

Local girl lauded for work on tallgrass prairie

Valerie MacDonald

Michaela Halsey's commitment to Mother Earth has been recognized with the Moraine: For Life! Award.

The 12-year-old Scout was named a Community Champion at a special ceremony in Markham this week for her project of restoring a section of tallgrass prairie on her grandparents' farm east of County Road 45 at Roseneath.

"We're hoping to see (native) flowers come up this spring," she said during an interview following her win.

Michaela is also anxious to involve her whole Scout troop in a larger restoration project as a result of the work she's done and recognition she's achieved.

Working with the Black Oaks Savanna/Tallgrass Prairie organization at Alderville First Nation, Michaela began with a professional assessment of areas subsequently identified as "remnants" of the historical prairie soil type and grasses that once covered much of North America. Just one per cent of the prairie still exists today, and restoration projects have been undertaken to naturalize these areas and extend the prairie coverage with its special beauty, home to a variety of insects, birds and wildlife.

"I burned off a 300-by-300-foot section, preparing the ground for rehabilitation," she said. "Then I planted tallgrass seeds from the tallgrass initiative."

When the snow recedes and the sun once again warms the ground, Michaela hopes to find wild blue lupins, prairie smoke, butterfly milkweed and black-eyed Susans are once again growing on the former prairie lands.

Learning about the Oak Ridges Moraine on which she lives has been an eye-opening experience for the young girl and one she wants to share. In addition to involving the Scouting movement in this type of project, Michaela hopes to take part in the seed collection that takes place every fall in the Alderville First Nation's Black Oaks Savanna/Tallgrass preserve.

It's important to her that native species flourish and not be overrun by others, she says.

In addition to achieving Scouting badges in the area of conservation, Michaela introduced her whole family to the importance of the moraine environment as a filtration system for ground water.

"(Michaela) wanted to do something tangible (for the environment)," says her mom, Anne.

So she started researching invasive species through the assistance of the Ministry of Natural Resources and found that the glacial soil deposits of the Moraine where they live has remnants of the Tallgrass Prairie.

George and Marguerita Halsey's farm contained ideal conditions and the work began.

"I became (just as) interested (as Michaela)," Anne said.

vmacdonald@northumberlandtoday.com

© 2007 Cobourg Daily Star (ON). All rights reserved.