

## Final Assignment details:

**Word Count:** Between 2,000 and 2,250 words (**no more, no less**)

### Note:

After emailing your assignment **DO NOT REMOVE IT** from your hard drive until after having received your final mark. Make sure you have a copy, perhaps on a USB.

Only send one document. All info (story and sources) have to be in same file.

### Assignment requirements:

- A minimum of 5 original interviews.
- You are greatly encouraged to do **MORE** than 5.
- Your primary interview must be in person.
- At least 3 of the other interviews must be in person or by phone.
- Email interviews are accepted as long as you meet the other interview requirements.
- Contact info (phone and email) must be included for all interviewees at end of assignment. They do not make up part of the word count.
- Include people you tried to interview but who declined or were unavailable.
- You must have a minimum of two scenes in your article. A good idea, but not imperative, is to start with a scene (either witnessed by you or reconstructed). Another is to have the second scene follow a line break. You can have more than two.
- Follow the CP style guide.
- Include your research information at the end of the article.
- It does not make up part of the word count.
- Include a word count.
- Have a tight, catchy title.
- Indicate target publication.
- No footnotes.
- No Internet links (you can mention a website but it can't be used to explain your story).
- Sidebars are acceptable but not necessary; they are part of the word count. Make them tight. Give them a headline. Bullet points or other such formats are OK for a sidebar.
- Make sure the file has your name on it, such as pmclaughlinfinal.docx.
- For the **first draft only** you can use "TK," which means a certain detail will be forthcoming in the final draft. For example, "In TK, the company published a report..." The TK subs for the actual year, which you have yet to determine.

## How to Save a Marsh

Nina Munteanu, an ecologist and writing instructor at the University of Toronto, was devastated when she heard that long-time Mississauga City Councillor Jim Tovey had died suddenly on January 15 at age 68. In November 2017, Tovey had taken Munteanu on a guided tour of the proposed site of Inspiration Lakeview. The plan for the site is an ambitious one, calling for the rezoning of the land previously occupied by the Lakeview Generating Station to make way for a 26-hectare man-made wetland along the eastern shore of Mississauga's waterfront, a short drive from the Long Branch GO Station. Munteanu says Tovey was "so in his element" that day, "joyful and inspirational."

Inspiration Lakeview was Tovey's brainchild, and the project will be carried out by the Credit Valley Conservation authority (CVC) and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), according to the City of Mississauga's masterplan for the site. It is going to be modelled after the only remaining natural wetland along the Canadian shore of Lake Ontario, Rattray Marsh, which is a few kilometres to the west.

Munteanu notes that Canada has lost nearly 70% of its natural wetlands as a direct result of human interference. Rattray Marsh is a rare success in the conservation of these sensitive ecosystems, making it an example for the Inspiration Lakeview team to follow.

For many years, the key figure in the conservation of Rattray Marsh was Ruth Hussey. In 1954, Hussey, a thirty-eight-year-old veterinarian by trade, moved to the southwest corner of Toronto Township (now Mississauga), with her young family in tow. She soon fell in love with the nearby lakefront property owned by Colonel James Rattray, who encouraged Hussey and her children to swim and fish in Lake Ontario. Rattray offered to sell his 148-acre property to the

township in the mid-1950s, for use as a conservation area, but the offer went unanswered by the township council.

After Rattray died in 1959, at age 72, part of his property was sold to developers. For a time in the 1960s there was a plan to develop the entire property into a subdivision, marina and yacht club—it was envisioned as a resort for the rich and famous, a “Florida of the north,” as Jean Williams, chairperson of the Rattray Marsh Protection Association (RMPA), dubs it derisively. The appeal of the Rattray property, with its dense deciduous forests, cobbled beaches and diversity of wildlife, was intense for Hussey, and she refused to let the property be developed without a fight. Thanks largely to the determination of a band of local citizens under Hussey’s leadership, the municipal government eventually saw the wisdom in acquiring the remaining 95 acres of the property.

Williams, who succeeded Hussey as chairperson of the RMPA following Hussey’s death in 1984, has been involved with conservation efforts at the marsh since she moved to Mississauga in 1975. Fortuitous timing, for that was the same year the City of Mississauga, under its first mayor, Martin L. Dobkin, finally saw the wisdom of purchasing the Rattray Marsh property, south of Lakeshore Road West and a few kilometres west of the Credit River. “Though Dobkin’s tenure was brief, [his] administration significantly changed the city’s evolution,” John Stewart, a retired *Mississauga News* columnist, wrote in 2014.

Dobkin was an early proponent of including greenspaces in urban planning. In addition to the marsh, his administration oversaw the acquisition of many other parks and public lands in Mississauga, an expensive move that was derided at the time, but the value of which in the decades since has been incalculable. Munteanu says it was the acquisition of such properties decades ago that allows people today “to connect with, and develop an appreciation for, nature in

urban centres.” If anything, building cities around the natural environment enhances the tranquility of greenspaces. Without leaving the city, Rattray Marsh provides people with an escape from the busyness of life on the west side of Mississauga’s waterfront.

Beyond Hussey’s efforts, there were other factors that influenced the newly-formed Mississauga City Council to purchase the Rattray Marsh property in the early 1970s for use as a conservation centre. The CVC website states that, in 1969, the marsh was recognized by the federal government “as an environmentally significant Area, a provincially significant wetland, and an area of natural and scientific interest including a number of protected species at risk.” More importantly, Stewart says that heavy rains flooded the marsh in 1973, which reduced the asking price for the property from nearly two million dollars to a little over one, more in line with the new city’s modest budget.

Nonetheless, Williams and Stewart both say the real savior of Rattray Marsh was Hussey. At the entrance to the marsh from Old Poplar Row, one of several side entrances from the surrounding neighbourhood, there is a plaque that reads: “Ruth Hussey—because of her, Rattray Marsh is ours.” When Stewart interviewed Hussey in the late 1970s, she was blind, had a guide dog by her side, and had difficulty moving, due to advanced arthritis. But she still took him on a tour of the marsh, and showed him the highlights from memory. A short time before their interview, Hussey’s doctor told her she should stop walking. She ignored her doctor’s advice, telling Stewart that she had been walking all her life and did not want to stop. Because of her, people today continue to enjoy walking the trails at Rattray.

Urbanization, and the resulting build-up of sediment in Sheridan Creek, which flows through the marsh out to Lake Ontario, poses a significant threat to the diversity and sustainability of wildlife at Rattray. It is a threat made worse by the presence of invasive exotic

carp, which, as Williams explains, disturb the sediment in the water to feed. The marsh, according to CVC, is currently home to 428 species of plants, 227 species of bird, 26 mammals, 18 reptiles and amphibians, and 11 species of fish.

As the only natural lakefront wetland along the Canadian shore of Lake Ontario, Rattray Marsh is a priority area not just for CVC and the City of Mississauga, but also the federal and provincial ministries of natural resources. There are a lot of stakeholders invested in seeing the continued preservation of Rattray Marsh. This has been helpful for funding projects at the marsh, because the volunteer-run RMPA no longer has to rely on the generosity of wealthy, anonymous local benefactors to carry out conservation projects. Canada 150 signs, signalling support from the federal government's Community Infrastructure Program, are now sprinkled throughout the property.

No matter the involvement of higher levels of government, the community surrounding Rattray Marsh remains heavily involved in its upkeep, as Williams is quick to point out. Many local residents have homes that back directly onto the Marsh and they are quick to report sightings of invasive species of plant and animal life and assist in cleaning up waste. RMPA organizes spring cleanup days, which are well-attended each year. Freyja Whitten, the invasive species coordinator for CVC, says that, in the last seven years, volunteers from the local neighbourhood have put in over 500 hours cleaning up the marsh, helping to restore its biological diversity and ensure its long-term health and sustainability.

Rattray Marsh is one part of the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, which extends from Niagara-on-the-Lake in the west to Brockville in the east. The Waterfront Trail was opened in 1995, following a 1988 report from the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront, chaired by former Toronto Mayor David Crombie. Williams caught up with

Crombie, an old friend, last October, when they were on the 2017 Conservation Authorities Biennial Tour, a guided tour of sites controlled by CVC and Conservation Halton. During their chat at the marsh, Crombie lamented the fact that the Waterfront Trail is not as natural everywhere as it is at Rattray, that in many places the trail is obviously manufactured.

While man-made green spaces are the cause of concern for Crombie, they are not for Munteanu. A limnologist with a degree from Concordia University, meaning she is trained in the study of inland waters, Munteanu now teaches writing courses at the University of Toronto and George Brown College. The author of the 2016 book *Water Is...*, a critical look at the importance of Canada's wetlands, Munteanu says that we have our work cut out for us if there is to be any hope of preserving wetlands. In her words, they are among the "least-appreciated" ecosystems, because of their hybrid nature.

In Munteanu's field, the technical term for wetland is ecotone—a term referring to the convergence of two ecosystems into one. In particular, the convergence of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. With the loss of more than two-thirds of Canada's wetlands, we have also lost much of the services these spaces offer. Wetlands serve as natural combatants to climate change. The fertile soil in wetlands acts as a "carbon sink," in Munteanu's words, storing carbon and other pollutants that otherwise would be in the atmosphere. So, manufactured green spaces like Inspiration Lakeview have become necessary to fill this important role.

By mixing terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, wetlands also provide a balance and complexity that would otherwise be lacking in our ecosystems. This allows them to act as a refuge for plant and animal life. But a diversity of wildlife can only thrive at places like Rattray Marsh thanks to the efforts of CVC's Whitten and others in her field.

Whitten defines invasive species as any species of plant or animal that is not native to an area and outcompetes and outgrows the native wildlife. By the time Whitten and the CVC were getting involved with invasive species management at Rattray Marsh in 2009, it was too late to reverse the damage that had been done by the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a beetle that infected the ash trees in the region. The effect the EAB has had on the canopy at Rattray has been, in some areas, devastating, leaving gaping holes in the sky where a few short years ago there were tall, healthy-looking trees.

Even if Whitten's team had come aboard the struggle with the EAB sooner, it is unlikely they would have been successful in affecting a meaningful change—a chronic lack of dedicated funding for CVC means there is only so much she can do, regardless of support for other conservation projects from the federal and provincial governments.

On other fronts, Whitten's team has enjoyed greater success. Purple loosestrife, a beautiful flowering plant that takes over waterways and crowds out virtually all other organisms, is under control at Rattray, thanks to years of effort. And invasive carp are now blocked from swimming up Sheridan Creek by a mesh fencing where the creek flows out to Lake Ontario. So successful have those efforts been that Whitten now provides advice to other conservation authorities on the best management practices for dealing with those invasive species.

By coordinating with other conservation authorities, Whitten is accomplishing a key goal of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council (OIPC). As OIPC's chairperson Kellie Sherman explains, ten years ago there was a crying need for an umbrella organization to “bridge municipalities” and coordinate the battle against invasive species among all of the province's conservation authorities. OIPC has provided that service and, while a lack of money is still an issue, Sherman says the organization is “getting there” in terms of funding.

Back at Rattray, for Whitten it is a case of getting one step ahead and then falling back again in the fight against invasive species. The carp are under control, but high-water levels in the marsh last spring resulted in the reintroduction of invasive plants, such as the tall perennial grass *Phragmites*, in areas where Whitten had gotten their presence under control. So high were the waters in 2017, Williams said that she cannot recall a worse year for flooding in the marsh in the four decades she's lived in the area. It's an uphill battle to maintain the health and biodiversity of Rattray Marsh and other wetlands, but for Whitten the fight never ends—she is already planning projects well into 2018.

About the outlook for the marsh, Williams is optimistic. She is in her late eighties, though her vigour belies that fact and she prefers to say, "I'm as old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth." Young people give her a reason to be optimistic in the twilight of her years. In a transatlantic accent similar to the actress Angela Lansbury's voice in its patrician air, Williams speaks enthusiastically about involving students from the local elementary schools, many of them first-generation Canadians, in conservation projects. "They are the future, and they care about this place. And they get their parents to care. It's a wonderful thing to see."

Projects like Inspiration Lakeview give Munteanu reason to be hopeful about the future of wetlands in general, since she says that conservation happens at the local level. When Inspiration Lakeview is completed, it will join Rattray Marsh in providing refuge for the birds, insects and other species of wildlife that rely on the shoreline of Southern Ontario as a stopover area on migratory routes. Mike Puddister, the restoration and stewardship coordinator for CVC, described the Lakeview site to *The Toronto Star* as his organization's own "field of dreams," saying that if they build it, wildlife will come. That will be Jim Tovey's legacy. In Munteanu's

words, “what a cool way to honour a man who dedicated his life and career to making this world a better place for everyone.”