, over the years, we acquired some neighbouring forests and wetlands and finally moved to the corner of our property.”

Wetlands have been Paul’s major focus for many years, long before it became buzz words. Carbon dioxide, a natural element in our atmosphere, was being spewed out of the industrial/manufacturing complex at an alarming rate, and he realized we had to change our lifestyles for the good of the planet.

“In Lanark County, we have a huge natural storage of carbon dioxide, in our wetlands and our forests,” he points out. “Wetlands are No. 1 in carbon storage per area, particularly the carbon stored in peat, while forests are a close second, with carbon stored in both wood and in the soil. And Lanark will continue to have an abundance of both, if we act to save them. Wetland drainage must stop, with compensation for landowners, if required.”

To inform people about the natural glories of Lanark County, Paul published a document entitled 'Green Gems', replete with a map. In it, he identifies 30 of the most important natural treasures of the county, explaining where they are and how they contribute to a healthy, enduring climate. He also has written a comprehensive book about the natural elements of Lanark, 'A Guide to the Natural Environment of Lanark County'.

Dr. Paul Keddy has a simple three-point plan to mitigate climate change, starting in Lanark County. First, act now or it will be too late. He has seen the increasing destruction first-hand. Second, focus on the most important aspects first. He uses the analogy of rearranging chairs on the Titanic, urging people to demand action on the big, pressing problems, particularly the protection of existing wetlands and forests. And third, do something locally: if all the communities in the world cleaned up their act, the benefits would show up at the global scale.

Tom Shoebridge is a member of [Climate Network Lanark](#).