Community and conservation: contemporary constructions of land protection among volunteers involved in a local land trust

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Abstract

Community and conservation: contemporary constructions of land protection among volunteers involved in a local land trust

Lilian V. Dart

Faced with the intersecting environmental crises of the 21st century, conservation organizations are searching for practices that produce better, more sustainable outcomes. However, they have often relied on forms of conservation which shore up rather than disrupt settler relationships to land in the form of fortress conservation and assumptions about the human-nature dualism. In this thesis, I examine a local land trust that intends to include community[-based] conservation into its conservation practices. In particular, I explore how the organization's volunteers understand and construct the relationship between community and conservation, and the ways this might impact operations. Using a community-based research approach, interviews (n=17) were conducted. The findings indicate that the volunteers are demographically homogenous, leading to a homogenous, Western-science informed understanding of community[-based] conservation. This perspective views involvement of community as a direct trade-off with optimal ecological goals. As the volunteers wield uncommon power in organizational governance, difference in opinions toward missions or operations could lead to constraints on the organization. This study contributes to larger academic discourses on environmental volunteers, land trusts, and frames of conservation, and provides tangible recommendations to an organization attempting to include community[-based] conservation in its practices.

Keywords: community-based conservation, land trusts, environmental volunteers, frames of conservation, environmental governance, power, human-nature dualism

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

A definition for land conservation is elusive. Through space and time, the goals, methods, and desired outcomes of conservation have varied. The term is not a panacea; it is necessarily community-defined and place-based. The intricacies that prevail in how humans define conservation are embedded in their individual and group values and identities, which have implications on both the social and ecological dimensions of the environment.

The need for conservation, despite the absence of a widely accepted understanding, is crucial. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II calls for the conservation of 30-50% of the Earth's terrestrial and marine habitats for nature-based solutions to climate change and an emphasis on sustainable development (IPCC, 2022). Additionally, conservation is needed to address the intersecting loss of biodiversity crisis due to habitat destruction and land fragmentation (Woo-Durrand, 2020).

While caring for the land was a common practice in the lands that came to be known as Canada, this thesis will primarily focus on articulations of land conservation rooted in settler colonialism. Conservation in Canada has a contentious past, and "… is as much a social phenomenon that reflects the dominant interests that define social objectives as it is an explicitly scientific practice grounded in theory and empiricism" (MacDonald, 2003 p. 21). Presently, formal land conservation is conducted through government programs, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on conservation[1]. The conservation NGOs rely heavily on

[1] Other examples of conservation are through for-profit businesses, private landowners, and farmers, to name a few.

volunteer labour (Hanson & Filax, 2009), and therefore producing agreeable outcomes for these important stakeholders is vital for the success of conservation NGOs (Freeman, 1984).

This study aims to understand the ways in which volunteers involved in a local land trust frame conservation, and the implications that may have on organizational operations. The following section will present a brief background of previous research that guided this study, the context in which this study is conducted, the research objectives and relevance, my positionality in this research, and a guide to the organization of this thesis.

1.2 Background

Following the colonization of settler-defined Canada, land conservation evolved from a way of protecting 'wilderness' for the wealthy elite (Cronon, 1996; MacDowell, 2012), to a post-war act of patriotism (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009), to the environmental movement sentiment of 'untouched' fortress away from the harm of humans (MacDowell, 2012; Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009). Finally, in the late 20th century, calls for sustainable development (Jasanoff, 2001; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1989) and increased trust in the scientific method dominated land conservation narratives and have taken shape as community[-based] conservation[2] and conservation biology, respectively. The ways in which land conservation has evolved in how it is framed by humans provides a compelling argument that an encompassing definition of the term would not capture individual attitudes. This study attempts to identify how individuals involved in a local land trust contemporarily frame conservation.

[2] In this thesis, I will use the term *community[-based] conservation* to encompass both community-based conservation and community conservation. While community-based conservation is used more often in the literature, community conservation is sometimes used interchangeably with the term.

Land conservation in Canada was originally conducted through government programs. However, due to changing governments and an decisions that were unfavourable to the supporters of conservation, such as the arbitrary placement of parks and the obvious preference for resource extractive capitalist economies (MacDowell, 2012), a loss of confidence led to the development of non-governmental land conservation (Killan & Werecki, 1992; MacDowell, 2012). A popular non-governmental conservation organizational structure that emerged was the land trust (MacDowell, 2012). Land trusts protect land through fee-simple donation, purchase, or through conservation easements (Brewer, 1999). The decisions of land trusts are subject to the negotiation of various stakeholders in the organization including landowners (Bastian et al., 2017), the government (Logan & Wekerle, 2008), and the volunteers. While the relationship between land trusts and landowners, and land trusts and governments have been well-studied (ex. Bastian et al., 2017; Merenlender, 2004), this thesis provides one of the first examples of the stakeholder relationship between a land trust and its volunteers.

Due to the contentious history of conservation in Canada, it has been the subject of different framings throughout the last century, namely ‘nature for itself’, ‘nature despite people’, ‘nature for people’ and ‘nature and people’ (Mace, 2014). Humans are subjective in how they understand conservation, as explained by layered frameworks proposed in the fields of social psychology and philosophy. It can therefore be argued that conservation is much more about the cognition, experience, and relationships of individuals and groups over any reasonable objectivity that has been proposed.

This case study focuses on a land trust that has recently taken steps to begin implementing community[-based] conservation methods into its operations. Due to the high proportion of formal and informal volunteers involved in the mission and operations, the

organization was curious about how this important group of stakeholders would feel about these changes, and if it would challenge their understanding of conservation.

1.3 Context

This study uses Kawartha Land Trust (KLT) as the context of inquiry. KLT is situated in Nogojiwanong (called Peterborough by settlers) and the surrounding area, located in the province of Ontario. As of 2022, KLT has protected 27 properties and manages one property, comprising of over 4800 acres of land. The organization acquires land through fee-simple donations, purchase, or through conservation easements, and values conservation, collaboration, transparency, integrity, and innovation (Kawartha Land Trust, 2021). In 2019, KLT received an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant for the organization to begin adopting a community[-based] conservation approach.

The research is conducted on Treaty 20 Michi Saagiig territory and in the traditional territory of the Michi Saagig and Chippewa Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations. Since the early 1800's, the area has been subject to settler colonialism (Jones, 2018), and is now an urban mid-sized city. Located 150 km northeast of Toronto, the city of Peterborough has over 83,000 inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2021), and is primarily populated by individuals who are not in a visible minority group[3] (94%; Statistics Canada, 2017b). The Peterborough Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) encompasses part of the Kawarthas, and is comprised of rural areas like Selwyn, Cavan-Monaghan, Douro-Dummer, Otonabee-South Monaghan, Curve Lake First Nation 35, and Hiawatha First Nation (Statistics Canada, 2017a; figure 1.1). KLT also has properties located in the Census division of Kawartha Lakes, located northwest of Peterborough CMA. The Kawartha Lakes Census division has the population of

[3] Important to note that Statistics Canada includes Indigenous Peoples as not being in a visible minority group, and therefore Indigenous Peoples are reflected in this 94% (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

79,247 and encompasses urban areas like Lindsay, Bobcaygeon, Fenlon Falls, Omemee, and Woodville (Kawartha Lakes, n.d.).

The area is dense with institutions focused in the environmental sector, the natural heritage and resources sector, and the management sector. In particular, the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources, and Forestry (formerly and commonly called the Ministry of Natural Resources, or 'the MNR'), Trent University, Fleming College, Trent Severn Waterway, The Canadian Canoe Museum, and various conservation authorities and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) are located in the area. The region is characterized by an extensive system of rivers and lakes, and by woodland, wetland, and agriculture (Helleiner et al., 2009).

Conducting research in this context illuminates the conservation dynamic between a medium-sized urban city and rural regions, and highlights the ways in which a community heavy in environmental, conservation, and management sectors may influence the attitudes of individuals who volunteer in a local land trust.

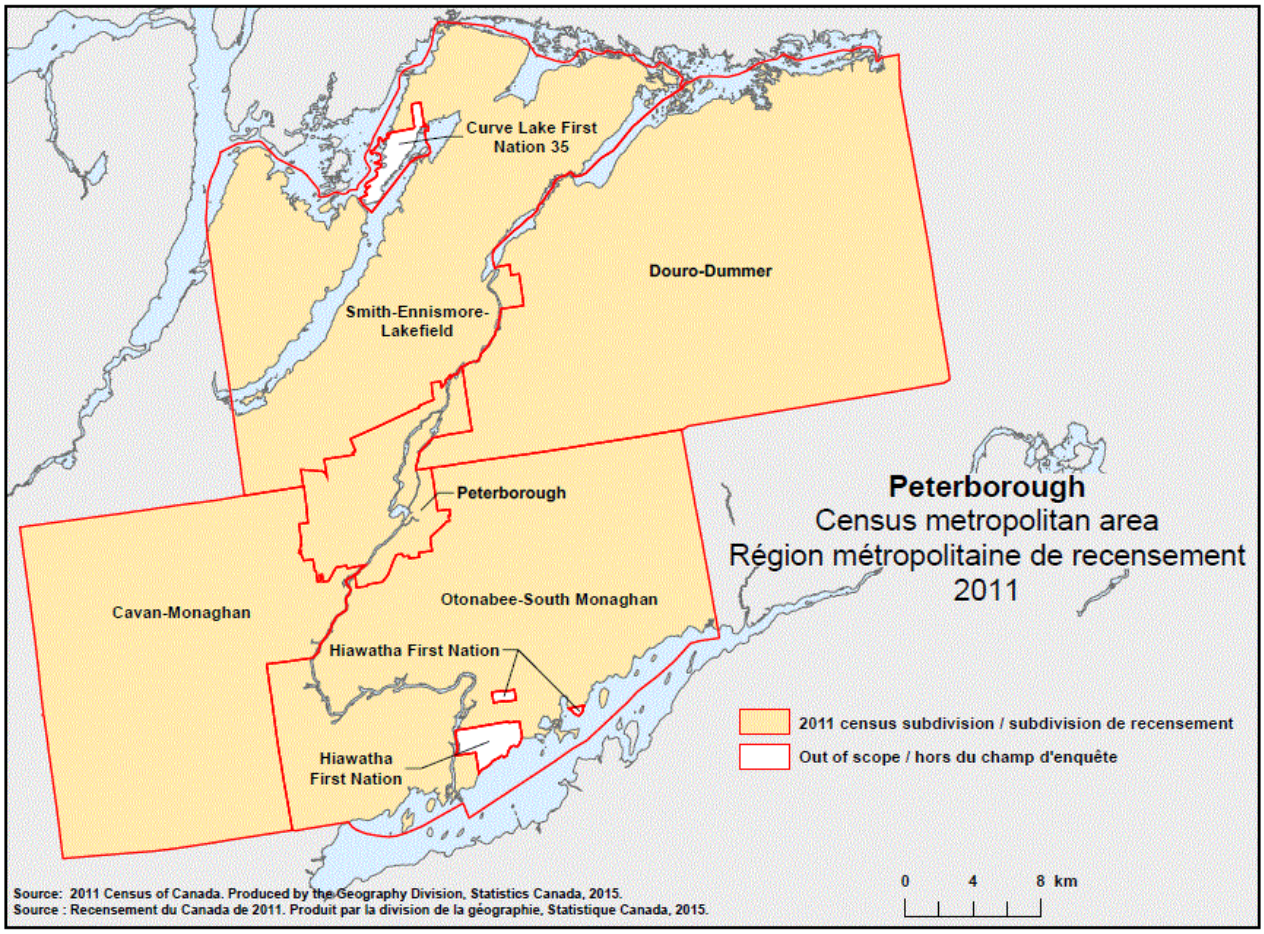

Figure 1.1 Map of Peterborough CMA (Statistics Canada, 2011).

1.4 Research objectives

The research presented in this thesis attempts to understand how volunteers involved in a local land trust construct and understand conservation and its relationship with community. In particular, this study primarily focuses on formal volunteers. The formal volunteer roles include directors, trustees, committee members, lead property stewards, and student interns. The objectives central to this thesis are to:

a) Explore what drives volunteers to engage with KLT;

b) Understand the perspectives of volunteers regarding land conservation and community;

c) Examine the role that volunteers have in the sustainability of the organization.

As KLT moves towards more pluralistic ways of caring for the land through community[-based] conservation, it is important to reflect upon any trends in representation in their volunteers (and who is not represented), how these individuals frame conservation and if this understanding is similar or dissimilar from the organization, and the power these individuals have in organizational vision and operations.

This thesis will provide conceptual contributions to wider bodies of research on community[-based] conservation, land trusts, and environmental volunteers. Due to the nature of community-based research, this work will also suggest practical and organizational changes through a list of tangible recommendations that are presented to KLT.

1.5 Approach to research

This study is guided by a community-based research approach, working collaboratively with KLT to address the question of how the volunteers feel about the changes in organizational operations to a more pluralistic community[-based] conservation approach. While the research question expanded to understanding community and conservation in a broader way, the idea presented by the organization remained central to this work.

The data were collected between June and October of 2021 and used volunteers (n=14), the majority of them being formal volunteers (n=12). The other volunteers (n=2) had informal, casual roles within the organization. Additionally, to provide more nuance to understanding the volunteers and the general perspectives of the organization, staff (n=3) were used in this study. Each participant was involved in a semi-structured interview to understand individual perspectives and to address research objectives.

In keeping with community-based research framework, KLT was involved in all stages of the research process, however, more prominently in the conceptualization phase. The results of this

research were disseminated to the organization through an informal preliminary report, a presentation and meeting, and a formal report following the thesis defence.

1.6 Positionality

Research on and about property and land-based issues in Canada must be prefaced with the researcher's relationship with said land. I am a white settler on the treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg. I am local to Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), inhabiting the area through my childhood, and then again for three years as an adult. While I have lived away from the area for the past year, I continue to have a deep appreciation and sense of kinship for the lands, waters, and beings of Nogojiwanong.

Growing up in privilege as a middle-class urbanite, I had access and was taught appreciation for green spaces. This exposure led me to an affinity for the outdoors as a young adult where I worked in the outdoor industry and spent much of my free time recreating on the land through activities like hiking, camping, and canoeing. Many of the institutions and industries that are built upon the idea of the outdoors subscribe to low-impact, preservationist paradigms, an understanding that I previously bought into – and a paradigm that I challenge in this work. As the Peterborough CMA and surrounding area is characterized as a mid-sized city surrounded by rural communities, many of my peers in childhood came from local rural families that engaged with the land differently, namely through farming, fishing, and ATV/Snowmobile use. By participating in some of these practices and engaging with these people, I gained an understanding of a different perspective than my own regarding the use of the land.

My disciplinary background focused on the biological sciences, environmental sciences, and geography. I spent the early years of my undergraduate degree enthralled with 'pure' sciences. However, the reductionist paradigm of science in university institutions curtailed my journey as a

'pure' scientist. My interests evolved to an interdisciplinary lens on environmental issues, led by the understanding that human subjectivity and experience deeply influence how we understand science and environmental issues. My research background has been largely collaborative and community-based, working interdisciplinarily on science-based issues with a social geography lens. I believe in the power of academic research in informing social and organizational change and am not interested in conducting research for the sake of producing an outcome that is not beneficial to the community.

I am both an insider and outsider to this research. I am an insider due to my history in the community, support of conservation, and disciplinary background. However, I am an outsider to the research as I have never been involved in the governance or inner workings of the organization and had limited knowledge or pre-existing understanding of KLT prior to conducting this research. I believe that the insider position helped me in establishing rapport with the participants and in understanding the goals of the organization, both ecologically and in regard to community engagement. Conversely, the outsider position allowed me to maintain a level of objectivity as I conducted the study.

I descend from settler ancestry, and therefore have an implicit and unconscious bias toward the idea of land ownership in Canada. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I am keenly aware of colonial paradigms regarding the land and attempted to weave in Indigenous perspectives and sovereignty into my literature review and conclusions.

1.7 Thesis organization

This thesis is organized into six chapters, which will guide the reader through the development of the study, how the research was conducted, and the key findings. Chapter 2 will introduce concepts that are key to understanding the goals of this research, including the

importance of conservation, the history of conservation in settler-defined Canada, the role of land trusts, the importance of volunteers in environmental governance, and how human cognition and subjectivity shape how individuals frame the goals, methods, and outcomes of conservation. Chapter 3 will contextualize the research in the local context of the Kawarthas and KLT. The background and trajectory of the organization will be highlighted to compliment the research objectives and conclusions. Chapter 4 will highlight the methodology followed and the methods used in this community-based research. In that section, the dissemination plans will also be explored. Chapter 5 provides the thematic analysis of the qualitative research by compartmentalizing the findings into four subsections focused on who volunteers with KLT, how they feel about conservation, how they feel about the community and conservation, and what this may mean for the sustainability of the organization. Finally, chapter 6 discusses these findings with respect to the literature and highlights contributions, limitations, and next steps. Chapter 6 provides specific recommendations to KLT, based on the findings, and closes with concluding remarks on the research.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Our environmental crisis

The 21st century faces a slew of human-caused intersecting environmental crises (see IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, 2021) driven by capitalism. Currently, land fragmentation and habitat loss are thought to be the most pressing threats to biodiversity in Canada, affecting 82% of at-risk species (Woo-Durand, 2020). Climate change and associated effects are believed to rapidly increase and exacerbate the land fragmentation and habitat loss impacts on at-risk species over time (Woo-Durand, 2020). Overexploitation and introduction of new species are also drivers of environmental change, but have less damaging impacts on ecosystems (Woo-Durand, 2020). Biodiversity on earth is important in maintaining ecosystem resilience to disturbance, in species interactions (including in maintaining the livelihood of humans), and in the mitigation of climate change through processes such as carbon sinks, urban cooling, and reducing the risk of land erosion (ex. Seddon et al., 2020).

Although the Canadian government has protected 13.5% of terrestrial (land and water) areas, and 13.9% of marine areas (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2022),

> … declining biodiversity trends in many areas of the country provide a clear indication that Canada is not displaying particular effectiveness in confronting or addressing the biodiversity crisis within its borders in spite of the many statutes that include provisions to do so. (Ray et al., 2021 p. 1055)

This failure is due to the decentralized authority over natural resources between federal and provincial governments (Cairns, 1992) and the neoliberal obsession over resource extraction (Ray et al., 2021). The significance placed on the health of biodiversity by Indigenous

knowledge holders and Western scientists, as well as evidence-based projections for the state of the climate, reaffirm the importance of structures and institutions that mitigate damage to the environment, restore ecosystems, and prevent land fragmentation.

The idea of caring for and protecting land is not novel in Canada, both before and after colonization. The reasons for, and methods used, in protecting or stewarding the land are intertwined and deeply influenced by the values and the subsequent constructed meanings of individuals and communities at any given time. For example, Indigenous place-thought articulates that, "…habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies… meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand, and implement." (Watts, 2019 p. 23). Where Western epistemology understands a separation and hierarchy between human and nonhuman, Indigenous place-thought and subsequent Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is essential in a paradigm shift from current Canadian articulations of conservation. This thesis will primarily focus on settler colonial understandings of the land and conservation.

Currently, the formal protection of land in Canada occurs primarily thorough state-centered government programs, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on conservation. To fully comprehend current understandings of land protection and conservation, it is important to grasp the historical values placed on protected areas by settlers. Although the environmental history of Canada is full of nuances and deviations from course, throughout the next section of this chapter, I will attempt to construct a timeline of environmental understandings in Canada since it was colonized. In particular, the human relationship to the environment and the subsequent implications of this relationship on the land will be explored.

2.2 Conservation for what? Conservation for whom?

2.2.1 Beginnings of conservation in settler-defined Canada

The land now called Canada began to be settled by colonizers in the early 16th century. Canada's colonial history is riddled with the erasure of Indigenous Peoples through imagined landscapes. By trying to distinguish itself from both Britain and the United States, a dualistic narrative was constructed by early colonizers (Mackey, 2000). They did this by understanding Canada as northern and thus superior, deriving these nationalist ideologies from their beliefs about the Canadian winter and how inhabitants reflected its qualities (Berger, 1997). Articulations of whiteness and vigor led to an understanding of Canada as possessing masculine characteristics of prosperity, health, purity, and self-reliance (Mackey, 2000). This narrative led to an emerging society of people who understood Canada as an empty and uninhabited place that possessed unlimited resources and that was destined for success.

Early articulations about the land are understood through Cronon's (1996) thesis on wilderness thinking. While initially wilderness was viewed through a biblical lens and assumed to be 'savage' and 'unruly', a newer paradigm emerged based on the myth of the American frontier and the doctrine of the sublime. That by leaving civilization, a "… man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization snapped his energy and threatened his masculinity" (Cronon, 1996. p.14), and that he may be closer to God as "… [God] would most likely be found in those vast, powerful landscapes where one could not help feeling insignificant and be reminded of one's own mortality" (Cronon, 1996. p. 10). Initial colonial understandings of the land saw it as a place of inexhaustible resources, however early Canadian foresters (and even earlier in the United States) advocated for conservation in 1875 when they saw forest depleting at an unsustainable rate. In the United States, this understanding began

gaining traction and promptly split into two distinct schools of thought on conservation: utilitarian conservation and wilderness preservation - the former having an initial strong influence on the protection of land in Canada (MacDowell, 2012).

In 1887, Rocky Mountain Park (RMP; now called Banff National Park) was given royal assent and was the first national park designated in Canada. Rocky Mountain Park was founded on the wilderness ideals previously outlined by Cronon (1996) and the promise of a flourishing economy (MacDowell, 2012). The park provided an oasis for wealthy elite men to experience rugged individualism and religious awakening, while continuing to host a slew of resource extraction activities (although out of sight of tourists visiting these landscapes [Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009]). While Indigenous Peoples were forced from these protected areas, their traditional economies and livelihoods understood as destructive and anti-conservation, settler capitalist economies like luxury hotels and travel were considered the admiral way of protecting these areas (Youdelis et al., 2020). Despite this sentiment being justified by protecting the lands from the 'immoral' people, it was increasingly obvious that it was merely to protect the lands for the use of 'moral' people (Campbell, 2011; Youdelis et al., 2020). Although, as will be explored later, pieces of utilitarian conservation have re-emerged in the 21st century, commodifying lands for the sake of the wilderness experience further entrenched the nature-culture dichotomy that has come to structure mainstream approaches to conservation.

2.2.2 The emergence of preservation

As previously mentioned, thinking in the United States split between utilitarian conservation and wilderness preservation early in the conservation movement (MacDowell, 2012). Although Canada and the United States do have aspects of a shared conservation history, differing national

identities lead to deviations in thinking (Sandlos, 2012), and thus the idea of preservation in Canada was not understood until the wartime era (MacDowell, 2012).

In the postwar baby boom, infrastructure development and the emergence of automobiles meant that more people could experience these 'wilderness areas', far from urban life. As a response to wartime politics, "preserving nature in national parks came to represent an act of [Canadian] patriotism, [and] visiting national parks was an experience of national meaning." (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009 p. 169). Eventually, resource extraction activities in national parks were eliminated, not because of the environmental concern but because of the unaesthetic nature of this industry that may impact the tourism economy (MacDowell, 2012). As the visitors increased, so did the support for these areas. The growing demand for places of 'untouched wilderness' allowed the government to expand national and provincial park systems.

2.2.3 The environmental movement and fortress conservation

In the background of the parks boom between 1930 and 1970, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, a group of individuals who shared preservationist understandings and ecological values, lobbied the government for areas free from human use. In response to the extensive lobbying, the Ontario government instated the Wilderness Areas Act in 1959, "… which employed the concept of sanctuary to preserve areas of natural significance" (MacDowell, 2012 p. 276), however still allowing extractive activities on larger protected areas (MacDowell, 2012).

With the rise of the environmental movement in the 1960's, the idea of wilderness preservation came to the forefront of public environmental thought (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009). The environmental movement was largely pushed by the influence of works like *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *The Population Bomb* by Paul R. Ehrlich. Carson (1962) used the scientific method to outline the impact of chemicals such as Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) on

biodiversity. Unlike utilitarian conservationists who were concerned about the use of resources, Carson's thesis focused on the damage that humans were causing the environment (Jasanoff, 2001; MacDowell, 2012). Similarly, Ehrlich (1968) alarmed the public by highlighting the risk of overpopulation on human society. He explained, "… regardless of changes in technology or resource consumption and distribution, current rates of population growth will guarantee an environmental crisis which will persist until the final collapse" (Ehrlich, 1968 p. 44). This ethos, combined with the wilderness thinking (Cronon, 1996), painted the idea that ecosystems that are 'untouched' are superior for biodiversity because humans are inherently damaging to the environment; nature exists outside of human culture.

Public support for preservation grew as the popularity of parks continued to skyrocket and the scientific knowledge regarding the protection of wildlife habitat became widely held among the public (MacDowell, 2012). Seemingly simultaneously, two conservation movements emerged in Canada, both of which are important to understand as intertwined and individual entities as I dissect the values of land protection through time. The first is non-governmental conservation, and the second is fortress conservation.

Although the provincial and federal governments seemed to grasp preservation for ecological good, MacDowell (2012) outlines that some environmentalists argued that the placement of parks was arbitrary, avoiding areas of resource extraction, enabling resource companies to explore the area before founding a park, or by simply continuing the practice of some resource extraction, such as logging. Initially, advocacy was the main route taken by non-governmental organizations to incorporate public opinion into federal and provincial conservation practices. However, frustration with the government grew as many preservationists did not feel the parks were being adequately protected (Killan & Werecki, 1992), and funding cutbacks from

conservation initiatives in federal and provincial parks became more prominent (Bunce & Aslam, 2016). Non-governmental organizations like Algonquin Wildlands League and Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC) were born out of this era (Killan & Werecki, 1992). Using distinctly different tactics, these organizations moved the preservation agenda through advocacy and land securement, respectively (MacDowell, 2012). The NCC, now one of the most recognizable land trusts in the country, was founded to acquire land through donation, purchase, or easement to protect ecological diversity. Organizations like Algonquin Wildlands League and NCC were place-based in character, where communities advocate to protect land on a local scale (Brewer, 1999).

The shift from the utilitarian paradigm to the preservation paradigm saw the popularity of the fortress method of conservation gain traction. The fortress method, also known as the 'fence and fine' or 'fishbowl' approach, was understood as best practice in the new wave of environmentalism and subscribed to the idea that humans are inherently damaging to the environment and thus should be excluded from these 'nature areas', allowing biodiversity to flourish without the interference of humans. The fortress method of conservation reinforced the fiction of wilderness (Cronon, 1996), and served as an ideological underpinning to understanding protected areas as pristine, untouched, and separate from humans. These ideas saw conservation and the interests of communities as being incompatible (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). Although fortress conservation was intended to help biodiversity, individuals subscribing to these methods saw humans as the antithesis to attaining these ecological goals; however, this understanding did not take into account that Indigenous Peoples had lived on the land and shaped the environment for centuries. Only when the land was colonized, and settlers began to shape these landscapes did large-scale environmental damage begin to affect ecosystems (Lewis & Maslin, 2015).

Additionally, as outlined previously, the fortress model, developed for the purpose of conservation by governmental and non-governmental organizations, furthered the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from the land.

The beliefs associated with fortress methods of conservation and wilderness thinking enabled some people to think of the environment as 'out there' and away from human impact, "… giv[ing] ourselves permission to evade the lives we actually lead" (Cronon, 1996. p.17). As an inherently top-down approach to land management, fortress conservation furthered the human-nature dichotomy and weakened the place connection of humans to the land, impacting the ways in which humans imagine their relationship with the environment. Youdelis and colleagues (2020) explain this by stating, "If humans are only tourists in nature and not animals integral to ecosystems, we will continue the tradition of locking up parcels of land away from where we live and continuing our unsustainable lifestyles adjacent to those areas" (p. 246). Eventually, this paradigm began to be questioned as a counterintuitive force in attaining ecological goals. Although fortress conservation continues to be a dominant practice in contemporary land protection, a body of evidence has emerged that challenges the implications of this method on ecosystems (Kashwan, 2017). For example, literature on the impact of fences on biodiversity (Jakes et al., 2018), the need for relative disturbance (including human disturbance) in maintaining resilient ecosystems (Dell et al., 2019), and the importance of place connection on pro-environmental behaviour and care for biodiversity (Beery & Wolf-Watz, 2014), reject notions presented by the fortress model.

2.2.4 Community[-based] conservation

Even as it has been questioned, the idea of fortress conservation continues to persist in governmental and non-governmental efforts to protect land. However, scientific approaches and

the inclusion of community in conservation emerged as the new conservation paradigm at the end of the 20th century. In the 1980's, scientific discourse began to seep into parks policy (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009) as a reaction to the 1970's environmental movement (Jasanoff, 2001). The idea of ecological integrity was legislated into an amendment to the *National Parks Act* in 1988 (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009). This concept transcended the levels of government, and was implemented as a key concept into Ontario's *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* in 2006. Within this act, ecological integrity is defined as "… a condition in which biotic and abiotic components of ecosystems and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities are characteristic of their natural regions and rates of change and ecosystem processes are unimpeded" (Government of Ontario, 2006). While resembling the ideals that led to fortress conservation methods, "ecological integrity carries with it a weight of scientific authority that is understood as leading logically to specific policies that are designed to protect an ecosystem or restore it to a particular state" (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009 p. 179).

Science has become an increasingly trusted way of understanding the world around us. For example, a survey found that 89.3% of Canadian respondents trust science 'a lot' or 'some' (Wellcome Global Monitor, 2020), although trust in science can be confounded by factors such as individual leaning on the political spectrum (Pew Research Centre, 2020). Gauchat (2012) found that,

> … the public defines 'what science is' in three distinct ways: (1) as an abstract method (e.g., replication, empirical, or unbiased); (2) as a cultural location (e.g., takes place in a university or is practiced by highly credentialed individuals); and (3) as one form of knowledge among other types such as common[-]sense and religious tradition. (p. 183)

The public's assumption of objectivity and political neutrality gives science influence and authority, leading to confidence in policy driven by 'the science'. Although there is a general trust in the discipline, only 42% of the Canadian population are actually able to grasp basic science concepts presented in the media (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014), therefore a concept like 'ecological integrity' may be even more difficult for the public to discern. Thus, with the inclusion of science discourse into governmental policy, scientific experts have become the champions of conservation and are the ones who have to disseminate this jargon-filled rhetoric to the public (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009).

Also emerging at the end of the twentieth century was the inclusion of community in conservation work. To address the growing public concern sparked by the 1970s environmental movement, "[a] new term – *sustainability* – came into common use, bridging what had previously seemed an irreconcilable contradiction between environmental protection and human development" (Jasanoff, 2001 p. 90). Although the literature on the origin of the concept of community[-based] conservation is scarce (Montgomery et al., 2020), it is believed that the United Nations Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* and its call for sustainable development (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1989) sparked this new thinking on the inclusion of community in environmental work like conservation (Clarke, 1990; Jasanoff, 2001).

By the mid 1990s, methods of community[-based] conservation had become a trusted method of protecting the land in the conservation community (Mulrennan et al., 2012) as a result of calls for sustainable development and perceived failures of top-down fortress conservation (Montgomery et al., 2020). At its core, community[-based] conservation protects biodiversity "by, for, and with community" (Western & Wright, 1994 p. 7). Early scholars who wrote about community[-based] conservation defined it as "champion[ing] the role of community in bringing

about decentralization, meaningful participation, and conservation" (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999 p. 629). Community[-based] conservation rejects the notion that local communities are inherently damaging to biodiversity and understands the benefit of engaging individuals and groups in protected areas (Montgomery et al., 2020) and has the ability to bridge the divide between humans and nature (Kothari et al., 2013). In fact, a systematic review of the literature found a positive relationship between beneficial social outcomes and beneficial ecological outcomes (Miller et al., 2012).

The practice of community[-based] conservation is place-based and context specific (MacDonald, 2003; Mahahjan et al., 2020), indicating that it may look different across geographies. However, decision-making power within this framework is typically an iteration in the range of self-regulation to co-management (Dudley, 2008; Ruiz-Mallén & Corbera, 2013). Conversely, government and private conservation governance typically use top-down structures to manage protected areas (Dudley, 2008). While these institutions may use some participatory approaches, "…unequal power relations between actors… favo[u]r the interests of the more powerful" (Bixler et al., 2015).

An important distinction relevant to this research is the difference between *community[-based] conservation* and *community participation* in conservation. Where community[-based] conservation is characteristically bottom-up and relies on decentralization of power by including the local community in decision making, community participation in conservation is a broader term that encompasses various levels of engagement. While scholars in various fields have proposed different iterations of public participation spectra (ex. International Association for Public Participation *Spectrum of Public Participation),* Pretty (1994) offers a development-

specific framework[4]: (1) passive participation, (2) consultative participation, (3) bought participation, (4) functional participation, (5) interactive participation, and (6) self-mobilization. Passive participation "… can include education or outreach activities where individuals are informed of a recent decision or regulation…" (Rinkus et al., 2016 p. 48); the community participates in conservation once decisions have been made by the governing body on how they *should* participate (Pretty & Smith, 2004). It is important to note that while community[-based] conservation has recorded benefits for ecological outcomes, approaches like passive participation do not (O'Riordan & Stoll-Kleeman, 2002).

While this research does not explicitly address Indigenous-led conservation or Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), these emerging methods have gained acceptance and appreciation in very recent history among some conservation circles. The Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE; 2018) identify core goals of IPCAs, which include following Indigenous knowledge systems, respecting ceremony, seeking opportunities for sustainable economies, prioritizing culture, protecting species, and using fair governance systems. Indigenous-led conservation has innumerable positive implications including benefits to biodiversity (Schuster et al., 2019) and in steps toward decolonizing conservation.

2.3 The land trust model

2.3.1 Land trusts for conservation

This research uses a land trust as the context of inquiry. According to the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (n.d.), a land trust is a non-profit charitable organization that acquires land or interests in land for the purpose of biodiversity conservation. Land trusts typically acquire land through conservation easements, fee-simple donation, or less commonly, through purchase. In 2020,

[4] This framework was also adapted in a biodiversity conservation context by Pretty and Smith (2004).

there were 148 land trusts in Canada which were responsible for protecting and stewarding over 275,000 acres of land (Land Trust Alliance of British Colombia, n.d.).

A unique facet of the land trust is the use of easements in acquiring land. Conservation easements are contractual and legal agreements between an organization and a landowner that enable continued private ownership by the landowner while limiting development and other activities on the land to meet conservation goals (Main et al., 1998; Merenlender et al., 2004). A conservation easement has no specified content and can vary between properties due to the unique goals of both the landowner and the land trust (Merenlender et al., 2004). However, often the easement may restrict activities such as "subdividing, clear cutting, grazing cattle near stream banks, strip mining, or erecting billboards… [and] may require landowners to build fences, maintain trails, or engage in organic farming." (Parker & Thurman, 2019 p. 339). The use of easements in conservation is widely thought of as a win-win for an organization and a landowner, as explained by Logan and Wekerle (2008) who state: "Within a complex multi-sectoral environmental network that involves government support through partnerships and tax-incentive programs for landowners and environmental non-governmental organizations, land trusts provide a channel for landowners to protect their lands "in perpetuity"" (p. 2097). As such, if the land is sold, the following landowners are bound to the same easement restrictions that were originally produced.

Another dimension in the growth of the land trust movement that it is important to consider is the neoliberalization of conservation. While land trusts did not conceive the concept of neoliberal conservation, the organizational approach does not resist it. This presents an interesting tension, in that the land trust structure acknowledges that land has an economic value, however, it seeks

to prevent the fragmentation of land and the loss of habitats through the protection of these lands. Logan and Wekerle (2008) explain this, highlighting that

> [o]n one hand, environmental organizations promote the preservation of nature and its value today and for future generations as antithetical to the marketplace mentality. On the other hand, they are involved in developing new forms of environmental governance by putting a monetary value on environmentally sensitive lands and the nature that is to be preserved (p. 2098).

Under neoliberal conservation, concern for the environment becomes a business venture and an opportunity for economic growth (Liverman, 2004), while failing to recognize the idea that capitalist, free-market economies are the foundation of these very global environmental problems (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). A key characteristic of neoliberalism is deregulation. However, it has been argued that it is better thought of as *reregulation* in the case of neoliberal conservation (Castree, 2008; Igoe & Brockington, 2007): that is, "… the deployment of state policies to facilitate privatisation and marketisation of ever-wider spheres of social and environmental life" (Castree, 2008 p. 142)[5]. Igoe and Brockington (2007) highlight that reregulation of resources can be harmful to local communities, as these rural people may have little capital or understanding in how to invest it. Additionally, practitioners involved in neoliberal conservation historically have not valued local knowledge and experience, and criminalize livelihoods or tradition, resulting in unfavourable changes in both ecosystems and social systems (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). It is important to note, however, that scholars do call for conservation and stewardship of private lands (Olive & McCune, 2017), as the majority of

[5] Conversely, a compelling argument that could be made is that land trust securement brings formerly private lands into the public sphere, taking land out of the ordinary real estate market.

endangered species in Canada are located in the south, where the highest proportion of private land exists (Kerr & Cihlar, 2004).

Although this research does not offer a direct critique of the land trust model as an example of neoliberal conservation, it is an important discussion when considering the ways in which conservation can address both social and ecological sustainability and the limits of this model.

2.3.2 Land trusts and stakeholders

The landowner-land trust relationship is interesting to explore as it pertains to organizational governance and subsequent operations. Within a conservation easement, a market-based agreement is made between the landowner and the land trust (Bastian et al., 2017). Negotiations between the landowner and the land trust are made to satisfy the demands of both sides of the agreement (Bastian et al., 2017), as conservation goals cannot be met without the cooperation of the landowner (Merenlender et al., 2004). Interestingly, Merenlender et al. (2004) found "… most land owners prefer the least restrictive easement obtainable and one that retains the most exclusive rights" (p. 71), thus the actual terms of the easement may require sacrifice from parties on either side of the agreement (Bastian et al., 2017). The motivations to enter an easement and the goals of the easement of both landowners and land trusts are well studied. In particular, place attachment, environmental concern, and financial incentives (specifically, tax benefits) motivate landowners to enter into easements, whereas an easement that would allow public access to their land or that would result in lost revenue, may deter a landowner from entering into an easement with a land trust (Bastian et al., 2017). The latter may indicate that entering into a conservation easement is only an endeavour for the cash rich, land rich landowners who do not rely on the land for their livelihoods (Merenlender et al., 2004).

A dominant critique of the landowner-land trust relationship is that of 'perpetuity'. While conservation in perpetuity can be beneficial in the long-term goals of protecting species or ecosystems by preventing land fragmentation or development, Merenlender et al. (2004) ask, "[h]ow is permanent protection of a resource ensured while allowing for ecological change, inclusion of new data, changes in conservation needs, and other factors that may require changes in management to best serve the intentions of the easement?" (p. 67). Understanding ecosystems as dynamic, while placing legally binding and static easements on properties, is juxtaposing and counterintuitive. However, this dilemma can be remedied through the recognition of normal ecological changes and evolution through time, and understanding that management plans can change and adapt to changing landscapes. Conversely, it is argued that involving landowners in land trusts can be understood as a participatory and collaborative approach to conservation, involving local and place-based decisions into organizational governance (Logan and Wekerle, 2008).

As described in section 2.2.3, the widespread emergence of non-governmental conservation organizations that directly protect land (such as land trusts) was in part ascribed to rollback neoliberalism of protected areas by provincial and federal governments in the 1990s (Logan & Wekerle, 2008). This led to a particularly strong growth of non-profit private conservation in Canada in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Barla et al., 2003). The development of organizations like land trusts was responsive and opportunistic in response to a coupled reduction in government funding and increased environmental concern. Land trusts now rely heavily on government funding and government tax incentives to achieve their organizational goals (Barla et al., 2003; Merenlender et al., 2004). Landowners who place conservation easements on their properties can receive favourable tax benefits under the provisions of Canada's Income Tax Act

and the Ecological Gifts Program[6] (Ontario Land Trust Alliance, n.d.). Since the inception of the Ecological Gifts program in 1995, over 1433 ecological gifts valuing over $900 million, and protecting 195,000 hectares of wildlife habitat have been donated across Canada (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2021). While this model is favoured by landowners and land trusts, it has been critiqued as a "… bait and switch tactic for neoliberal governments" to reduce government spending and accountability for the environment (Logan & Wekerle, 2008 p. 2103).

When a land trust is created, it is typically small and run only by volunteers. As it grows and is able to secure more funding, often through government grants, a small number of paid staff are hired (Brewer, 1999). These organizations, however, continue to rely on unpaid volunteers for important jobs like sitting on the board of directors (Brewer, 1999), monitoring, and stewardship (Hanson & Filax, 2009). By understanding the land trust model, it is clear that these organizations rely on the opinion of a number of different stakeholders, be it landowners, government, volunteers, paid staff, or other interests such as Indigenous communities, donors, land use planners, and outdoor recreationalists. It is therefore important to discern the perspectives of each stakeholder group, their relationship to the land, their belief in what conservation should be, and their perspectives of other actors. While the relationship between landowner and land trust (ex. Bastian et al., 2017; Merenlender et al., 2004; Parker & Thurman, 2019; Stroman & Kreuter, 2019), and government and land trust (ex. Barla et al., 2013; Logan & Wekerle, 2008; Merenlender et al., 2004) is well studied, the literature on volunteers involved in land trusts is scarce.

[6] The Ecological Gifts Program is a recognized incentive within the *Income Tax Act* in Canada and the Quebec *Taxation Act*, which provides benefits like tax credits or elimination of taxable capital gains to individuals or corporations (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2021).

2.4 People and conservation

2.4.1 Volunteers and group dynamics

This research focuses on volunteers who are involved in land trusts. As explained in section 2.3.1, many different stakeholders, defined by Freeman (1984) as a "…group or individual who can affect, [or be] affected by the achievement of an [organization's] purpose" (p. vi), are involved in conservation through land trusts. Volunteers are stakeholders who have close relationships with the organization and thus have a legitimate exchange-based claim. They provide resources in the shape of time, expertise, and money, in exchange for an organizational output that they understand as favourable to the group or individual (Hill & Jones, 1992). While many land trusts are able to hire paid staff, they continue to rely heavily on volunteer labour (Hanson & Filax, 2009), as budgets for non-profit conservation organizations are largely funded by the government, which is precarious due to shifting policies when governments change (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009).

Due to the uncertainty of funding for conservation in Ontario, and the increasing importance placed on environmental stewardship by the public, the engagement of volunteers is vital for the health and longevity of these organizations. The continued support of volunteers is subject to stakeholder theory, which suggests that "… the survival and success of an organization are contingent upon its ability to produce valued and agreeable outcomes for a diverse range of stakeholders" (Freeman, 1984 in Lamont et al., 2015 p. 61). If an organization were to change its mission or operations without the support of stakeholders, the long-term viability of the organization could be jeopardized. Understanding the perspectives of the volunteer stakeholder group inform decision-makers and the broader sector on how a paradigm shift or smaller methodological changes within an organization might be received.

Volunteers are individuals who participate in organizations or activities without financial compensation. The contribution of the volunteer force in Canada is vast, with 79% of Canadians over 15 volunteering in a formal or informal manner, dedicating volunteer hours to the equivalent of 2.5 million full-time year-round jobs in 2018 (Government of Canada, 2021). While national data suggests younger generations have higher formal and informal volunteer rates, older generations contribute more volunteer hours on average (Government of Canada, 2021). In contrast to national data on the general volunteer force, Winch et al. (2020) found that 40-70 year-olds were the most common age group across the literature to volunteer in the environmental sector. Within this group, individuals with higher education (Tang, 2006), higher socioeconomic status, and social capital (Wilson & Musick, 1996) are more likely to formally volunteer. Additionally, white populations are more likely than racialized populations to formally volunteer (Wilson & Musick, 1996), an outcome possibly attributed to structural barriers and discrimination (McBride, 2007). Research on race and environmental volunteerism is scarce, but due to the overwhelming lack of demographic diversity in environmental occupations (Norris, 2017) and in environmental recreation (ex. Krymkowski et al., 2014), it is likely that the demographics of volunteers in the sector follow this trend.

The motivations for volunteering in conservation work is well studied. Previous research has found that volunteers engage in conservation work to help the environment, for recreational land use, and to expand their knowledge (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). A deep sense of connection to the land and a particular place has been associated with pro-conservation behaviours (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). A number of social motivators have been associated with commitment to environmental volunteerism and are more salient than care for the environment alone (Asah & Blahna, 2013). Asah and Blahna (2013) explain this by stating, "… helping the environment was

an important motivator… only when conservation volunteering efforts met volunteers' desires to defend and enhance the ego, socially interact, and build community" (p. 872).

In organizations, the attraction-selection-attrition hypothesis (ASA; Schneider, 1987) has been proposed as an explanation for the composition of human resources. In particular, this model "… elucidates how individuals join and leave organizations, stating that people are functions of three interrelated dynamic processes: attraction, selection, and attrition. Individuals are attracted to, selected by, and retained in organizations whose members are similar to themselves in terms of psychological attributes" (De Cooman, 2013 p. 48). The ASA organizational model leads to a homogeneity in personality (Schneider et al., 1998) due to the tendency towards reproducing one's self.

Within the social groups to which individuals belong, for example a volunteer group, the group identity is the sum of the individual identities. A strong group identity, based upon the values of the group, is important in strengthening and reinforcing individual values and identities (Bouman et al., 2020), indicating a bidirectional relationship. However, it has been found that assumptions are often made about group values (Bouman et al., 2020), which sometimes are incorrect (Samuelson et al., 2003). Additionally, while typically volunteers identify deeply with the organization that they volunteer with, Kruetzer and Jäger (2011) found that often the volunteers and staff have distinctly different perceptions of how the goals should be reached. Differences in these perceptions can lead to interpersonal conflict (Kruetzer & Jäger, 2011).

The ASA model asserts that organizations tend toward homogeneity in personality, based upon the perception of similarity in values or identities. It is therefore important to understand individual and group perceptions of contentious issues like conservation. As values shepherd attitudes and behaviour (Stern et al., 1999), individual and group values can ultimately be

understood as the basis for decisions about biodiversity conservation. However, as will be explored in the following section, the layers of the subjective human complexify this relationship.

2.4.2 Constructing conservation

Conservation decisions through time have relied on human values and social representations of the environment. The specific cognition involved in how humans construct conservation and how that may influence individual and group attitudes towards management decisions is well studied. Scholars in fields such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy have proposed various conceptual frames to explain the ways in which human attitudes towards conservation are influenced by constructing mental models of the environment (Buijis, 2009), the social representations of biodiversity (Buijis et al., 2008), and the prioritization of values (Loring & Hinzman, 2018). Due to the complicated cognition of the subjective human, it is difficult to discern a definitive explanation behind attitudes towards conservation and subsequent management decisions. Thus, the contextual frames I present will be layered, in an attempt to nuance what influences individual and group attitudes in this context.

Earlier research in social psychology on human cognition and environmental attitudes focused on singular, one-dimensional concepts like values. A value, defined by Schwartz (1992) as “a desirable trans-situational goal varying in importance, which serves as a guiding principle in the life of a person or other social entity” (p. 21), was understood as a predictor for variability in attitudes and social constructed ideals (Stern, 2000). Schultz (2000) proposed the human-nature relationship, specifically how humans see themselves in relation to nature is represented on three-factor values structured from egoistic to altruistic to biospheric, where environmental

concern is understood as affecting 'me', 'all people', and 'all living things', respectively[7]. Studies have found that stronger pro-environmental behaviour is rooted in biospheric values (Stern & Dietz, 1994; De Groot & Steg, 2009), and conversely individuals who fall into the egoistic value category are more reluctant to act pro-environmentally due to concerns about financial loss, discomfort, or inconvenience (de Groot & Steg, 2009). When attempting to distinguish what drives a biospheric value system, a relationship between connection to nature and this value system is discovered (Martin & Czellar, 2017). However, Beery and Wolf-Watz (2014) argue the concept of nature connection "…neglects the human domain of perceptions, values, and representations, and downplays the subjectivity of human experiences" (p. 203) strengthening the human-nature dichotomy. Therefore, it is suggested that the geographic concept of place and place connection may be a better way to encompass the subjective human (Beery & Wolf-Watz, 2014). This sentiment is echoed by Vinning and colleagues (2008) who found cognitive dissonance between nature connection (ex. Participants saw themselves as part of nature), and general perception of the natural environment (ex. Participants understood nature as excluding humans).

It is therefore argued that values and beliefs about "… conservation may be more complex than the frequently used one-dimensional distinction between [environmental] values" (Buijs, 2009, p. 418). Adding additional dimensions of the subjective human makes this understanding more nuanced. Buijs (2009) proposes a conceptual framework – 'images of nature' – that uses individual values and beliefs as directly influencing value orientation and thus

[7] As mentioned previously, a host of frameworks to explain environmental attitudes and behaviour have been proposed. Another continuum that is used in the literature is between ecocentric and anthropocentric. Both of these perspectives are supportive of conservation, but ecocentric focuses on the intrinsic value of the environment, while anthropocentric focuses on conservation for the benefit of humans (Thompson & Barton, 1994). While this framework differs slightly from Schultz's (2000) bisopheric, altruistic, egoistic continuum, I will be focusing primarily on the latter model.

attitudes toward conservation and subsequent management decisions. Manfredo et al. (2003) characterize value orientations as "… an expression of basic values [that] are revealed through the pattern of basic beliefs held by an individual" (p. 289). Where values are quite broad and generalizable among groups, beliefs within value systems can explain individual differences (Fulton et al., 1996).

Within this conceptual framework, individual values (nature for people or nature for itself) and beliefs (the nature-culture divide, the environment as fragile or resilient, the environment as in balance or as needing to be changed), lead to specific value orientations towards the level of management and the goal of management (Buijs, 2009). Five images of nature are characterized as influencing individual perceptions and attitudes towards conservation: wilderness images, autonomous images, inclusive images, aesthetic images, and functional images (Buijs, 2009). Each of these images of nature use unique combinations of values, beliefs, and value orientations to construct an ideal representation of the environment, and thus conservation (Buijs, 2009).

While the 'images of nature' conceptual framework is useful for understanding individual cognition, it is important to "acknowledge both the individual level of cognition, as well as the social level on which the cognitions are based" (Buijs et al., 2008, p. 79) as valuable to a nuanced explanation of group and individual perceptions of biodiversity management. Buijs and colleagues (2008) connect these notions to develop a conceptual framework that illustrate group-specific representations of biodiversity being rooted in individual understandings of the benefits of biodiversity, the attributes of nature, and the human-nature relationship. This conceptual frame highlights that a concept like 'biodiversity' is subjective, and that different social representations of the term will lead to varied perspectives on the goals, methods, and expected

outcomes of conservation management decisions (Buijs et al., 2008). Unsurprisingly, groups of like-minded people are unified in their representations of biodiversity, leading to similar opinions towards its management (Buijs et al. 2008).

While it is clear that attitudes towards conservation and the management of biodiversity are embedded within human cognition, and are influenced by a complicated network of values, beliefs, and social representations, scholars have questioned how individuals negotiate these priorities (Loring & Hinzman, 2018). When faced with difficult trade-offs, the ways in which individuals prioritize multiple desired outcomes "… is rooted less in the specifics of the values they hold, and more in their philosophical approach to reasoning" (Loring & Hinzman, 2018, p. 375). It is therefore argued that individuals use deontological ethics (what is right versus what is necessary), and time frame (short-term versus long-term thinking) when negotiating multifaceted decision making in the management of biodiversity (Loring & Hinzman, 2018). By using deontological ethics and time frame, four principal strategies are proposed by which individuals prioritize desired goals of the management of biodiversity: dependency driven (how the system works), ideal world (the way things should be), pragmatism (what is achievable), and deficiency-driven (what we need now; Loring & Hinzman, 2018). It is therefore argued that when attempting to understand the perspectives of stakeholders on management decisions, it is important to discern the reasoning behind this perspective and any trade-offs employed in their decision making (Loring & Hinzman, 2018).

In the views toward the management of biodiversity, specifically through conservation, Mace (2014) offers four framings that have been used through modern conservation and continue to be employed contemporarily: 'nature for itself', 'nature despite people', 'nature for people', and 'nature and people'. Prominent in the 1960s and 1970s the 'nature for itself' frame focuses on

wilderness thought and emphasizes protected areas without people; ‘Nature despite people’, the dominant thinking in the 1980s and 1990s, understands humans as damaging to the environment and is rooted in population biology and natural resource management; ‘Nature for people’ focuses on ecosystem goods and services, and the sustainable management of biodiversity, which was the primary frame used in the early 2000s; Finally, ‘nature and people’ emphasizes socioecological systems and the importance of bridging the nature-culture dichotomy (Mace, 2014). There is a current emphasis on the ‘nature and people’ framing of conservation, which underpin approaches like community[-based] conservation (Sanborn & Junge, 2021). In agreement with Buijs et al. (2008), these views toward conservation are group-specific (Engen et al., 2019). For example, a Norwegian study found that many (> 66%) of the participants in groups such as government, conservation, and cultural heritage used the ‘nature despite people’ framing, while many (> 64%) of the participants in groups such as landowners and farmers used the ‘nature and people’ framing (Engen et al., 2019).

Chapter 3

Research context

This research used and collaborated with Kawartha Land Trust (KLT) as the context of inquiry. KLT is a non-governmental conservation organization which protects 27 properties (figure 3.1) comprising of more than 4800 acres in the area through fee-simple donations, purchase, and easements (Kawartha Land Trust, 2021). The organization also helps to manage an additional property (Kawartha Land Trust, 2021). KLT acts as a steward for the lands by caring for the ecosystem through protection, restoration, and monitoring as well as sharing through education, research, and public use (Kawartha Land Trust, n.d.).

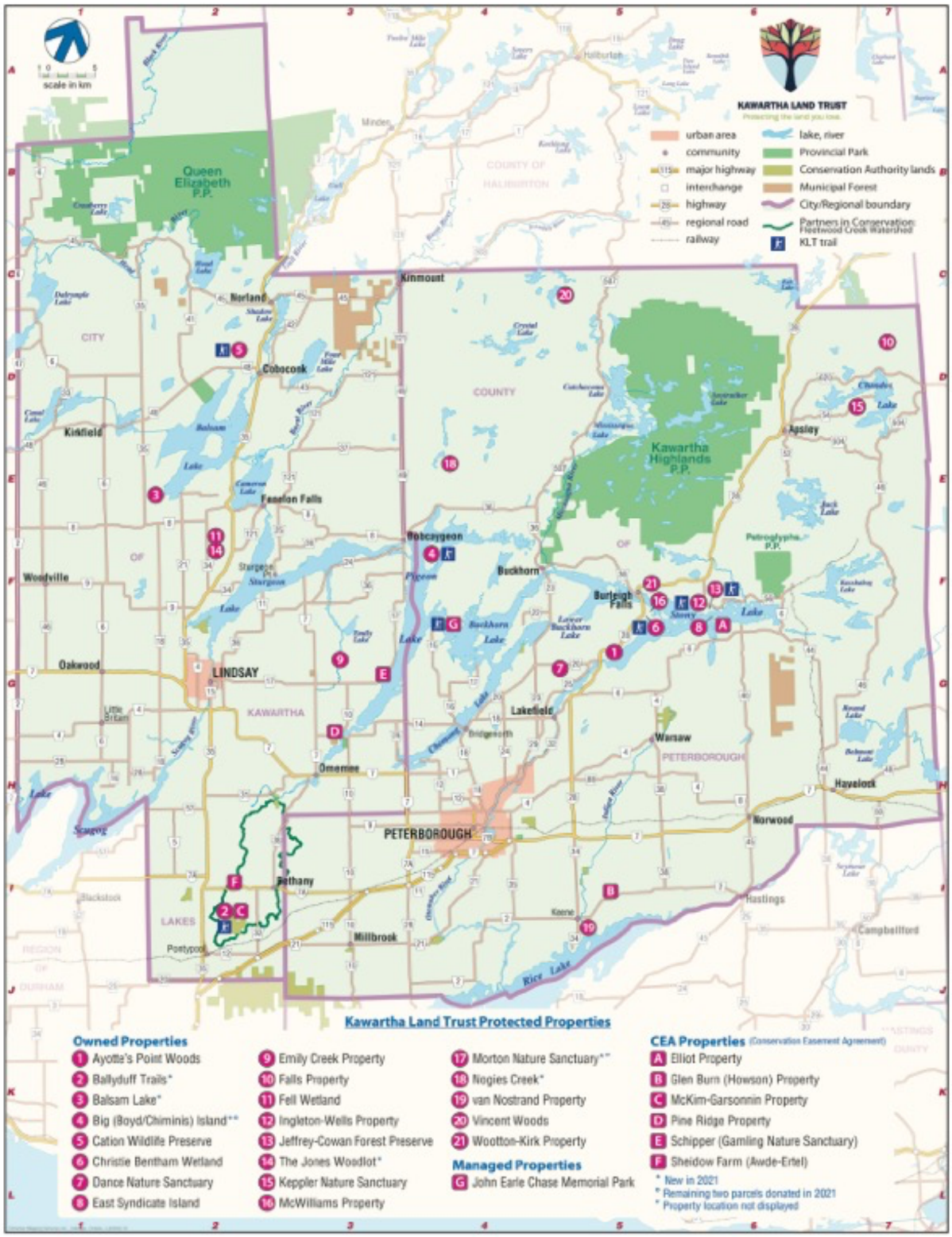

Figure 3.1 Map of Kawartha Land Trust lands (Kawartha Land Trust, 2022)

In 2019, KLT received a time-specific, project-oriented grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This grant was intended to be used for a new community[-based] conservation initiative that would encourage direct community engagement in conservation efforts. Community[-based] conservation is context specific and iterative depending on place-based factors (Mahajan et al., 2020). KLT defines community[-based] conservation for their organization as "… supporting landowners stewarding their own land; developing and maintaining a broad range of trail networks; looking for access opportunities on Kawartha Land Trust land; and exploring opportunities to engage with other organizations that support the interests of the community" (email communication).

Published documents by KLT on community[-based] conservation are limited, especially on the benefits that the organization understands from using this approach. However, the organization uses the evaluation criteria developed by the U.S. Land Trust Alliance (LTA) titled, *Flexible Framework for Evaluating Community Conservation.* This framework outlines the community assets that should be considered in an evaluation of community[-based] conservation, which encompasses resource-level impacts, systems-level impacts, and human-level impacts. A consultant for KLT adapted the community assets in the LTA framework to fit KLT. The KLT-specific framework encompasses resources or physical assets, individual assets, and community assets:

a) The resource or physical assets include: the health of the land/ecosystems, monetary/financial assets that are available to the organization, built infrastructure including trails and other structures, and paid and volunteer labour that can support the development of other assets as well as the professional development of these individuals;

b) The individual assets include: conservation knowledge and nature connection empowering individuals to share their conservation needs, experiences, and expectations with KLT, as well as individual sense of place in an area or region;
c) The community assets include: community wellbeing and development along with the support of conservation through trust, relationships, and networks, and political awareness and influence (Kawartha Land Trust, 2020).

In particular, this research focused on volunteers within the organization. KLT makes use of unpaid volunteers through a number of formal and informal operations. This research distinguishes the formal volunteer roles from the informal roles based on the roles published in the KLT Annual Report 2020.

The formal volunteers used by KLT are as followed:

a) Director: the board of director's "… main objective is to manage the affairs of the organization by ensuring that KLT's mission is at the forefront of all decisions and future development. The [board of directors] reviews and approves recommendations from its committees in the areas of financial stewardship and risk management, human resources, monitoring key stakeholders, and overseeing community, education and advocacy" (Kawartha Land Trust, n.d.)
b) Trustee: the trustees "… primarily support the organization and its Board of Directors in their fulfillment of KLT's mission. They are responsible for the election of Board of Directors, approving amendments to the By-law, receiving audited financial statements and approving the appointment of the auditor" (Kawartha Land Trust, n.d.);
c) Committee member (stewardship, securement, and development): the committees "... focus on developing and assisting land securement, long term land stewardship, and

developing resources and opportunities to help enhance those goals" (Kawartha Land Trust, n.d.);

d) Lead Property Steward: "… act as the main points of contact for [the] protected properties and keep the Stewardship Team updated on any emerging issues. They act as a liaison between [KLT] and [the] visitors, while also keeping tabs on trail conditions, species at risk sightings, existing and emerging invasive species, vandalism issues and much more" (Kawartha Land Trust, n.d.);
e) Unpaid student interns (placements from Trent University, Fleming College, and Canadian Conservation Corps).

It is important to note that despite the board of directors being the only volunteers who have formal power over the organization, the governance structure allows for other groups of volunteers to have an informal but tenacious power. For example, the stewardship committee, securement committee, and development committee are populated by 'experts' who make formal recommendations to the board of directors. Despite the ability to reject recommendations, the board of directors is highly influenced by the opinion of KLT's committees. These internal systems of governance are historic to the organization and trusted as a way to ensure the organization is being led by scientific evidence through the expertise of industry professionals.

The informal volunteer roles include as on-the-ground stewards supporting the lead property stewards, in data collection, invasive species removal, administrative assistance, trail maintenance, and in communications, to name a few.

On May 5, 2022, KLT announced that the organization was working towards developing a strategic plan for the next eight years, to 2030. The strategic plan aims to have impacts that address the loss of biodiversity, the effects of climate change, and that strengthen the relationship

between people and nature (Kawartha Land Trust, 2022). Notably, the organization aims to support these goals through seven strategies, including:

a) Creating corridors and connections (landscape conservation);
b) Habitat stewardship and restoration (in-situ conservation);
c) Nature-based climate solutions (adaptation and mitigation);
d) Integrated landscape management (working lands and private lands);
e) Indigenous connections (working towards Truth and Reconciliation);
f) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (diversifying voices at KLT);
g) Land connection (education, access, trails, and youth; [Kawartha Land Trust, 2022]).

Throughout its 20 years of existence, KLT has grown and changed. While resembling the basic structures that characterize a land trust, the organization's uncommon governance structure and location provides an interesting context to conduct this research. As KLT moves forward, integrating community[-based] conservation methods into its practices and making important decisions about the strategic direction, it is integral for the organization to understand the perspectives of its volunteers.

Chapter 4

Methodology and methods

This research was conducted to understand the ways in which volunteers involved in a local land trust construct and understand conservation and its relationship with community. The case study followed a community-based framework[8] and used grounded qualitative analysis and exploratory methodology for inquiry around the central objectives, including to a) explore what drives volunteers to engage with Kawartha Land Trust (KLT), b) understand the perspectives of volunteers regarding land conservation and community, and c) examine the role that volunteers have in the sustainability of the organization.

This chapter is organized into three sections which are intended to demonstrate the process by which the research was conceptualized, operationalized, and how the community would access the findings. To begin, the methodology will be explored and will highlight the community-based case study framework that was used in the research approach. Next, the ethics, recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis will be explained. Finally, the intentional dissemination of results will be emphasized.

[8] In this thesis, it is important to distinguish between *community[-based] conservation* (the conservation paradigm that this work is focused on) and *community-based research* (the research approach I followed).

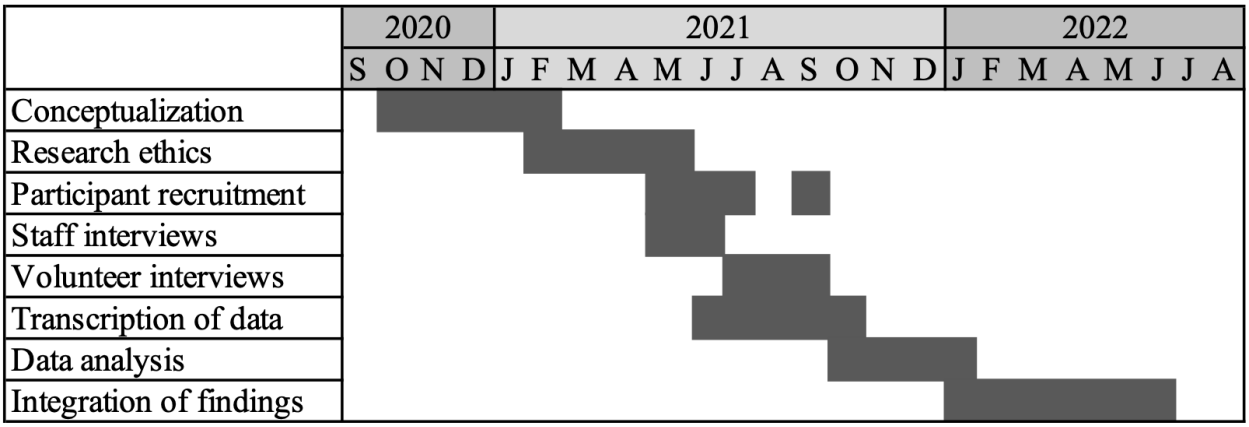

Figure 4.1 Timeline of research.

4.1 Methodology

This section will address the methodology used in conceptualizing this inquiry. The approach of this study used a community-based research approach and collaborated with KLT, a local conservation land trust, as the context of inquiry.

4.1.1 Community-based approach to case study research

This case study was guided by a community-based research approach. A case study is conducted when a researcher wants to study questions of "why" or "how" (Yin, 2018), and "… is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context" (Crowe et al., 2011). The nature of this case study is focused on a single land trust that is currently in a transitional phase as it moves towards adopting community[-based] conservation into its practices.

Community-based research is a contextual framework that refers to the collaborative inquiry between a researcher and community (Halseth et al., 2016). It begins with a research topic or observed phenomenon identified by the community (Minkler, 2005), and is characterized as producing reciprocal benefits for the researcher and the community (Halseth et al., 2016). Community-based research is informed by place-based development, which emphasizes the context-specific nature of the study (Halseth et al., 2016).

While the community-based research approach does not prescribe particular methods (Mulrennan et al., 2012), it is guided by the principles outlined above. Halseth and colleagues (2016) highlight that the level of engagement within community-based research is dependent on the capacity, resources, or time available by the researcher or community and that some studies may not involve collaboration at each step.

The majority of community collaboration in this research occurred in the conceptualization phase, although KLT was engaged periodically throughout the duration of the study (figure 4.1). I was initially contacted by a consultant for KLT, who was working with the organization on evaluating a new community[-based] conservation approach that the organization was using. The consultant described that the organization was interested in developing connections with the research community and was looking for deeper inquiry into the approach they were developing. Then, I met with the KLT's *Director, Community Conservation* and the *Community Conservation Coordinator* at KLT to discuss potential research and inquiry.

I deliberated with the organization a number of different research directions but settled on the broad idea of KLT volunteers and their perceptions of the organization's evolving operations, with a specific emphasis on the new community[-based] conservation approach. I was tasked by the organization to work with the consultant on developing a study that would be complementary to the consultancy work, and thus collaborated closely with the consultant in the conceptualization phase of the research.

Following the initial conceptualization, I drafted a proposal, highlighting the goals, methods and outcomes of the study and sent it to the *Director, Community Conservation* at KLT and the consultant for the organization, who each supported the proposal. The *Director, Community Conservation* then wrote a letter of support of the research and following the Trent

University Research Ethics Board approval (file #26563) and assisted me with two rounds of participant recruitment (outlined in section 4.2.1).

The results of the research were communicated with the organization in an informal report, a presentation, and a formal report (outlined in section 4.3.1). Due to the time-sensitive nature of the consultancy work, initial findings were outlined in an informal report to the consultant in November 2021. Further, the research findings will be disseminated to volunteer participants in a separate formal report (outlined in section 4.3.2). The results of the thesis were extended into recommendations to yield the greatest tangible community benefits of the research.

4.2 Methods

Following the conceptualization of this research, the process of data collection began. This phase encompassed the ethical approval of the study, participant recruitment, conducting the semi-structured interviews, and transcribing and analyzing the data.

4.2.1 Research ethics and recruitment

The operational phase of the research began with applying and receiving approval from Trent University Research Ethics Board (REB). Following consultation and written support of KLT in conducting this study, all dimensions of the ethics were explored and risks were minimized to the greatest degree possible. On May 18, 2021, Trent University REB granted approval of this study (file #26563), and recruitment was permitted to begin.

The recruitment was initiated when I emailed a small number of staff who were identified as frequently interacting with or involved with KLT volunteers. The staff members were sent a letter of information (Appendix F) through email, outlining the proposed research, and the identified risks and benefits of their involvement. They were encouraged to reply if they were interested. The staff who communicated interest in involvement were then sent a letter of

informed consent (Appendix G). Once this was signed, dated, and sent back to me, interview times were mutually agreed upon through phone or video communications platforms.

Following the recruitment and interviews of the staff members (n=3), the recruitment of the volunteers began. A staff member then sent the introductory email to the volunteer mailing list with a brief synopsis of the research (Appendix C), the letter of information (Appendix D), and an anecdote which encouraged them to participate through contacting me directly. The volunteers then contacted me through email and were sent a letter of informed consent (Appendix E). Once this was signed, dated, and sent back to me, interview times were mutually agreed upon through phone or video communications platforms.

When the majority of volunteer interviews had been completed, I noticed that the demographics of participants were quite homogenous, particularly in age. During earlier meetings with KLT, the staff mentioned some formal student volunteers that they had working with the organization. This group of individuals were not included on the initial recruitment email. The staff member from the organization then sent a similar email to the student volunteers with a brief synopsis of the research (Appendix C), the letter of information (Appendix D), and an anecdote which encouraged them to participate through contacting me directly. A few of the student volunteers emailed me and followed the same protocol as above, including signing an informed consent form (Appendix E). One student volunteer who expressed interest was not interviewed due to incompatible schedules and the research ethics approval ending.

4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Following the recruitment and the informed consent process, the interviews began. At the start of each interview, I reminded the participant about the purpose of the research, the importance of their informed consent, and the fact that the interview was being recorded. They

were asked again if they felt comfortable proceeding with the discussion. Each interview was recorded for the purpose of transcription and data analysis.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews could not be in person. The participants (volunteers, n=14; staff, n=3) were given the choice of interviews through a recorded phone call or through a video communications platform (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts). Most of the participants opted for a recorded phone call.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature, which is an interview style that follows a prepared interview guide, but gives the researcher and participant flexibility of naturally deviating the discussion (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are advantageous when research is exploratory, as the discussion often gives the researcher insight into an unconscious phenomenon or trend that may not be identified by prescribed questions (Adams, 2015).

I followed a general interview guide for all participants (Appendix H; Appendix I). The first section gained insight into each participant's demographics and a more general understanding of their relationship with the environment. The second section explored their perceptions of conservation and KLT's role in protecting and caring for the land. Next, I read KLT's definition of community[-based] conservation and asked the participants to comment and explain their thoughts on this approach. The final two sections differed slightly between the staff participants and the volunteer participants; the staff were asked specifically about their paid role in the organization and the organizational role of the volunteers (Appendix I), while the volunteers were asked about their volunteer role in the organization and dialogued about environmental volunteerism and the KLT-volunteer relationship (Appendix H). Following the prepared leading questions, all participants were asked if they had any questions or additional

thoughts. They were encouraged to contact me through email or phone call if they had any follow-up.

The data, in the form of audio, were stored on an encrypted external hard-drive under participant codes, ready for the next phase of data analysis.

4.2.3 Data analysis

I manually transcribed the audio files and stored transcripts on an encrypted external hard-drive. Once the transcription was complete, each interview file was imported into NVivo software for analysis.

The interview files (n=17) were then separated into staff and volunteer categories and were coded using qualitative thematic analysis. The thematic analysis systematically followed the steps outlined by Nowell et al. (2017): a) familiarizing with data, b) generating initial codes, c) searching for themes, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes, and f) producing a report. This was an iterative process that began with the simple transcription of the data, where I identified early trends.

The themes that emerged in the data analysis are explored in depth in chapter 5.

4.3 Research dissemination

This dissemination of this study is an important facet of community-based research and also to my personal values as a researcher, and therefore is vital to intentionally consider and include. My communication of the results and recommendations to the organization and to the participants is outlined in the following subsections.

4.3.1 Communicating with the organization

As discussed previously, the consultant working with KLT had a time-sensitive report on evaluating the outcomes of the organization's community[-based] conservation initiatives for an

Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant. As my research was intended to support the consultant's work, I was to communicate my results to the consultant. However, the timeline of my research was different than the consultant's work, so I produced a preliminary report in November 2021. The consultant sent me a number of questions, which I provided answers to, based on data trends and quotes (Appendix J). As a follow-up to the preliminary report, I met with the consultant to clarify any questions that they had.

Following the completion of a first draft of this thesis, I initiated a meeting with KLT to summarize my results. I was asked to provide an executive summary (Appendix K) that would be circulated to all staff to gauge who would be interested in attending. In June 2022, I met with staff from the organization and presented my research. I led a discussion, listened to feedback, and asked the staff a few follow-up questions that I had to lend nuance to my understanding of the organization and fill gaps in my thesis (Appendix L). This meeting, occurring over Zoom, was recorded and distributed internally to KLT staff who were unable to participate in the meeting.

Finally, after the final draft of this thesis is accepted by my committee, I will send a summary of results and recommendations in a short report to the organization (Appendix M).

4.3.2 Communicating with the participants

After the thesis is accepted by my committee, I will send a summary of my results in a short report to all participants (volunteers and staff). The participants will be encouraged to contact me if they would like access to the full published thesis, or if they have any follow-up questions or comments.

Chapter 5

Results

This research addresses the question of how volunteers involved in a local land trust construct and understand land conservation and community. To understand individual experiences and perspectives in this specific context, qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, outlined in section 4.2.2. The participants involved in the research include unpaid volunteers and paid Kawartha Land Trust (KLT) staff. They were interviewed to explore the ways in which volunteers understand what conservation 'should be', and the role community has in achieving these goals. Additionally, the role of volunteers in the organization's operations and the risk of misalignment are investigated in the context of KLT.

The narrative will begin by understanding who the volunteers are and why they are involved with KLT. The next two sections will explore the perspectives of volunteers on what conservation 'should be' and the perceived risks and benefits of involving the community in achieving conservation goals. The final section of this chapter will use the perspectives of staff and volunteers to explain the role of volunteers in KLT and the possible impacts of a difference in perspectives and values.

5.1 Who volunteers with Kawartha Land Trust?

Before understanding the perspectives of volunteers in KLT on land conservation and community, it is important to examine who volunteers with KLT and why they chose this organization. In chapter 6, this will be critically examined alongside perspectives of volunteers to understand the relationship between 'who' the volunteers are, and how they articulate ideas of conservation and community individually, and as being intertwined. This section will address the importance of professional background, alignment of values, and life stage in attraction to KLT.

Key considerations such as occupation, colleagues, homogeneity, group identity, like-mindedness, retirement, free time, and passion are dominant in the following narrative.

5.1.1 Demographics

To contextualize who volunteers with KLT, a demographic questionnaire was conducted at the beginning of each interview to determine basic characteristics including gender, age, level of education, professional sector, and occupation. In section 5.1.2, professional sector and level of education will be explored further, and in section 5.1.3, age and occupation will be understood further. Moreover, the demographics illustrated below (figures 5.1-5.5) will supplement anecdotes from the qualitative data to strengthen the findings in this research.

While characteristics like gender are balanced in the traditional way of understanding gender as a binary, other genders were not identified by the participants (figure 5.1). All other demographics were skewed toward highly educated individuals (figure 5.2), who overwhelming are currently or formerly employed in the environmental sector (figure 5.3). A high proportion of participants were older adults (figure 5.4), who are retired (figure 5.5).

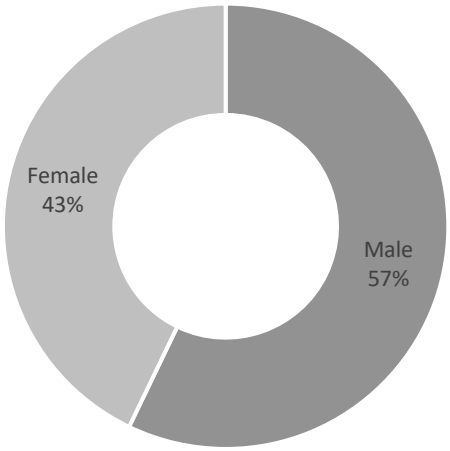

Figure 5.1 Gender identities of volunteer participants (n=14).

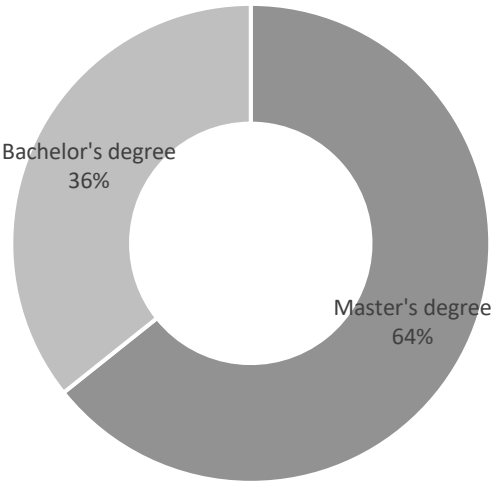

Figure 5.2 Highest level of education of volunteer participants (n=14).

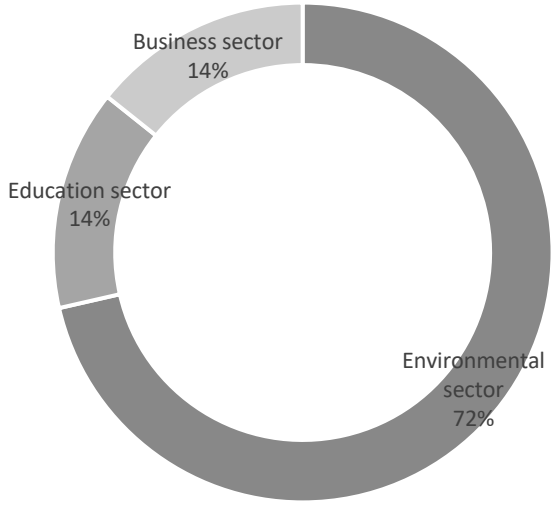

Figure 5.3 Professional sector of volunteer participants (n=14).

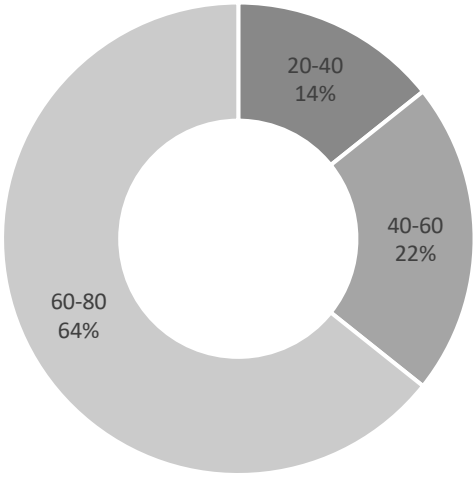

Figure 5.4 Age of volunteer participants (n=14).

Figure 5.5 Occupation of volunteer participants (n=14).

5.1.2 Professional sector

The Kawarthas region is uniquely dense with professionals in the environmental sector. When asked in the demographic questionnaire (Appendix H) about education (either previous or current) and professional sector (either previous or current; figure 5.3), many of the volunteer

participants have undergraduate or master's university degrees in fields such as zoology, forestry, and wildlife biology, and subsequent careers in the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources, and Forestry (formerly and commonly called the Ministry of Natural Resources, or 'the MNR'), and in post-secondary institutions such as Fleming College and Trent University. As volunteer 3 stated, "… [KLT] is quite fortunate that it can draw on retired [MNR] employees, retired Trent University [employees], and retired Fleming College [employees]. There is a wealth of expertise available to help the staff", indicating pride and perceived benefits in this facet of the volunteer demographics. Further, the participants spoke proudly about their contributions to the field.

When highlighting why they got involved or what they enjoy about their involvement with KLT, the participants often pointed to knowing people already involved in the organization from their careers: their current or former colleagues. As a participant explained, "I got involved because someone that I used to work with invited me to the [KLT]" (volunteer 4), a common sentiment among the participants. Many pointed to an individual person that they knew professionally as how they were recruited to volunteer for the organization. Others highlighted the fact that they knew that KLT drew a significant proportion of volunteers from their former employer, signifying the importance of familiarity and comfort in choosing where to volunteer. It is also clear that some participants use involvement in the organization as a way to connect or stay connected with former colleagues, as explained by a participant who said, "it has been really good professionally for me as well to continue fostering these connections" (volunteer 10). Further, a participant spoke excitedly about a regular Zoom call they had with their former colleagues who are now involved with KLT.

While a high proportion of the participants spoke positively about the involvement of current and former employees of environmental sector organizations in The Kawarthas, many were quite candid about how this overrepresentation may impact the diversity of people in the organization and may deter individuals from different backgrounds. Volunteer 3 explained,

> The people who sit on the stewardship committee and the securement committee are mostly retired MNR people. We tried to diversify, but frankly the committee I am on is weighted to retired white males. And I don't know whether that is a hinderance to other people to join or that is just the fact of the demographic of the retired people who are interested in this kind of thing at the moment, and that probably will change over time.

This participant indicated a level of self-awareness of the homogeneity in the professional background of their committees and the way it might limit more diverse participation. Although many participants were reflective about the lack of diversity, they continued to highlight that the wealth of knowledge brought to the organization by professionals in the field was a strength of KLT, with a participant posing the question, "why wouldn't you take advantage of that?" (volunteer 9). For some, then, a tension existed between the homogeneity of the volunteers and the usefulness of experts within the organization. A participant who came to the organization from a different professional background explained,

> When I first joined [as a volunteer] the first thing I noticed was… everyone has come from the [MNR]. And they all are managers of this, and former managers of that, or retired from this department. I felt a little overwhelmed in terms of how am I going to be able to converse with these people? Am I going to feel comfortable? (volunteer 7)

This quote confirms the question of hinderance, in addition to worry and discomfort of joining KLT as a volunteer. Interestingly, this initial intimidation did not appear to be sustained, with

participants expressing that they felt welcomed and comfortable once they joined as official volunteers for the organization.

5.1.3 Alignment of values and identities

Discussions in the semi-structured interviews highlighted alignment of values and identities as an important factor that attracted the volunteers to KLT, and why they enjoy their involvement in the organization. Beyond professional background, individual values, group values, and organization values were expressed frequently as important factors in how the volunteers understood purpose and meaning in their work.

When explaining the dimensions of their identity that attracted them to KLT, the volunteers articulated a deep concern about environmental issues and a responsibility toward taking care of the land. Many highlighted that this ethic was developed early in childhood; one participant reminisced: “As kids we went out with [our grandfather] and were taught about the beauty of nature and how important it was” (volunteer 5). Other participants described childhood memories and experiences that were formative in developing their care for the environment such as spending time at their cottage, at summer camp, or on their family farm. Among many participants was a deep worry about environmental issues such as climate change and infrastructure development, expressing their concerns in concrete terms. For instance, volunteer 9 noted, “We are going to get to that tipping point. Once you get to the tipping point, if you cross it, there is no going back. The system collapses very quickly. That is basically what is going on with this world.” Statements like this were often accompanied with deep emotions such as grief, sadness, and vulnerability, which were audible in these candid moments. The participants explained that their childhood experiences and subsequent worry for the environment as the reason that drives their individual values. The volunteers use involvement in KLT as a way to

take actionable steps. One participant stated, “I feel that I am doing something that has value, something that matters” (volunteer 6), thus displaying an ability to transform their values into meaning in the work they do for KLT.

Along with their personal values, the participants also perceive other volunteers in the organization as having similar values, identities, and interests. Many cited that they came to the KLT and enjoy volunteering with the organization because they have the opportunity to work with ‘like-minded people’. As one participant explained,

> I really like making connections with people who have similar interests and similar passions. I think with volunteering in general, people aren’t really going to do it unless they are passionate about it so it is nice to volunteer with something that you are passionate about because you will meet like-minded people. (volunteer 6)

Similarly, other participants spoke about the shared values among the group of volunteers, like considering the work a vocation, and being passionate about conservation. In alignment with findings outlined in section 5.1.2, it is clear that participants enjoy the comfort and familiarity of the organization and were reflective about the fact that they tend to congregate with people who are akin to themselves in all aspects of their lives. Concurrent with how the participants felt that it was beneficial to have a high proportion of professionals from the same or similar fields, they also saw great benefits of having a high proportion of individuals with similar values and identities. A participant explained that “We may not necessarily agree always on how we get there from here, but we all share that common objective. So, I think that goes a long way in creating a good working relationship” (volunteer 3). This quotation highlights the importance of common values to keep the work grounded and directed, even if methods may differ.

The perceived alignment of values between volunteers and KLT is what attracted many of the volunteers to the organization, as opposed to joining other conservation organizations in The Kawarthas. As explained in section 5.1.2, a high proportion of the volunteers are highly educated in scientific fields related or adjacent to conservation, and many had long careers in the sector. The volunteers explained in their interviews that they were familiar with the work of other local conservation organizations, but chose KLT. They felt that the organization was aligned with their pre-established values, as one participant expressed,

> I think I would say my skillset and knowledge brought me to [KLT] as opposed to getting to [the organization] and gaining that skillset and knowledge. I came preloaded with a basic understanding of what [KLT] does and my support of that is what brought me to [the organization]. (volunteer 11)

As noted by many volunteers, the organization has upheld and strengthened their conservation values, but has not changed them. The participants were asked explicitly in their interviews if their understandings of conservation had changed over time, and most were clear that they had not, but had been maintained through their work with KLT. One participant noted, "[KLT] hasn't changed my perspective on the need for conservation, that was there before or I wouldn't have volunteered. They have maintained it, and helped ensure that this is a worthwhile way to spend some time" (volunteer 4), suggesting the importance of perceived alignment in values and understanding to engaging volunteers.

5.1.4 Life stage

Many volunteers involved in KLT are retired. Volunteerism in the retired community is a well-studied phenomenon and was an obvious and important dimension of the volunteer demographic. Both volunteer and staff participants who were interviewed explained that

individuals who are involved with large parts of the volunteer force, such as the committees and the board of directors, are retired. The individuals who are retired use involvement in KLT as a way to lend professional skills and expertise to the organization, to keep their lives structured, and to socialize.

As explained previously, the participants feel proud that their professional background can be useful to the operations of KLT. The few participants that were interviewed who are not retired expressed sentiments like, “I certainly feel the effect of my vocation in life on my ability to contribute and I think I have this overriding sense of guilt that I am never doing quite enough” (volunteer 10), indicating the restraint of time and life stage on full involvement in their volunteer role. One volunteer supported this by explaining that meeting times were sometimes a barrier to involvement when trying to balance family and work life with KLT volunteering.

Conversely, the retired volunteers use their newfound free time to share professional skills in a way that feels meaningful to them; as one participant explained, “I feel like in my retirement, I am contributing something to a worthwhile cause, that is a benefit to me” (volunteer 4). The retired volunteers highlighted the fact that they agree to parts of the volunteer role based on what they enjoy doing, and have the ability to avoid parts of the volunteer role that they do not enjoy. A few of the participants reflected back to their careers and explained how involvement KLT is a way to continue the things they enjoyed, or to change how they engage in the field, like volunteer 3, who explained, “One of the things I thought when I first joined the land trust was that I was at a desk at the [MNR] for most of my career and I thought, “oh boy”, this is the chance to go out and do some hands on things.”

The volunteers further explained the value of volunteering with KLT beyond the self-satisfaction of lending professional skills to the organization. Involvement in the organization

provides the retired volunteers a way to stay engaged and busy. A participant expressed this benefit by stating, “Now that I am retired, I have learned that I do need some structure in my life. So, this helps to provide structure. I have the flexibility of being a volunteer. If I don’t want to work one day, I don’t have to work” (volunteer 9).

Although the volunteers communicated satisfaction in their retired life, they highlighted the importance of staying busy by volunteering. In addition, the retired volunteers use their involvement in the organization as a way to continue to be intellectually stimulated, as one participant exclaimed, “But there are probably 20 examples of things that I have learned. I come home from meetings and tell [my spouse] all sorts of stuff. It is amazing what I have learned” (volunteer 7). Finally, volunteering in retirement provides an outlet for socialization, with most participants highlighting the social events as being enjoyable and fulfilling. A participant described this sentiment shared by the volunteers by stating, “For a lot of retired people, it is nice to have that community” (volunteer 12), which can be difficult to maintain when leaving their careers.

5.2 How ‘we’ understand conservation

In this section, the perspectives of volunteers involved with KLT will be explored, specifically focusing on how they construct and are constructed by their conservation values. The KLT volunteers understand conservation practice to be informed by a commitment to Western science and protection from human use. They also asserted the need for these to be the concrete and unwavering goals of conservation. Throughout this section, the themes of Western scientific knowledge, management, passive use, control, and core mandate will be intertwined to convey the relationship the volunteers have with conservation and the land.

5.2.1 Science thinking

When communicating their perspectives on conservation, land use, and KLT, the volunteers often referred to using ‘the science’ as a guiding principle. Discussions in the semi-structured interviews highlight Western science as driving the volunteers in all dimensions of their work, including making sense of the importance of conservation, as well as in their methods of achieving conservation goals.

Dominant in the Western science-based narrative communicated by the volunteers is using technical language to insert meaning into the conservation of KLT properties. A significant majority of the volunteers felt that conservation ultimately means preventing damage and harmful interference with ecosystems: an understanding in line with the concept of ecological integrity. This is exemplified by a participant who stated,

> Well, it doesn’t mean that the system is not dynamic, or not static. It will continue to evolve and develop, but the features that we are trying to protect; the natural features and ecosystem functions are going to be maintained for the future. All I can say is structure, composition, and function: you need all three. (volunteer 4)

The volunteers often explained conservation using terms such as ‘ecosystem services’, ‘natural heritage’, ‘significant wetlands’, ‘sensitive landscapes’, and ‘natural succession’, thus signifying the importance of Western science thinking in their understanding of the need for conservation. Further, when examining conservation outcomes, a number of participants referred back to this science-based understanding, as explained by a participant who said:

> While maybe a small part of a bigger solution, [conservation] is at least a positive approach to climate change. Maintaining a carbon sink, and so on. The effect that forests have on local and regional climates are important, as well as protecting where

> those trees grow, like preventing erosion. And again, we look at areas where deforestation has occurred and where landslides occur, and they follow that deforestation. This demonstrates that we can't go around and remove forests and hope to keep the environment the same. It just doesn't work that way. (volunteer 8)

By using Western scientific language to explain positive conservation outcomes, the volunteers exemplify the importance of this way of thinking to their individual and group conservation ethic.

The volunteers also judged appropriate conservation methods through this Western science-based lens. There was a general agreement that there should be limited human interference with the land, as explained by a participant who stated, "most of the time, [conservation] is to let natural succession take its course" (volunteer 3). However, many participants also noted that they believe that there are specific situations where intervention by the organization is necessary. The volunteers used terms like 'manage', 'control', and 'eliminate' to refer to this dimension of conservation, and polarize 'native' and 'invasive' species as good and bad, respectively. They spoke very candidly about removal of invasive species as being an important part of KLT's operations, with one participant expressing,

> One of the biggest things that they do on many of their properties is to eliminate, as much as they can, any non-native invasive species. We do tree planting, but one of the main things that comes up on the list in management is eliminate phragmites or buckthorn or other things. (volunteer 8)

Additionally, 'creation' and 'restoration' were touted as positive conservation work by KLT, with many participants highlighting the planting of tallgrass prairie plugs by the organization and the creation of habitat and wildlife corridors for species. By understanding the work of KLT

through these methods, it is clear that the volunteers subscribe to a strong Western science ethic. This understanding further highlights the priorities that the volunteers have in the work of KLT, and how they insert meaning into conservation.

5.2.2 Conservation and humans

The relationship between humans and conservation was often explored by participants in the semi-structured interviews. While not suggesting that humans should be excluded from all of KLT properties, the ways in which humans interact with these areas was a point of contention. This section will examine the general sentiment of the volunteers on humans and conservation and will delve into perspectives of human use of KLT properties.

The volunteers agreed that some human use of KLT properties is acceptable. However, they understood human use as being a trade off with fully attaining the ecological goals of conservation. When speaking about KLT properties, the volunteers expressed a dichotomy between human use and ecological goals, and often saw them as opposed. For example, when explaining the wishes of a landowner donating land to the organization, a participant explained that they may ask the landowner, “Do you want to allow people on it or do you want to protect it forever?” (volunteer 6). In addition to landowner wishes, the volunteers explained that KLT chooses the properties to open to the public based on logistics, ease of access, and ecological value. As explored in section 5.2.1, a strong Western science ethic drives how the volunteers understand conservation. This ethic further demonstrates how the volunteers understand the intersection between humans and conservation; as highlighted by a participant who said, “We have some land that we don’t allow the public to interact with, and that is because the public might upset the natural habitat of the land” (volunteer 7). By assuming that the public poses a

risk to the ecosystems of KLT properties, the volunteers imply that human use of the land is unaligned with the goals of conservation.

On the KLT properties where public use is permitted, the volunteers felt that certain use and activities are more aligned with their understanding of conservation than others. When describing how the public should interact with KLT properties, most of the volunteers highlighted activities like walking and snowshoeing. One participant explained this common sentiment as "support[ing] any sort of passive recreational activities on the properties" (volunteer 9), with another who highlighted that they are "the kinds of activities that are most in synch with what KLT would want in the conservation of these properties" (volunteer 1). Additionally, a significant majority of the volunteers were very clear in their lack of support of motorized vehicles on KLT properties. They cited the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), snowmobiles, and motorized dirt bikes as being high impact and damaging to the land in addition to focusing on the 'type' of people who partake in these activities, which will be explored further in section 5.3.

Finally, hunting and trapping were discussed. Many of the volunteers were in agreement that hunting, in general, is a sustainable practice. They thought of it as an activity with strong cultural and historical roots, with one participant explaining, "hunting is not something that is new to us. It is something that historically and from an evolutionary perspective has allowed us to evolve to the status that we are now" (volunteer 9). However, the volunteers expressed that this was not something they could imagine on KLT properties. For example, a participant suggested, "I don't think I would want to see hunters all over our land. I think it is incompatible use, with trails and people hiking" (volunteer 6). The sentiment among volunteers was not that hunting is unaligned with the ecological goals of conservation, but that it is incompatible with the use and activities that they value more on KLT properties. In particular, the volunteers cited

safety risks, lack of policing and control, property size, and felt that there is ample crown land that affords itself to hunting.

5.2.3 An attachment to Kawartha Land Trust's 'core mandate'

As discussed in section 5.1.3, the volunteers understand KLT as aligned with their personal and group values, thus reflecting their understandings of what conservation is and how it intersects with people. The volunteers appreciate the greater benefits of the community[-based] conservation approach that KLT is beginning to explore, but often referred to the 'core mandate' as being important to focus on. Participants highlight the importance of balancing priorities, finding mutual benefits, and staying focused on the 'core' or 'primary' mandate of the organization, which aligns with both the idea that human use of protected lands is a trade-off with ecological goals and that science should dictate the agenda.

Many volunteers voiced concern of various degrees about KLT's decision to begin incorporating community[-based] conservation methods into the organization's operations, specifically on public use of the KLT properties and public voices involved in guiding the mission. Volunteer 9 described this by stating, "It is that balance between [KLT] trying to get its name out there and become familiar to people who are not familiar with it, versus spending time on its primary mandate of acquisition and protection." While finding the ways in which KLT engages the public important to the sustainability of the organization, the volunteers were wary that this way of thinking may overshadow their beliefs and values of what conservation should be. There was a generally cautious tone among the volunteers, many describing 'grappling' with the idea of changes to the organization. This is detailed by a participant who expressed, "We are at a crossroads of what we do. Because I can sense in the board right now, there is some concern as we grow. It is natural that we morph somewhat into something gradually different" (volunteer

7). Coming to terms with the changes was a sentiment echoed by a number of the participants, but continued to be accompanied with the caveat, ‘there must be a balance’.

5.3 Conservation and the local community

In addition to articulations of how the volunteers understand conservation, the general intersection of humans and conservation and the role of KLT in conservation, this research is also focused on investigating how the volunteers discern the role of the local community - the public - in conservation. This theme will focus on ‘them’: the ‘outsider’ community who could potentially recreate on or adjacent to the KLT properties or who may have stakes on the land. This section will explore the perceived intent of behaviour and values of the ‘outsider’ community and will explain how the volunteers understand the organizational benefits and intrinsic benefit to the community. Throughout the following narrative, articulations of behavioural intent, possessiveness, conflicting values, not in my back yard (NIMBY)-ism, and leveraging community engagement will be dominant.

5.3.1 The risk of ‘them’ on the land

As discussed in section 5.2, the volunteers have a particular idea of what type of human use and activities are permissible and aligned with the Western scientific values of the participants, and consequently the organization. As such, the volunteers generally see humans and conservation as incompatible with attaining optimal, Western science-based conservation goals. However, they also believe that some human use of KLT properties is permissible and less impactful on the land, constructing a hierarchy of use and activities.

While citing this hierarchy as a solution for evaluating activities that are more or less aligned with the ecological integrity that they value in conserved land, the participants often

referred beyond the activity to the community who participates in it. When explaining their view of motorized vehicles on KLT properties, volunteer 9 highlighted,

> I would not support the use of ATVs or snowmobiles or things like that. Mostly because of the way that people use those for recreational activities are not using them to observe nature for its beauty. They are using it for the thrill of being on the vehicle itself… It is because the guys are out there having fun. They are not out there to protect the property.

This inference of intent behind behaviour was common among volunteers when speaking about use and activities on KLT land. They used a hierarchy of permissible use to infer the conservation values embedded in the community, and often observed the community as an individual entity rather than a group of independent and autonomous individuals. For example, a participant stated,

> I am a lot more comfortable with fishing, hunting and foraging than I am with recreational uses. I feel that in general, this is a general statement, if I see people fishing or hunting it appears to be a lot more in tune with conservation than people who are just there for a party. (volunteer 1)

Embedded in this statement is an assumption of the values and beliefs of all those who engage in certain recreational practices as being different than individuals who engage with the land in other recreational practices.

The volunteers were also wary that the community that live adjacent to the conserved land may have an engrained historical and possessive view on the KLT properties. Some participants speculated that this may lead these people to think that they could ‘do what they want’ on the land, even if these activities were unaligned with what the volunteers or organization felt conservation ‘should be’. Volunteer 8 explained this sentiment by stating,

> A lot of people particularly seem to have an engrained possessive nature of our properties even though they are not their own. And I find that many of the properties that the KLT has come in possession of, were used by and large illegally by people who were on ATVs and [snowmobiles]. And it is very difficult to try to control these people's use of the property when they have a certain possessive use of that property even though it is not theirs. [They say], "I have been doing this for years. Why can't I continue doing it, even though it is not owned by me?"

A number of examples were discussed by the volunteers, including individuals driving through KLT to access their own properties more easily, and hunting on the land that they have always hunted on. Conversely, a few volunteers highlighted that the public might be unaware or misled about what it means when a property is protected by KLT. They speculated that the community may be unintentionally using the land in impermissible ways, continuing what they have 'always done'. A participant posited this by explaining, "I think a difficulty is that some of those folks think that [KLT] properties are government owned, and they make the argument that they have been fishing there for years with their dad or grandpa" (volunteer 1). Although agreeing that it may be the lack of knowledge over purposeful disregard of the rules, this further amplifies that the volunteers perceived the possessive or historical attachment of community to the land as harmful to conservation.

5.3.2 The risk of 'them' and their perspectives

In addition to the risk of the community using KLT properties and the perceived intent behind their actions, the volunteers also highlight the risk of the community involvement in the organization's operations and decision making. They emphasize how engaging community can be difficult due to different perspectives than their own science-based perspective about how the

land should be used and explain how adjacent landowners can have a *not in my backyard* (NIMBY) attitude towards the operations of KLT and conservation as a general practice.

The volunteers expressed hesitation when wondering what community[-based] conservation may mean for the decisions of KLT. Involving 'outside' community would mean incorporating different perspectives and values into the organization. This common sentiment is supported by a participant who stated:

> Well, when you start dealing with a diverse community, there are risks. A big chunk of the community is farming community. And some of them will have a different philosophy about land use practices. And others are people moving in from the big city, and they are going to have a certain view of what things should be. And then there are other consumptive users that think it's probably been tied up. And so yeah, there are risks to this approach but it's because of the diversity of the community and it tends to be a conservative area, so they have certain philosophies about climate change and environmental use. (volunteer 4)

The participants worried that the perceived conflict in values between themselves and the local community may lead to undesirable changes; more voices involved in these decisions means having to accommodate those voices and opinions into practice. Beyond the concern of accommodating community voices as a threat to individual ideals, the volunteers discussed the more pragmatic implications to KLT operations, as one participant highlighted, "People see things differently, and I think that differing conservation ideas will give [KLT] more work" (volunteer 2). Similar to the ideas explored in section 5.2.3, many of the volunteers posited whether this type of work should be the focus of the organization and continued to emphasize the

'core mandate' and the importance of balancing priorities in line their individual conservation ideals.

In addition, the volunteers highlighted the contention between KLT and the neighbours or community living on adjacent properties. In particular, a theme of NIMBY-ism emerged, and the volunteers wondered if engaging adjacent landowners might be a nuisance for the operations of the organization. While they understood that consulting and building relationships with local people as being important for the sustainability of these properties, one participant explained, "It might create a bit of conflict and might be hard to make progress on certain issues" (volunteer 13). Some of the volunteers illustrated that adjacent landowners can be displeased with both the KLT infrastructure, and the fact that some properties are open to the public, thus attracting more people to their locality. This is exemplified by one participant who said, "There have been some adjacent landowners who have not been happy with where some of the [KLT] signs have been, traffic, and parking on the road" (volunteer 11). Another participant stated, "There are a lot of cottagers who don't like [KLT]. [When I was volunteering], I ran into a couple people who didn't really like the [organization], but they were more angry at the people who were using the land that they thought should be theirs" (volunteer 12). As will be explored in section 5.3.3, a small number volunteers could understand benefits to engaging adjacent landowners due to local kinship with the land, but continue to be wary about KLT spending too much of its time or resources on maintaining engagement.

5.3.3 What can be gained from this relationship?

While continuing to raise concerns about the risks of involving community in conservation work, some of the volunteers do understand the practical and positive impacts of community[-based] conservation to the organization and to build public support of conservation.

Among these articulations, the volunteers spoke about the public 'buying into' the mandate of KLT, the possibility of increased financial donations, and in acquiring land through donation. In other words, they see it as an opportunity to further their conservation values through public contributions to the organization or support of what KLT stands for.

Garnering buy-in from the community was prioritized highly by the volunteers when they spoke about the benefits of community[-based] conservation. They understood this as an all-encompassing positive result and one that can lead to a number of desirable reciprocal outcomes. One participant explained this by stating, "another benefit we are hoping for is once they are converted and see how wonderful this is, they won't misuse or abuse the land and perhaps they will even put a conservation easement on it to prevent damage to it" (volunteer 6). The term 'converted' was used by a few participants in this regard, inferring a hope for change or transition in values from being exposed to KLT through various engagement initiatives. One participant echoed the shift in values and behaviour with an example:

> What I have seen over the 4-5 years is that over time, the arc of better behaviour has gotten better. I don't see as much garbage left behind on Boyd Island, and I see more use on the Chase property of people using it to walk. (volunteer 1)

Further, the volunteers frequently but briefly discussed the intrinsic benefits of community[-based] conservation to the public. They overwhelmingly highlighted the value of 'nature connection' from being able to visit and passively recreate on the properties.

Unsurprisingly, the volunteers saw the engagement of community as a way for KLT to garner additional financial support from the community. A common sentiment was the feeling that the public perhaps doesn't know what the organization does, and thus if they learned about its mission and goals, they might donate money or land. A participant stated, "we need money in

order to accomplish our goal. The more we can educate the public, the more we can get some of their money to us" (volunteer 7). The potential of more monetary donations was echoed by most of the volunteers, along with the potential of land donations. When positing what represents success in community[-based] conservation, a participant highlighted, "in my mind, it would be a significantly higher [number] of properties donated or being protected with conservation easements" (volunteer 9).

While the idea of community[-based] conservation is often seen as a relationship of reciprocal benefits, the volunteers only mentioned one benefit that the community could provide to KLT that is not associated with community buy-in or support of the organization: the place-based relationship which local people might have with the land. This benefit, despite being mentioned by fewer than half of participants, is highlighted as a way that KLT can positively learn from the community and individuals who have a historical relationship with the land. One participant explained this,

> The one thing I have learned over time is that you will find no greater champion for a local environmental area than those who actually live there, enjoy them, and really understand them. Whether that is cottagers, permanent residents, First Nations – people who actually live in the area understand the area, have intergenerational attachments to it, they really get it. They can provide a group like KLT some really good insights into the history of the area into why certain parts are protected and certain parts aren't. Or [they] might have inside knowledge of key environmental features that an average person might not. Plus, they have a really strong connection to the land and therefore that really deeply rooted passion for protecting it. That is a really good thing. (volunteer 13)

Interestingly, the benefits of local, place-based knowledge were more likely to be mentioned by participants who did not fit in the homogenous demographic that is overrepresented in the volunteers interviewed for this study.

5.4 Volunteers and Kawartha Land Trust

To examine the role that volunteers have in the sustainability of the organization, the internal dynamics and structure were explored. To supplement the views of the volunteers, a few KLT staff (n=3) were also interviewed. This theme will focus on the function of volunteers in the organization and the implications of these organizational relationships. In particular, this section will focus on volunteers as being integral to KLT, as well as the challenges and opportunities the relationship offers for both the organization and its volunteers. The importance of non-profit governance, growth, work force, skills, conflict, misalignment, ownership, support, and intrapersonal development will be explored throughout this section.

5.4.1 Volunteers as integral to Kawartha Land Trust

As a non-profit organization, the paid staff and unpaid volunteers agree that KLT could not function without the use of volunteers. The volunteers make up the majority of the labour force in the organization and have various roles including advising on the board, on-the-ground work, and in administration of the organization. The staff highlighted their importance in keeping the organization grounded, in the sheer volume of work, and in more specific roles that drive the direction of KLT. Additionally, volunteer loyalty and ambassadorship is explored.

As stated in chapter 3.0, KLT is an organization that began as a group of volunteers and slowly expanded to a small group of paid employees. The group of staff interviewed for this study highlighted how this history and growth exemplify the importance of volunteers through keeping the organization grounded and providing the support as they grow. A staff participant

explained that many volunteers have been involved with KLT since before the organization had any paid staff, or before the current roster of paid staff:

> I think the volunteers here are still many volunteers that are with us before there were any staff. They have been here for over 15 years, since before we had paid employees. I think there is something really great about honouring that, they bring this accountability, this vision, and this path with it which is really interesting. (staff 1)

While KLT may go through changes in staff or strategic direction, the volunteers have remained a constant in the organization, keeping it focused on its work. The staff participants considered this to be beneficial as it keeps the original vision at the forefront of the organization, even if the methods or approach may change or evolve. Further, they highlighted how the capacity of the organization has expanded quickly, and unanimously agreed that this could not have happened without the dedication of volunteers. A staff participant described this, saying "[volunteers] are vitally important to KLT, particularly, KLT has gone through a pretty crazy growth trajectory in the last 20 years and I don't think we would have accomplished what we had, had we not had the volunteer base that we do" (staff 3). The staff explained the general support of the volunteers through the evolution of the organization using strong terms like 'fundamental', 'vital', and 'unmatchable', to describe the value of their volunteers to the organization.

In addition to the general support through time, the volunteers have been useful in very specific elements of the organization. The trustees, directors, committees, property stewards, student interns, in addition to casual roles, are exclusively populated by unpaid volunteers. As explored in section 5.1.2, many volunteers are current or former professionals and find fulfilment in their contribution to the organization. The staff echoed how beneficial the rich professional

background in the environmental field is to KLT. One staff participant spoke about this candidly, stating:

> A lot of [the volunteers] have tremendous expertise in a wide range of skills that really benefit what we do. So, in terms of when we go out and were doing inventories on property or assessing different sites, trying to determine how best to steward these properties, or even in terms of making applications to tax incentive programs or things like that. I think professionally, KLT has really benefited from these skills. (staff 3)

Thus, it is clear how important unpaid professional knowledge is to the function of the organization. In addition, the staff highlighted less obvious roles that the volunteers take on to support KLT. A staff participant exemplified these more administrative roles, stating, "[we have] lots of volunteers to help us with fundraising applications, article writing, or even volunteers helping us with looking over resumes to hire staff" (staff 2). The use of unpaid volunteers in important organizational capacities like securing funding and hiring staff demonstrates a level of trust that KLT has in its volunteers. Thus, the organization assumes a level of understanding and alignment that the volunteers have with the values, goals, and function of KLT. Further, it illustrates how volunteers can shape the organization's mission through important decision making and determining how to represent the organization to the public.

The volunteers also represent the organization in a less formal regard. When speaking about KLT, the volunteers overwhelmingly referred to the organization as 'we', instead of 'they'. This signifies a strong sense of ownership to the organization and its goals, and represents a responsibility and accountability to upholding the values and mission. The staff also highlighted how the volunteers represent the organization to other communities, as explained by staff 2 who said,

> We also have volunteers who are part of different community groups, so they spread the word when we have events and stuff and they get their friends to come out. We have volunteers who act as ambassadors of KLT whenever they're out in the public or at different events, they can talk about how they're part of the organization. Our volunteers represent us so well.

The staff and volunteers alike emphasized how informal interactions with the community can be influential in engagement and garnering support, and thus using the volunteers as public ambassadors can be beneficial to the overall goals of the organization.

5.4.2 Organizational relationship challenges

As stated in section 5.1.3, the volunteers believe that their values are aligned with each other and with KLT. There is a generally respectful and collaborative reciprocal relationship between the organization and the volunteers. However, conflict and interpersonal challenges are inevitable in working relationships. Both the staff and the volunteers highlighted how misalignment of ideas about conservation and environmental values can be difficult to navigate. In an organization largely populated by volunteers, conflict or disagreements could have a significant impact on the function or operations.

Although there is a general sentiment of aligned values and like-minded people within the organization, the staff pointed to contentions caused by different internal understandings of what conservation ‘should be’. A staff participant explained, “there are people involved in our organization and land trusts in Ontario and everywhere in conservation that think the core mandate is to create little wildernesses that exclude humans, and their negative influence” (staff 1). These comments highlight an awareness of different perspectives within the organization. Another staff participant stressed how this misalignment may impact opinions on how the

organization should function. They emphasized that volunteers, especially who have been with the organization for some time are sensitive to changes, and "we know that when we are trying to change or shift as an organization and do different things, that there might be some resistance and a little bit of a sense of entitlement, because there is that overwhelming amount of ownership" (staff 2).

This resistance to change by the volunteer force was echoed by the staff as being prominent in discussions, but they did not go as far as saying it impacts on the ground operations, and thus it may not have a huge impact on the current function or operations of KLT.

There were also a number of examples of internal strife raised by the volunteers. In particular, the volunteers expressed how other volunteers may have different ideas of how KLT should function and what the organization should focus on, a sentiment echoed by the staff participants. One volunteer participant suggested,

> Some of our board would take exception with the statement 'for the public's enjoyment'. And they would say, "no we protect land to protect land, and to protect its natural benefits for wildlife, and for biodiversity. All of our land isn't for public consumption! (volunteer 7)

This quote indicates further misalignment of values even among volunteers on the board in what they think conservation 'should be'. Although emphasizing that an aspect of KLT that they enjoy is working with like-minded people with aligned values, many of the volunteer participants pointed to instances of misalignment in understandings. More specific examples of how differing opinions can be impactful on interpersonal relationships and organizational functioning were highlighted by volunteers. A number of participants explained a contention between volunteers on decisions on *Lymantria dispar,* a moth species that caused severe damage to Ontario trees in

2021. Distinct groups of volunteers had differing opinions on the recommendations that should be given to KLT regarding the management of the moth, with a participant explaining, “I was a little ticked off” (volunteer 8).

5.5 Summary

This chapter presented the results of the qualitative research employed for this study. Using thematic analysis, four major themes emerged, illuminating how volunteers involved with KLT understand and construct the relationship between community and conservation, and the impact of volunteers on the organization’s mission and operations. The findings indicate that a community of similar individuals with aligned values volunteer with KLT and highlight a particular comfort in maintaining this status quo. A similar way of thinking about conservation through a Western-science lens and with humans as a trade-off with attaining ecological goals was present among the volunteer participants, leading to a concern about community[-based] conservation practices. Finally, the KLT staff participants elucidated the importance of volunteers in the organizational mission and operations.

Chapter 6

Discussion and conclusions

To fully ground the following discussion and conclusions, it is important to reflect back to the question leading this study. This qualitative community-based case study was conducted to understand the ways in which volunteers involved in a local land trust construct and understand conservation and its relationship with community. Specifically, the objectives central to this thesis are to a) explore what drives volunteers to engage with Kawartha Land Trust (KLT), b) understand the perspectives of volunteers regarding land conservation and community, and c) examine the role that volunteers have in the sustainability of the organization. The findings that emerged from the thematic analysis indicate that the volunteers involved in this organization are generally homogenous in their demographics, leading to an overwhelmingly aligned understanding of what conservation *should be* and how the community *should be* engaged. Due to their power within the organizational governance structure and their necessity in operations, the volunteers' uniform understanding of the relationship between humans and the land may lead to limits on imagining how community[-based] conservation can be deployed.

This chapter is structured into four sections, helping to explain the research findings and highlighting the impact and limitations of this study. I begin by reflecting upon how the central objectives of this thesis are fulfilled by the research findings, and the ways in which the literature supports or is extended by this research. Next, the impact of this study will be understood by describing how the findings contribute to the literature and to the organization, emphasizing practical recommendations to KLT. To develop the analysis, the limitations and future directions of the research will be critically reflected upon. Finally, this thesis will conclude by offering some final thoughts on community and conservation.

6.1 Summary of findings and thesis objectives

The following section will closely examine the central objectives of this thesis alongside the research findings and will use existing literature to highlight the ways in which this work contributes to the greater idea of community and conservation. Additionally, this section will highlight how the research findings extend or challenge previous work in this field.

6.1.1 To explore what drives volunteers to engage with Kawartha Land Trust

When explaining why they decided to engage in volunteer work with KLT, the participants involved in this study often referred to important dimensions of their individual and group identities. The volunteers find meaning in this work by operationalizing their values in an organization and with a group that they understand to share these core beliefs.

Shared characteristics that comprise individual identities, such as a connection with nature developed as a child, a concern for the environment, and a desire for inclusion in a like-minded community, were prominent among the volunteers. When asked to describe a favourite memory they had in nature, nearly all volunteers referred to a childhood experience. Unsurprisingly, it has been found that childhood nature experiences and exposure to pro-environmental norms help to shape adult environmental self-identity (Molinario et al., 2020). The early experiences highlighted by many of the participants could be formative in developing the aligned identities of the volunteer group.

Additionally, similarities in the participants' professional background, education, and occupation, being overwhelmingly from the environmental sector, highly educated, and retired, were apparent in the interviews and supported by the data that emerged from the demographic questionnaires. The characteristics of the volunteers who were involved in this study is not a novel finding and supports the body of literature on 'who' volunteers in the environmental

sector. Individuals who volunteer in the environmental sector have been found to be middle-aged or older adults (i.e. 40-70) (Winch et al., 2020) and highly educated (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Tang, 2006). The professional sector of volunteers involved in conservation, however, has not been explicitly studied. While volunteering in the professional sector to which you are currently or formerly employed makes sense based on comfort and expertise, a study (Caissie & Halpenny, 2003) that evaluated the motivations of volunteers involved in Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC) and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON) demonstrate more variability in the professions of those involved than the findings outlined here. Most of volunteer participants in this study were found to be currently or formerly employed in the environmental sector, which may be partially explained by the context in which the research was conducted. KLT is uniquely situated in The Kawarthas, home to institutions like Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources, and Forestry (formerly and commonly called the Ministry of Natural Resources, or 'the MNR'), Trent University, and Fleming College. While it is not surprising that current or former employees of these institutions choose to be involved with KLT, it is noteworthy that they make up a significant proportion of the volunteers, bringing with them a particular way of thinking and acting on conservation ideals.

The characteristics highlighted above were discussed as important dimensions of individual identities and were described as the traits that inspired engagement in conservation as a general practice and idea. However, The Kawarthas is home to a number of different conservation organizations; why is it that they chose KLT? The answer is embedded in the idea of perceived alignment. That is, the volunteer participants believe that others in the volunteer group, and in the organization as a whole, carry analogous values based on the identities they present to one another.

The first instance of perceived alignment characterized by the participants was in the recruitment process. The informal recruitment process for other volunteers was repeatedly described as ‘knowing someone’, often from professional circles, or the understanding that in general, a high proportion of KLT volunteers had a similar professional background. The recruitment process led many participants to believe that other volunteers carried similar values to them, which is unsurprising and aligned with the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) hypothesis suggesting that organizations tend toward uniformity in individuals (Schneider, 1987). While some of the volunteers were reflective about how this may deter individuals who come from different backgrounds, they generally understood the homogeneity of the volunteer group as favourable. The appreciation of like-minded people volunteering with the organization was a common sentiment and is supported by literature on environmental volunteerism which has highlighted social motivators as more salient than care for the environment alone (Asah & Blahna, 2013). In fact, many of the volunteers explained how social events were a highlight of their volunteer experience and something that they missed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The assumptions made about group values strengthen and reinforce the individual values of volunteers in a social group (Bouman et al., 2020), therefore it becomes a comfortable place to exist with a low risk of identities being challenged. The affirmation of individual identity is bi-directionally relational to a strong group identity (Bouman et al., 2020; Samuelson et al., 2003), and thus acts as a positive feedback loop system: individual identities collectively make the group identity, and the group identity strengthens and shapes individual identities. The research presented here, in addition to existing literature, demonstrate that this system may be the default of human resources in an organization when the network is not intentionally designed to be plural.

In addition to perceived alignment with other volunteers in the organization, the findings demonstrate that perceived alignment with KLT's mission was an important dimension to volunteer engagement. Many of the volunteer participants highlighted that the organization reflected their existing conservation values, and therefore were happy with the current operations. However, as Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) note, this may be more perception than reality. They found that volunteers had different beliefs about the mission of the organization that they studied than did the paid staff (Kruetzer & Jäger, 2011). As will be explored later, the increasingly pluralistic community[-based] approach that the organization is moving towards challenges the alignment of volunteers to KLT, as the participants in the volunteer group feel that the organization should focus on the 'core' mandate of conservation for ecological integrity. Thus, the findings of this study support and extend existing literature by demonstrating that (mis)alignment in terms of organizational vision is both fluid and dynamic; what was once clear agreement can change as the organization matures and grows, and as the context and opportunities change.

While the first objective of this research was to explore what drives the current volunteers to engage with KLT, it is also important to wonder who is not represented in or engaged by the organization and why. The findings outlined above demonstrate individuals volunteer in conservation because they feel it is a way to operationalize their values and identity meaningfully and they volunteer specifically with KLT due to the perception of shared values among others and the organization as a whole. There is clear comfort and preference for volunteers to reproduce themselves in recruitment, thus risking the possibility of leaving other important stakeholders behind. What volunteers understand as a strength can also be understood as a weakness when posing the difficult questions of how other people are intentionally excluded or

discouraged from participating. The overwhelming homogeneity of the volunteers in this study leads to equally homogenous understandings of the land and the relationship between community and conservation. The following subsection will dissect these understandings and the implications of a one-dimensional and unchallenged construction of what conservation is and what it could be.

6.1.2 To understand the perspectives of volunteers regarding land conservation and community

The next objective of this research is to understand the ways in which the volunteers involved in KLT understand the idea, methods, and goals of conservation and how the inclusion of community works into this understanding. As noted in chapter 3, the organization received a significant grant to expand their engagement of the community using a new community[-based] conservation approach, which represents a considerable departure from the status quo for KLT. The volunteers are significant and important actors within the organization in both governance and operations, so it is important to discern how they believe the community can play a role in conservation theory and practice. This section will highlight how the volunteer participants embedded their understandings in Western science to justify how they understand conservation and the inclusion (and limits to that inclusion) of community.

As discussed previously, the volunteers indicated that they are proud of the fact that KLT is dense with professionals from the environmental sector in The Kawarthas. The findings illustrate that these professionals bring a strong Western science ethic to the organization, studded with the use of technical language to describe the land.

However, Western science isn't a monolith; its emphases and perspectives change through time (Wallington et al., 2005). For example, articulations in ecological sciences have

evolved from an early emphasis on equilibrium characterized by ‘balance of nature’, to ecological integrity characterized by ‘wholeness’ and ‘naturalness’ (Rohwer & Marris, 2021). More recent ecological paradigms understand ecosystems as dynamic, non-static systems (Wallington et al., 2005). I found that the volunteers use a hybrid of these ecological views – both integrity and dynamism – to understand conservation. However, this hybrid is skewed towards the integrity. This finding is supported by Wallington and colleagues (2005) who contend that there is a time-lag in adopting the idea of ecosystems as dynamic systems into contemporary public discussions, and Mace (2014) who suggests that modern conservation efforts use a combination of the conservation frames that have been dominant through time (nature for itself, nature despite people, nature for people, and people and nature). However, Wallington and colleagues (2005) suggest that the delay in adopting a full understanding of ecosystems as dynamic may be more prominent in senior conservation managers as they were trained in a time when equilibrium thinking was more prevalent.

The volunteers use their strong attachment to this way of thinking about ideal ecosystems to justify how they understand conservation and consequently how they believe humans should interact with the land. Words like ‘natural’ in addition to other technical terms, were often used by the participants as a shorthand for the loaded concept of ecological integrity (Rohwer & Marris, 2021; Wallington et al., 2005). It is a term that is prominent in the Canada National Parks Act and, more relevant to this discussion, in the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act which guides sectors like the MNR. The use of descriptors like ‘natural’ is therefore unsurprising due to the high proportion of volunteers who were previously employed in environmental programs within the civil service, which use the ecological integrity framework. The idea of ecological integrity, now dated, understands humans as inherently threatening to the ecological

processes and thus damaging to the environment, (Rohwer & Marris, 2021), and recognizes human use of the land as a trade-off with attaining ecological goals. While it has been abandoned by large swathes of ecologists, the idea of ecological integrity still holds sway. This finding supports previous research that indicated that individuals involved in conservation use the 'nature despite people' framing when describing conservation (Engen et al., 2019) and shores up the human-nature divide (Cronon, 1996). While the volunteers would sometimes refute the idea that they were 'preservationists', the findings indicate a (sometimes unstated) preference for fortress-type conservation.

The ways in which an attachment to older ecological principles guides the volunteers in their understandings of the land has implications for how they imagine incorporating the community into on-the-ground conservation. While agreeing that some engagement with the community is important for increased support, both financially and in terms of growing awareness of the organization's mission, the volunteers feel that public use of the land is a direct trade-off with their conservation goals. Within this trade-off, a hierarchy was constructed to evaluate the use and activities that could be done on KLT land: passive recreation like walking was overwhelmingly supported, hunting was backed as a generally sustainable practice but impractical on the land protected by the organization (due to the preference of passive recreation), and the use of motorized vehicles such as ATVs and snowmobiles was adamantly opposed. While justifying this hierarchy in the name of science, the volunteers often would go beyond the actual activity to explaining the spectrum of permissibility based on the individuals who engage or participate in it. By making inferences about the group-specific values and beliefs of the people who passively recreate, who hunt, or who recreate using motorized vehicles, the

volunteers decide who should or should not be allowed on KLT properties based on perceived alignment of values.

Previous literature has shown that members of the public, like landowners and farmers, use a 'humans and nature' framing to understand conservation (Engen et al., 2019). These attitudes and perceptions of individuals are influenced by a wide array of social representations (Buijis et al., 2008), human cognitions (Buijis, 2009; Schultz, 2000), and ethical and temporal trade-offs (Loring & Hinzman, 2018). The findings in this study indicate that when evaluating individuals with different understandings and attitudes towards the protection of land and conservation, the volunteers reduce this social construction to a single causal relationship (i.e. 'the people who snowmobile are only here to recreate' or 'the people who hunt generally care about the animals'), rather than the layered cognitions proposed by scholars in the field. A small number of the volunteers mentioned the place-based relationship that members of the public may have with the land. Tuan (1977) defines place as "…space infused with meaning" (35): the emotions and connection an individual feels in relation to specific pieces of the built, natural, or social environment. A sense of place is developed by local people who inhabit an area and by individuals who visit an area frequently (Klanicka et al., 2006), and positively predicts location-specific, pro-environmental behaviours (Halpenny, 2010). As many of the volunteers discounted this important dimension of individuals who may recreate on KLT lands, they risk limiting how they could imagine the community being positively incorporated into organizational operations.

As explored in section 2.2.4, community[-based] conservation involves protecting land "by, for, and with community" (Western & Wright, 1994 p. 7). Although it is context-specific and place-based (MacDonald, 2003; Mahahjan et al., 2020), it is characterized by power decentralization through involving the community in decision making. KLT defines

community[-based] conservation for their organization as the recognition that conservation work has a role to play in supporting the wider community (email communication). They identify that certain practices fit within this framework, like supporting landowners stewarding their own land, maintaining trails for public low-impact access, and collaborating with other local organizations (email communication). While the community[-based] conservation described by the organization encompasses parts of the term as defined by the literature, the key characteristic of decentralized decision-making power to the community is not included in KLT's approach. Therefore, this operational move resembles community participation in conservation, a broader term that addresses smaller steps in the community engagement process (Pretty & Smith, 2004). Specifically, KLT's vision for community[-based] conservation is akin to passive participation, which is characterized by the engagement of community through outreach or education once decisions have been made by the organization (Rinkus et al., 2016).

Even though the community[-based] conservation described by KLT does not explicitly involve the community in decision making, the volunteers worry about 'outsider' voices shepherding the organization into a direction that does not align with their conservation values. Specifically, they worry that adopting a community[-based] approach would compromise the 'primary mandate' of the organization, and would lead to the incorporation of voices that are not necessarily akin with their own. Thus, the very concept of community[-based] conservation threatens their current understanding of what conservation is, or what it could be.

The Western science paradigm continued to be prominent in discourse around the inclusion of the community into KLT decision making. As the volunteers understand the goals, methods, and outcomes through an ecological integrity lens, they found it difficult to discern how understandings based on other paradigms could be as compelling. The authority of Western

science over the public is well studied. The majority of Canadians trust science (Wellcome Global Monitor, 2020), and define it as an abstract method, a cultural location, and a form of knowledge (Gauchat, 2012). As it is difficult for the public to understand basic scientific concepts (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014), individuals trained in science are entrusted to incorporate their expertise into conservation practices (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009). The findings of this study illustrate that members of the public who are not part of this small science community are interpreted by the volunteers of having opinions on conservation which are less well informed, and hence less valid. The internal gratification of being led by Western science was pervasive among the volunteers due to their understanding of the authority of this ontology; they held a complex of the superiority of Western science over other ways of thinking. This research therefore supports Asah and Blahna's (2013) findings that the weight of social motivators, like defending and enhancing one's ego, motivates volunteers' engagement in environmental work, like conservation.

6.1.3 To examine the role of volunteers in the sustainability of the organization.

To understand the role of volunteers in the organization, a few staff members (n=3) were also interviewed. As the number of paid staff members in the organization is still quite small (10 full-time staff members), the volunteers make up a significant proportion of KLT's capacity. Understanding the role and importance of volunteers in the organization is useful to discern the impact of their understanding of conservation, and potential misalignments or disagreements could have on the operations of KLT.

Due to the governance structure of land trusts and the history of conservation in Canada, a number of stakeholders[9] are important to consider when understanding the operational

[9] I also identify Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders instead of stakeholders, following the work of Reed et al., (2022).

decisions of the organization at any time (Bastian et al., 2017; Logan & Wekerle, 2008; Merenlender et al., 2004). Often, land trusts begin as exclusively volunteer-run entities and eventually expand to a small pool of paid staff (Brewer, 1999). However, volunteers continue to occupy important mission and operational jobs within the organization (Hanson & Filax, 2009). The findings in this research support previous studies, demonstrating the importance of volunteers in all aspects of governance and operations, and provides concrete examples of these vital, organization-shaping jobs. The KLT staff spoke of the volunteers in high regard, illustrated how the growth trajectory of the organization would not be possible without the dedication of this group, explained how the volunteers keep the organization accountable to its original vision, and highlighted how the professional skills of their volunteers cannot be matched.

The trust that KLT has in their volunteers is made evident by two distinct functions that are performed with the help of volunteers: employee hiring and public communications. Where KLT believes the volunteers are aligned ambassadors of the organization and entrusts them to represent the vision in hiring and external relations, the usefulness of volunteers in this regard could change if they had a different understanding or acceptance of organizational operations. As indicated in section 6.1.2, the volunteers are generally in disagreement about KLT adopting a more pluralistic community[-based] approach, suggesting distinct differences between the staff and volunteers about direction of their organization. These differences have the potential to lead to interpersonal conflict within the organization (Kreutezer & Jäger, 2011), which can be represented by simply exploring how different actors define a word like ‘conservation’ (Crow & Baysha, 2013).

Another dynamic that emerged with the findings of this research is the power that volunteers have over KLT. Due to the fact that volunteers populate the board of directors, a

power dynamic is not overly surprising. However, as outlined in chapter 3.0, KLT uses a distinct and uncommon[10] governance system to guide the organization. The internal structures of this governance means that despite the board of directors being the only group that has formal power over the organization, members of the stewardship committee, the securement committee, and the development committee have an informal power over the board of directors due to their role as the 'expert'. While an analysis and critique of the structural governance of KLT is not the focus of this work, this finding does emphasize the power that volunteers have over the organization and the risk of differences in perspectives leading to potential misalignment.

Beyond this, the staff members expressed how the volunteers were essential for organizational operations. The retention of their support is vital for survival and success of KLT. As such, the production of agreeable outcomes is important for the organization to consider as they move forward (stakeholder theory; Freeman, 1984). As the volunteers described 'grappling' with the changes in the organization, it is clear that they do not wholly agree with or understand the current trajectory of operations. In an organization where volunteers wield an uncommon power, evident by the roles they are assigned to, the governance structure, and the expectation of representing the organization to the public, the understanding of misalignments in vision is imperative for avoiding larger conflict (Kreutezer & Jäger, 2011). Even though neither the staff nor the volunteers pointed to any large or specific conflicts that have emerged, the possibility of the current misalignment leading to future conflict is prominent. While the stakeholder relationship between land trust and volunteers has not been explored, López-Cabrera and

[10] As far as I know, this is an uncommon practice in land trusts (at least in Ontario). I identified all land trusts that are members and associates of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA; n=40) and searched through their websites to understand the governance structure of each organization. Only one land trust (Thunder Bay Field Naturalists) is structured to have non-director members on committees which advise the board of directors. While there might be limitations on the governance innerworkings that is publicly available on the internet, this is the only access I had to the information.

colleagues (2020) found that when conflicts do arise in organizations that rely heavily on unpaid volunteers, the volunteer group's rights supersede the paid staff's as they are protected by organizational vision (as a non-profit organizations are largely reliant on volunteer labour), values, and known risk of the power of stakeholder theory.

As indicated in the research findings, the volunteers are demographically homogeneous and congruent in how they understand the goals, methods, and outcomes of conservation. As a result, a dichotomy emerges between the volunteers and the organization. While increased diversity within a group can lead to unfavourable interpersonal circumstances like task conflict (Jehn et al., 1999), it has been found that diverse groups stimulate creativity and divergent thought, leading to organizational innovation (De Dreu & West, 2001). Notably, this is a characteristic emphasized in KLT's values (Kawartha Land Trust, 2022). Different perspectives, therefore, may lead to the emergence of new organizational difficulties but could ultimately guide the volunteer group as a whole into a more imaginative direction, thus widening group acceptance of the more pluralistic community[-based] conservation methods.

6.2 Contributions

6.2.1 Conceptual contributions

The findings that have emerged from this study contribute to the literature by supporting and extending previous research while also offering novel findings to concepts like community[-based] conservation, land trusts, and environmental volunteers. Specifically, the findings of this study empirically contribute to bodies of work attempting to understand who volunteers in conservation and why, and conceptually contribute to emerging fields that focus on the relationships between community and conservation, and between land trusts and volunteers.

While previous studies have investigated singular relationships in the demographics of individuals who volunteer in conservation or how environmental volunteers understand and frame conservation, this research is novel in how it connects the two variables. A significant finding, then, is that a homogenous demographic of people volunteer in conservation leads to a homogenous understanding of the goals and methods of conservation. This finding has implications on how organizations make decisions about recruitment, if they are looking for a balanced, innovative, and pluralistic perspective on operations.

This study also contributes to the growing body of research on community[-based] conservation and frames that individuals use to understand conservation. While previous literature has studied how human understandings and values on the land have influenced conservation practices through time, the findings presented here provide a snapshot of how individuals involved in a land trust contemporarily frame conservation. Additionally, as community[-based] conservation becomes an increasingly trusted practice of caring for the land, this research presents an example of how important stakeholders in a land trust may be resistant to this model, and the reasons for this.

Finally, this study provides novel insights into the relationship between volunteers and land trusts. While the literature is dense with the stakeholder relationship between land trusts and landowners, and land trusts and government, the influence of volunteers on these land trust organizations had not been examined. Therefore, the substantial power of volunteers on KLT identified in this study will contribute to the body of research that explores the stakeholder relationships of land trusts.

6.2.3 Practical and organizational

As this research is community-based and context specific, a major contribution is to disseminate the findings to KLT through a series of recommendations. The following subsection will outline the strategies that KLT can use to ensure their organization continues to move forward in an inclusive, pluralistic, and sustainable way. These recommendations will be sent to KLT following the completion of the study.

a) *To have a more nuanced understanding of what community[-based] conservation can look like.*

The present community[-based] conservation model that KLT is implementing does not reflect the scholarly and practical definition of the model. As such, the widely supported benefits of community[-based] conservation within the literature may not be relevant to the model proposed by KLT. Based on a review of the literature, and an understanding of the work of the organization, it is likely the model used more closely resembles passive community participation in conservation, which has not demonstrated the same positive social and ecological outcomes that community[-based] conservation has (O'Riordan & Stoll-Kleeman, 2002). Having a more nuanced understanding of what community conservation can look like (and its broader benefits) and implementing changes would allow the organization to move forward in a sustainable way.

Community[-based] conservation is a model that protects the land "by, for, and with community" (Western & Wright, 1994 p. 7). While investigating other examples of community[-based] conservation could be helpful in nuancing how KLT implements this model, it is inherently place-based and context-specific. As such, deep consultation with Indigenous communities, local settler communities, and local institutions would be a good start. Understanding how these distinct and interwoven groups understand the benefits, risks, and

methods of conservation is important for the organization to develop a profile of the community. However, simple consultation is not enough for community[-based] conservation. Thinking about each facet of this definition (*by, for, with*) in relation to the operations of KLT is key in developing this approach. While there is not a distinct set of guidelines in integrating a community[-based] conservation model into organization operations, Berkes (2007) developed a set of diagnostic questions that an organization could work through when building a community[-based] approach to conservation, which include questions like "does the project foster the development of different skills among stakeholders, particularly for those stakeholders who have usually been excluded or marginalized?" (Berkes, 2007 p. 15191), "does the project accommodate local, traditional or [I]ndigenous knowledge?", (Berkes, 2007 p. 15191) and "does the project allow for pluralism by recognizing a diversity of perspectives?" (Berkes, 2007 p. 15191), to name a few. In particular, exploring ways in which the organization could implement the decentralization of decision-making to the community would be important. When examining Pretty's (1994) participation in development continuum, *interactive participation* or *self-mobilization* could be used with the community to implement community[-based] conservation. This will be explored with additional depth below.

If the KLT is not currently interested in adopting the holistic nature of community conservation, they might consider using different language to describe the model that they wish to employ, perhaps community engagement or community participation.

b) To acknowledge the trade-offs of the community[-based] conservation approach.

Including community in conservation has inherent trade-offs, especially when understanding conservation with a Western science lens. However, if KLT's goal is to facilitate a culture of nature, this trade-off must be accepted and embraced. Research on conservation through history

has demonstrated that keeping people out of protected areas, or restricting them to prescribed ways to engage with the land, has led to unfavourable outcomes like strengthening the human-nature dichotomy. To work in the best interest of the community, and with a more holistic view on environmental outcomes, making space for a place-based relationship with the land would be an important direction for the organization to work toward.

As such, a recommendation emerging from this research is for the organization to find ways to move beyond the hierarchy of preferences for 'passive' recreation and continue to look for opportunities for individuals and groups to recreate (or more broadly, use the land) in a way that can foster the development of place connection and deepen their relationship to the land. As this would be a significant shift for the organization, engaging stakeholder groups like volunteers through workshops and community building with other actor groups would be vital; simply informing them about the importance would be unproductive.

Further, Berkes (2007) highlights how, despite community[-based] conservation being used as an approach to address sustainable development, there is little shared language or concepts between conservation practitioners and development practitioners. Deep engagement of practitioners from a number of different fields in developing and implementing a community[-based] conservation model would be useful in conceptualizing and understanding how benefits can be co-constructed to meet environmental and social goals.

c) To design a workshop for volunteers on community[-based] conservation.

Attending to the recommendations listed above will take significant effort by the organization's paid staff. However, as the volunteers have significant roles in both the mission and operations of KLT, it is important that they are truly informed about the principles and values underpinning community[-based] conservation.

The findings illustrate that the volunteers do not fully understand the magnitude of benefits that community[-based] conservation can yield. As such, it is understandable that there might be some hesitation to the practice. If KLT is to move forward, including more pluralistic methods into their conservation work, it is vital to put in the work of educating the volunteers on what community[-based] conservation is, and what it could look like. Specifically, the organization could include examples of organizations that have successfully implemented community[-based] conservation. Additionally, as it is clear that the volunteers are driven by research, it is important that KLT use available studies on the recorded social and environmental benefits of the practice.

d) To continue to deepen engagement with Indigenous communities and Indigenous ways of knowing.

KLT is located within Treaty 20 Michi Saggiig, and in the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishnaabeg and Chippewa Nations. It is impossible to have discussions about the land in settler-defined Canada without acknowledging Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous ways of knowing, and the harm that colonialism and colonial structures have had on these nations and consequently the land.

To move beyond colonial understandings of conservation, it is imperative to engage Indigenous Peoples to understand how conservation work can move the process of reconciliation forward. Even without employing a comprehensive community[-based] conservation approach (outlined in recommendation a), the involvement and sharing of decision-making power to Indigenous communities needs to be prioritized. In the context of KLT, the engagement of Curve Lake First Nation and Hiawatha First Nation is important in the consultation process. Specifically, the development of a community advisory committee that includes membership from these nations and other important community members ensures that the work that KLT is

doing is grounded and based in community. As KLT is already doing some consultation and collaboration, the recommendation is to continue this work and be intentional with how they are engaging this community.

An additional recommendation is for KLT to consider developing an area of Indigenous-led conservation. This would involve ceding decision-making power to Indigenous Peoples for the management or protection of an area. While Indigenous-led conservation would be a significant departure from the top-down approach that KLT currently employs, it would be an important step in the decolonization of conservation and would also demonstrate a deep commitment to community[-based] conservation rooted in reconciliation.

e) To design the system of volunteers to be plural.

A major finding emerging from this research is that the homogeneity of volunteers involved in KLT has led to a homogenous understanding of community and conservation. It is very important that the organization moves toward intentionally designing their volunteer recruitment, assignments, and discussions to be plural; the system default is engaging and celebrating a community of similar people. As the homogeneity of volunteers has the power to deter others, an initial effort in constructing a system that attracts and retains a diverse group would eventually lead to a positive feedback loop and a more natural plural structure.

While the value of the involvement of environmental professionals is crucial for the mobilization of field-specific knowledge in the organization, individuals from other fields or backgrounds should be equally prioritized for the balance they will bring to discussions around perceptions, goals, and methods of conservation. Discussions with volunteers must be designed to value all opinions evenly, and the field-specific professionals should not always dominate the

decision-making; it is important for all individuals involved in the organization to recognize conservation as an intersectional issue with collaborative solutions.

Engaging diverse individuals in volunteering for KLT has the potential to move the organization in a direction where groups of stakeholders are able to imagine different ways of conservation beyond current models, and more broadly different human-nonhuman relationality. Through a negotiation of values, diverse groups will be able to design and implement balanced ways of doing conservation. As innovation is a value of KLT (Kawartha Land Trust, 2022) and diversity leads to innovation (De Dreu & West, 2001), this recommendation is exciting as it can lead to multiple positive outcomes in the organization's operations.

To design a system of plurality, a recruitment strategy which prioritizes diversity must be developed. Specifically, the processes should appeal to communities that may not traditionally engage with conservation. KLT might consider approaching groups like Curve Lake First Nations, Hiawatha First Nation, the Kawartha Lakes Snowmobile Club, the Association of Stony Lake Cottagers, the New Canadian Centre, Community Race Relations Committee of Peterborough, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, or the Peterborough Agricultural RoundTable, to name a few. The inclusion of individuals in organizational governance, who may not have a traditional conservation background but who will bring a diverse perspective of land-based issues, is important to the flourishing of KLT.

f) To continue intentionally planning social events for volunteers.

The social dimensions of environmental volunteer work like conservation on volunteer engagement is apparent from the literature (ex. Asah and Blahna, 2013) and from the interviews conducted for this study. To continue facilitating a positive volunteer culture and therefore the retention of volunteers, these social events are paramount. Additionally, if KLT is to engage

more diverse volunteers, the social events could be a useful tool to build community through more informal social interaction. As the interviews for this study were conducted in the 2021, many of the social events had been halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. If not already done, a recommendation emerging from this research is to reinstate these events in a safe and fun way.

g) To create a 'volunteer coordinator' position.

Due to the value of volunteers in KLT for both missions and operations, a full-time position which focuses on the coordination, engagement, and recruitment design of volunteers should be considered. The recommendations outlined in this subsection, specifically focused on volunteers involved in the organization, will take significant and intentional effort and financial investment which may extend beyond the scope of currently employed or volunteer positions. As the management of volunteers in KLT is currently done by a number of different staff positions, creating a single position might be useful in streamlining and organizing volunteers.

In addition to the volunteer recommendations listed, the volunteer coordinator could also work to better define the distinction between formal and informal volunteers within the organization, could streamline volunteer onboarding material, and create unification among volunteers who may differ in opinions of operational vision or methods (through education and outreach, as outlined in recommendation c).

6.3 Critical reflection

The following section will provide a critical reflection on the limitations and further directions of this research. While a number of important contributions emerged, it is equally important to evaluate the limitations of the study and opportunities for further research. Acknowledging this will guide subsequent research endeavours of scholars studying community and conservation.

6.3.1 Limitations of research

Throughout the research process, a number of limitations and constraints emerged. These limitations are important to consider when evaluating the conclusions of this thesis and have arisen from the nature of the field of study, working with a community organization, and conducting research during a global pandemic. This subsection will address challenges in the conceptualization, in the data collection, and in the application of the research findings.

The research question for this study emerged in collaboration with KLT. The organization had been working to develop a community[-based] conservation initiative and were curious how a major stakeholder group, the volunteers, felt about these changes. While the research aimed to address organizational inquiry through community-based research, it was largely exploratory due to the nature of volunteers in land trusts being an under-studied phenomenon in the literature. As such, there is a risk that the findings presented do not attend to calls for additional research or that the findings lack relevance to larger discussions in the field.

The most significant limitations to this study occurred in the data collection phase. First, the recruitment of the volunteer participants used KLT as the intermediary. The *Director, Community Conservation* in the organization sent an introductory email to the volunteer email list with details about the study and encouraged them to email the researcher if they were interested in participating. The risk of emailing an entire volunteer list is that some voices might be overrepresented due the time constraints of availability for an hour-long interview. For example, retired people might be more responsive than working people. As a novel finding of this research is the homogenous demographics engaged with KLT, this recruitment strategy may have significant implications on the research conclusions. While ethical implications might arise

by being selective with participants, the researcher could work with the organization to ensure that all voices are represented.

Further, as the recruitment was focused on formal volunteers (trustees, directors, committee members, student interns, and property stewards), the voices of individuals who volunteer with KLT on a more informal basis (for example, individual stewardship events or workdays) were underrepresented. As this group had low representation in the study sample (n=2), this may have further implications on generalizing the volunteer group as a homogenous group with homogenous understandings of the land as the informal volunteers could have distinctly different understandings of community and conservation. The availability and eagerness of certain volunteers must also be considered as certain demographics of volunteers were likely to be more enthusiastic to volunteer for an hour-long interview. Additionally, this study was not designed to distinguish between different groups of volunteers involved with KLT. Due to the distinct governance structure of KLT, determining group-specific trends (for example, the directors) in the data might nuance understandings and lead to more relevant recommendations.

The Covid-19 pandemic had limitations on the collection of data through the semi-structured interviews, both logistically and conceptually. While the pandemic did not disrupt the collection of data, it did influence the development of the research methods. The semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually, through video communication platforms like Zoom, and over the telephone. Most of the participants chose the latter due to unfamiliarity with video communication platforms. The lack of human connection and visual cues could have implications on the comfortability of the participants being completely transparent or relaxed. Further, the data may be distorted or misinterpreted by the researcher not being able to observe

the visual cues that may represent emotions that are unobservable with speech. Conducting this research during the Covid-19 pandemic also likely led to 'unprecedented-time'-specific responses, which are not wholly representative of normal operations. For example, the participants often used phrases like "we used to…" to refer to pre-pandemic operations, and "we might…" or "we would like to…" to refer to post-pandemic operations. While these responses do reflect the current reality of the organization, the uncertainty of the future may have impacted the results of this study.

Finally, as noted previously, this research was conducted through a community-based research framework. As the research question is context specific to KLT, some of the findings of this study may have limited applicability to other contexts. Generalizing the findings to a broader contribution may be ingenuine, due to the specific context and circumstances that this research occurred in.

6.3.2 Future research

This study provides exciting opportunities for additional research on community and conservation. Future research could address the limitations outlined previously, build upon the findings of this study, or expand the theory on community and conservation. In particular, it would be beneficial for further investigation at a context-specific scale of KLT, and at a conceptual scale focused on broader ideas in community, conservation, volunteers, and land trusts.

Future community-based research conducted in collaboration with KLT could address the limitations on recruitment by working with the organization to contact a randomized list of volunteers, intentionally contact a list of volunteers curated by the organization as being diverse or could survey the entire volunteer group and use the data to guide recruitment on participants

to interview. As this study focused primarily on the formal volunteer group, it would be interesting to expand the participant group to include the informal volunteers. This may capture a wider demographic of KLT volunteers, as it could be postulated that these individuals are supporters of the organization but do not have the time flexibility that many of the formal volunteers do. To do this, a researcher could attend stewardship events or workdays facilitated by the organization and work with KLT to recruit participants.

A central finding in this research that would be interesting to investigate further are the assumptions made by KLT volunteers on how various groups perceive and value conserved lands. While researchers have addressed similar questions, centering an investigation in the rural Ontario context would be helpful in understanding the nuances of group-specific and individual attitudes. Recognizing the ways in which individuals in the community apply their values to land protected for conservation would help organizations like KLT and its volunteers to better engage the public in conservation practices and decision making.

This study was one of the first of its kind to explore the relationship between volunteers and land trusts. The findings indicate that volunteers have an uncommon power over organizational governance and therefore misalignments in conservation frames could have significant implications over operations. Due to the context-specific nature of this community-based research, it is vital that the land trust-volunteer relationship be investigated in different organizations, building upon the findings in this study.

6.4 Conclusions

The world is currently confronted with intersecting environmental crises caused by humans. Climate change and the loss of biodiversity already have had devastating effects on all living things and will continue on this unsustainable trajectory without major system changes

and important policy decisions. It is not difficult to see why the need for land conservation for the purpose of climate adaptation and mitigation is necessary; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC; IPCC, 2022) calls for 30-50% of the Earth's marine and terrestrial ecosystems to be conserved equitably and effectively. Due to the complicated history of conservation in Canada and its roots in colonialism, classism, and patriarchy (Youdelis et al., 2020), it is important for current efforts to be designed in a way that is inclusive and accessible. The fight for a habitable world must be a collaborative effort, and the involvement of Indigenous communities and local people is necessary.

To attend to calls for sustainable development (Brundtland Commission Report, 1987), community[-based] conservation was established as a method of protecting the land. Community[-based] conservation is a bottom-up practice that understands conservation work as a reciprocal process of providing community benefit and ecosystem benefit (Brooks et al., 2013). In 2019, Kawartha Land Trust (KLT), an organization that protects land in the Kawarthas received an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant to introduce new community[-based] conservation methods into its organizational practices.

This research addressed how volunteers, a large stakeholder group involved in KLT, understand the relationship between community and conservation. The findings indicate that the volunteer group involved in this study is overwhelmingly similar, leading to an aligned and homogenous understanding of the methods and goals of conservation, and how the incorporation of community works within this framework. Led by a Western science-informed view of conservation, the volunteers see the involvement of community as a trade-off with attaining ecological goals, a direct contradiction of the community[-based] conservation paradigm. As the volunteers hold an uncommon power in organizational governance, misalignments in opinions

toward mission or operations could lead to constraints on how community[-based] conservation is imagined, even if the organization is doing a lower-stakes version of this.

The attitudes that individuals have toward conservation are a complicated and layered network of social representations (Buijis et al., 2008), human cognition (Buijis, 2009; Schultz, 2000), and ethical and temporal trade-offs (Loring & Hinzman, 2018). As such, it is unlikely that individuals will significantly deviate in their understandings of community and conservation. In line with Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition hypothesis, the homogeneity in volunteers in KLT is likely the default for the organization. Therefore, designing pluralistic systems of attracting and retaining volunteers of various backgrounds must be a priority for the incorporation of diverse voices.

By conducting community-based research with KLT, this study contributes to larger discourses on environmental volunteers, frames of conservation, and the relationship between volunteers and land trusts. As we face a decade of important decisions and action to address the intersecting environmental crises, the complexities of community and conservation must be continually examined and explored.

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Appendix A

Trent University Research Ethics Board letter of approval

May 18, 2021

File #: 26563
Title: Community and Conservation: Evaluating the Environmental Beliefs and Values of Volunteers

Dear Miss. Dart,

The Research Ethics Board (REB) has given approval to your proposal entitled "Community and Conservation: Evaluating the Environmental Beliefs and Values of Volunteers".

When a project is approved by the REB, it is an Institutional approval. It is not to be used in place of any other ethics process.

To maintain its compliance with this approval, the REB must receive via ROMEO:

An Annual Update for each calendar year research is active;

A Study Renewal should the research extend beyond its approved end date of September 25, 2021;

A Study Closure Form at the end of active research.

This project has the following reporting milestones set:

Renewal Due-2021/09/25

To complete these milestones, click the Events tab in your ROMEO protocol to locate and submit the relevant form.

If an amendments to the protocol is required, you must submit an Amendment Form, available in the Events tab in your ROMEO protocol, for approval by the REB prior to implementation.

Any questions regarding the submission of reports or Event forms in ROMEO can be directed to Jamie Muckle, Certifications and Compliance Officer, at jmuckle@trentu.ca

On behalf of the Trent Research Ethics Board, I wish you success with your research.

Best Wishes,

Dr. Catherine Thibeault
REB Chair
Phone: (705) 748-1011 ext 7067
Email: cthibeault@trentu.ca

c.c.: Jamie Muckle
Certifications and Regulatory Compliance Officer

Appendix B

Letter of Support from Kawartha Land Trust

P.O Box 2338,
1545 Monaghan Rd.
Peterborough, ON K9J 7Y8
705-743-5599
kawarthalandtrust.org

February 10, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is to confirm that we agree and welcome Lilian Dart into our organization, Kawartha Land Trust, to do research. We have committed to providing Lilian with a list of potential participants for the study.

Thank you for the opportunity to have Lilian study the motivations and values of the volunteers at Kawartha Land Trust.

Sincerely,

Thomas Unrau

Appendix C

Email blurb sent from Kawartha Land Trust to potential participants

The interview will be focusing on how involvement in Kawartha Land Trust (KLT) has shaped your environmental values and beliefs. More specifically, you will be asked about the work you do with KLT, your perspectives of land stewardship, connection with nature, and your broader view of the environment. If you are willing to participate in this project, a 60-minute interview (over a platform such as Zoom or a phone call) would be required, facilitated by Lilian Dart, the principal researcher. The conclusions made in this study will help us in understanding how volunteering in conservation can shape good environmental behaviour. The results will be used in a report to Kawartha Land Trust, policy recommendations, and academic publications. It is important that you are aware that your name and all identifying information will be kept anonymous. If you decide that you would be interested in participating, or would like more information, please email Lilian Dart: liliandart@trentu.ca.

Appendix D

Letter of information to volunteers

Community and Conservation: Evaluating Beliefs and Values of Environmental Volunteers

Letter of Information
July 2021
Principal Investigator: Lilian Dart (liliandart@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187)
Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Rutherford (srutherford@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187)

Dear KLT volunteer,

Please accept this letter as an invitation to participate in a study that may help in better understanding volunteers who are involved in land trusts. The research is based out of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. **The purpose of this study is to understand how volunteering in conservation programs can change environmental beliefs and values.**

As you likely know, conservation is crucial for preserving ecosystems, protecting species, and preventing land fragmentation. As you volunteer for Kawartha Land Trust, and have been recognized as leader in the organization, I think you would have valuable input for this project.

If you interested and willing to participate in this project, a **60-minute interview** would be required, facilitated by Lilian Dart, the principal researcher of this project. This interview would be conducted over the phone or by video call (Zoom, Skype, or Facetime), at a time convenient for you. Lilian Dart is a MA candidate at Trent University in Sustainability Studies.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you are welcome to skip it. You can stop participating at any time. If you decide to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your interview included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University or the researcher.

If you choose to participate in this study, the researcher will require your written consent. The interviews conducted will be recorded for later analysis by the researcher. It is important for you to know that your name and any identifying information will be kept anonymous. All identifying information will be kept in a secure location under data encryption. This information will be destroyed after 5 years.

The conclusions made in this study will help in reports to non-profit conservation agencies (including to Kawartha Land Trust), policy recommendations to the government, and academic publications. You will receive a final report of this research, following its conclusion.
If you decide that you would be interested in participating, or would like more information, please email or call Lilian Dart: liliandart@trentu.ca or call (705)-748-1011 ext. 7187.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator:
Lilian Dart
Sustainability Studies
Trent University
Peterborough, ON
(705) 977-2449
lilian.dart@trentu.ca

Appendix E

Informed consent form for volunteers

Community and Conservation: Evaluating Beliefs and Values of Environmental Volunteers
Information and Consent
June 2021

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this study is to understand why individuals volunteer with land trusts. The data for this study will be mostly collected through interviews with the researcher, Lilian Dart. The results of the study will help Canadian communities to understand how volunteering in conservation programs can change environment beliefs and values. This may help organizations like Kawartha Land Trust shape good environmental behaviour.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you are welcome to skip it. You can stop participating at any time. If you decide to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your interview included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University or the researcher.

If you choose to participate in this study, the researcher will require your written consent. The interviews will be recorded for later analysis by the researcher. It is important for you to know that your name and any identifying information will be kept anonymous. All identifying information will be kept in a secure location under data encryption at Trent University. This information will be destroyed after 5 years.

The risks involved in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable (anxious, uneasy about) answering any of the questions if you think they might affect your work or personal wellbeing. To ensure confidentiality, names will not be used in the thesis or any published work that may come from the study and will not be shared with Kawartha Land Trust.

The conclusions made in this study will be presented in reports to non-profit conservation organizations (including Kawartha Land Trust), policy recommendations, and academic publications. You will receive a final report of this research following its conclusion.

This project has been approved by Trent University's Research Ethics Board. The principal investigator is Lilian Dart, Graduate Student in Sustainability Studies, Trent University (liliandart@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187). If any questions arise regarding the ethical process, please contact the Certifications and Compliance Officer, Jamie Muckle (jmuckle@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext.7896).

I, _____ (write name here), have read the Letter of Information, have read the Information and Consent document, and have had all questions answered, and I agree to participate in this study under the following conditions:

1. I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand the beliefs and values of individuals who volunteer with land trusts.

2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and that I can leave the study at any time.

3. I understand that if I decide to leave the study, all of the information I have supplied to the study will be destroyed.

4. I understand that my participation entails one 60-minute interview.

5. I understand that no identifying information will be published in the study.

6. I understand the benefits and risk of the study.

7. I understand that all of the information that is collected from me, including the recording of the interview will be kept in a secure location, and will be destroyed after 5 years.

8. I understand that I am able to contact the principal investigator, Lilian Dart, at any time to ask questions, or seek clarification or the Trent University Certifications and Compliance Officer (705-748-1011 ext.7896).

I agree that:

9. The interviews will take place over the phone, or over video call (Zoom, Facetime, or Skype), and will be recorded.

Yes _____ No_____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

Letter of information for staff

Community and Conservation: Evaluating Beliefs and Values of Environmental Volunteers

Letter of Information
May 2021
Principal Investigator: Lilian Dart (liliandart@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187) Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Rutherford (srutherford@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187)

Dear Kawartha Land Trust staff member,

Please accept this letter as an invitation to participate in a study that may help in better understanding volunteers who are involved in land trusts. The research is based out of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. **The purpose of this study is to understand how volunteering in conservation programs can change environmental beliefs and values.**

As you likely know, conservation is crucial for preserving ecosystems, protecting species, and preventing land fragmentation. As you work for Kawartha Land Trust in community conservation and interact directly with your volunteers, I think you would have valuable input for this project.

If you interested and willing to participate in this project, a **60-minute interview** would be required, facilitated by Lilian Dart, the principal researcher of this project. This interview would be conducted over the phone or by video call (Zoom, Skype, or Facetime), at a time convenient for you. Lilian Dart is a MA candidate at Trent University in Sustainability Studies.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you are welcome to skip it. You can stop participating at any

time. If you decide to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your interview included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University or the researcher.

If you choose to participate in this study, the researcher will require your written consent. The interviews conducted will be recorded for later analysis by the researcher. It is important for you to know that your name and any identifying information will be kept anonymous. All identifying information will be kept in a secure location under data encryption. This information will be destroyed after 5 years.

The conclusions made in this study will help in reports to non-profit conservation agencies (including to Kawartha Land Trust), policy recommendations to the government, and academic publications. You will receive a final report of this research, following its conclusion.
If you decide that you would be interested in participating, or would like more information, please email or call Lilian Dart: liliandart@trentu.ca or call (705)-748-1011 ext. 7187.

Sincerely,

Lily Dart

Principal Investigator: Lilian Dart Sustainability Studies Trent University Peterborough, ON (705) 977-2449 lilian.dart@trentu.ca

Appendix G

Informed consent form for staff

Community and Conservation: Evaluating Beliefs and Values of Environmental Volunteers

Information and Consent
May 2021
Principal Investigator: Lilian Dart (liliandart@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187)
Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Rutherford (srutherford@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187)

Dear Kawartha Land Trust staff member,

The purpose of this study is to understand why individuals volunteer with land trusts. The data for this study will be mostly collected through interviews with the researcher, Lilian Dart. **The results of the study will help Canadian communities to understand how volunteering in conservation programs can change environment beliefs and values.** This may help organizations like Kawartha Land Trust shape good environmental behaviour.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can choose whether to participate or not. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you are welcome to skip it. You can stop participating at any time. If you decide to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your interview included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Trent University or the researcher.

If you choose to participate in this study, the researcher will require your written consent. The interviews will be recorded for later analysis by the researcher. It is important for you to know that your name and any identifying information will be kept anonymous. All identifying information will be kept in a secure location under data encryption at Trent University. This information will be destroyed after 5 years.

The risks involved in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable (anxious, uneasy about) answering any of the questions if you think they might affect your work or personal wellbeing, or perhaps may feel worried that your confidentiality will be breached. To ensure confidentiality, names will not be used in the thesis or any published work that may come from the study and will not be shared with Kawartha Land Trust.

The conclusions made in this study will be presented in reports to non-profit conservation organizations (including Kawartha Land Trust), policy recommendations, and academic publications. You will receive a final report of this research following its conclusion.

This project has been approved by Trent University's Research Ethics Board. The principal investigator is Lilian Dart, Graduate Student in Sustainability Studies, Trent University (liliandart@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext. 7187). If any questions arise regarding the ethical process, please contact the Certifications and Compliance Officer, Jamie Muckle (jmuckle@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext.7896).

I, _____ (write name here), have read the Letter of Information, have read the Information and Consent document, and have had all questions answered, and I agree to participate in this study under the following conditions:

1. I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand the beliefs and values of individuals who volunteer with land trusts.

2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and that I can leave the study at any time.

3. I understand that if I decide to leave the study, all of the information I have supplied to the study will be destroyed.

4. I understand that my participation entails one 60-minute interview.

5. I understand that no identifying information will be published in the study.

6. I understand the benefits and risk of the study.

7. I understand that all of the information that is collected from me, including the recording of the interview will be kept in a secure location, and will be destroyed after 5 years.

8. I understand that I am able to contact the principal investigator, Lilian Dart, at any time to ask questions, or seek clarification or the Trent University Certifications and Compliance Officer (705-748-1011 ext.7896).

I agree that:

9. The interviews will take place over the phone, or over video call (Zoom, Facetime, or Skype), and will be recorded.

Yes _____ No_____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H

Interview guide for volunteers

Community and conservation: Evaluating the environmental beliefs and values of volunteers who engage in land trusts
Interview Guide

Introduction

- Introductory blurb (outline of research, association with KLT, goals, etc.)
- Emphasizing informed consent, phone call recording
- No right answer
- Any questions?

Demographics

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your highest level of education?
- Where do you currently live?
- Where did you grow up?
- What sort of relationship do you feel you have with the environment?
- Describe a favourite memory you have in nature...

History and perspectives of land use

Initial question	Possible additional questions	Clarifying questions
In your own words, can you explain what KLT does? THEN What does the word 'conservation' mean to you? OR Please explain what you feel respectful interaction with the environment looks like What is responsible use OR What kinds of use and activities in the environment do you see as most and least valid?	• Can you explain what the word 'environment' means to you? What is 'the environment'? • In your ideal world, what would conservation look like? • How do you feel about KLT's current conservation practices? Do you think there is anything they could do better or differently? • How do you feel about sustainable active uses of KLT land? For example, hunting, fishing, or harvesting… • What would collaboration look like with the nearby Indigenous community • How has your view on land conservation changed over time? • How do you think KLT decides what they allow access to?	• Can you tell me more about that? • Can you give me some examples of this? • Are you able to expand on this?

Preamble: KLT has been developing a community conservation approach, thanks to a Trillium Grant… Preservation… *Community conservation means we recognize that our conservation work has a role to play in supporting the wider community while still achieving important ecological outcomes*. In practice this means KLT looking for opportunities to engage a broad range of local citizens in its work and identifying opportunities to use conservation work to benefit the social and economic health of the Kawartha's. *For KLT this has resulted in supporting landowners stewarding their own land; developing and maintaining a broad range of trail networks and looking for access opportunities on KLT land; and exploring opportunities to engage with other organizations that support the interests of the community.*	• What do you see as the potential risks and benefits of this community conservation approach?	
Can you tell me about your involvement with KLT? OR What is your history with KLT?	• How long have you been involved with the KLT? • What part of your identity inspires you to volunteer in conservation? • How did you hear about the KLT? • What experiences have you had with the KLT events? If you haven't participated in any events, why? How do you think participating in these events have influenced your relationship with the environment? • What is your favourite part of the work that KLT does? • How often do you visit KLT properties? • Is there a specific KLT property that you feel connected to? • Why did you get involved with KLT?	

Why do you feel that volunteering for the environment important? OR What do you value about your volunteer work in conservation?	• What is the most satisfying part of volunteering with KLT? • What are the benefits of volunteering in conservation (to you? To the community? To the environment? To the organization?)? • Why do you think KLT involves volunteers in conservation? • How do you feel your connection with nature is influenced by your work with KLT? Can you give an example? • What are your interactions like with other volunteers or staff? • What do KLT properties mean to you?	
Conclusion of interview		
Is there anything relevant to our discussion today that you would like to tell me about? What have I missed? Do you have any questions for me?		

Wrap-up

Thank you so much for taking the time to tell me about your experience and perspectives, _____ (name of participant). Please let me know if you think of any questions or if you have any concerns. My contact is on the 'Letter of Information'.

Appendix I

Interview guide for staff

Community and conservation: Evaluating the environmental beliefs and values of volunteers who engage in land trusts
Interview Guide

Introduction

- Introductory blurb (outline of research, association with KLT, goals, etc.)
- Emphasizing informed consent, phone call recording
- No right answer

Any questions?

Demographics

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your highest level of education?
- Where do you currently live?
- Where did you grow up?
- What sort of relationship do you feel you have with the environment?
- Describe a favourite memory you have in nature...

History and perspectives of land use

Initial question	Possible additional questions	Clarifying questions
In your own words, can you explain what KLT does? THEN One of KLT's values is 'conservation'. What does the word 'conservation' mean to you? OR Please explain what you feel respectful interaction with the environment looks like OR What kinds of use and activities in the environment do you see as most and least valid?	• Can you explain what the word 'environment' means to you? What is 'the environment'? • In your ideal world, what would conservation look like? • How do you feel about KLT's current conservation practices? Do you think there is anything they could do better or differently? • How do you feel about sustainable active uses of KLT land? For example, hunting, fishing, or harvesting… • What does collaboration with the nearby Indigenous community look like to you? What does decolonizing conservation mean to you? • How has your view on land conservation changed over time?	• Can you tell me more about that? • Can you give me some examples of this? • Are you able to expand on this?

Preamble: KLT has been developing a community conservation approach, thanks to a Trillium Grant… *Community conservation means we recognize that our conservation work has a role to play in supporting the wider community while still achieving important ecological outcomes*. In practice this means KLT looking for opportunities to engage a broad range of local citizens in its work and identifying opportunities to use conservation work to benefit the social and economic health of the Kawartha's. *For KLT this has resulted in supporting landowners stewarding their own land; developing and maintaining a broad range of trail networks and looking for access opportunities on KLT land; and exploring opportunities to engage with other organizations that* support the interests of the community.	• What do you see as the potential risks and benefits of this community conservation approach?	
Can you tell me about your involvement with KLT? OR What is your history with KLT?	• How long have you been involved with the KLT? • What part of your identity inspires you to work in conservation? • How did you hear about the KLT? • What experiences have you had with the KLT events? If you haven't participated in any events, why? • What is your favourite part of the work that KLT does? • Can you describe what you did the last time you were on a KLT property? • How often do you visit KLT properties? Is there a specific property you feel connected to? • Why did you get involved with KLT? • How do you feel your connection with nature is influenced by your work with KLT? Can you give an example?	

Why do you feel that your volunteers are important? OR How are your volunteers helpful with attaining the goals of KLT?	• What kind of work do your volunteers do? • Do you have any volunteers that you really like/are memorable/valuable to you? What kind of work do they do? What makes them valuable? • Have you had any frustrating experiences with volunteers? What made it frustrating? • What type of people typically volunteer with KLT? What kind of skills do they have? Are there any different kinds of people that you would like to see volunteering? • Have there been changes in your volunteer base since you started at KLT? What kind of changes do you see in the future? • Why do you think your volunteers like working with KLT/volunteering in conservation? • If you were pitching volunteering with KLT to someone, what would you say?	
Conclusion of interview		
Is there anything relevant to our discussion today that you would like to tell me about? What have I missed?		
Wrap-up		
Thank you so much for taking the time to tell me about your experience and perspectives, _____ (name of participant). Please let me know if you think of any questions or if you have any concerns. My contact is on the 'Letter of Information'.		

Appendix J

Preliminary report to Kawartha Land Trust

Kawartha Land Trust Community[-Based] Conservation Research
Presented to: Kawartha Land Trust
Presented by: Lilian Dart
Nov 2, 2021

Below is the compilation of initial findings in the research being completed for my master's thesis, based on questions sent to me by [Kawartha Land Trust consultant] in October 2021. These findings are intended to be used by [consultant] in his consultation work for Kawartha Land Trust. Although not an exhaustive analysis, I have indicated in parenthesis if something was explicitly mentioned often. I have indicated with an asterisk (*) if the point made stood out to me/was an outlier. Points that do not include parenthesis may have been mentioned by a number of people but not commonly or not explicitly (for example, perhaps they were alluding to it).

Question: What uses of conserved land do they feel comfortable with? What uses of conserved land do they feel uncomfortable with?
*many conveyed the sentiment that even though they agree with some use of KLT lands (primarily 'low impact'), they value the fact that some of KLT's lands are not accessed by humans due to ecological value/sensitivity.

Uncomfortable

- Dogs off leash; disturbance to wildlife – 'people' think that dogs aren't doing any harm because they aren't killing animals, but this participant feels that dogs off leash disturb life cycles of animals… most thought this, but there was a split on if people thought dogs should be allowed at all. (5).
- Motorized vehicles (10): snowmobiles, ATV's, houseboats – one participant said "I am rabidly anti-motorized vehicles".
- 'Certain types of people': some participants spoke about how some members of the public, namely the type of people who participate in some of the above activities generally will be disrespectful of the land (partying, littering, fires, etc.). (3
- Too many people ("ruins it for everyone")
- Camping (unless in a very designated spot – one participant said "that is not KLT's business").
- Mountain bikes (3).
- Overharvesting (but sustainable harvesting is fine).
- Horse riding.
- Resource extraction or infrastructure development (2).
- Uncomfortable with most uses – has seen the damage of hiking (*)

Comfortable

- ‘Low impact’, ‘minimal interaction’, ‘staying on the trail’, ‘multi-use that doesn’t create destruction’, ‘passive recreation’, ‘leave no trace’ (8)
    - Limited human use – “preserving properties for natural succession”. (*)
- Walking (11); creation of accessible spaces (1)
- Snowshoeing (5)
- Skiing (4)
- Art – “take a chair and draw”
- Bird counts
- Geographical studies
- Horse riding
- Use depending on scientific state of the land – healthy land could have more consumptive (hunting/fishing/trapping, see below) uses or recreational uses, but sensitive areas (maybe a rare bird is nesting) need to have limited access – “I am not talking about allowing things like partying, I am talking about traditional uses and maintaining culture. Culture is a part of the land trust”.
- Use depending on intent; one participant spoke about their assumptions of activities correlating with respect for land.
- The traditional uses of Indigenous Peoples and other historic consumptive uses, as long as it is sustainable and doesn’t change the system – exercising treaty rights (*3, more of a rare sentiment).

Hunting/fishing/foraging

*a question specifically posed to participants which received an array of answers.

- “I am a lot more comfortable with fishing, hunting, and foraging than I am with recreational. I feel that in general if I see people fishing or hunting it seems to be a lot more in tune with conservation than people who are just there to party… [however], if KLT is picking up properties because they are significant wildlife corridors it doesn’t really make sense to kill animals if they are using it as a corridor”.
- A common answer was being okay with fishing (the water isn’t a part of the conserved land) and foraging but not being okay with hunting.
- Common concern with hunting is the human safety and logistics on KLT land… some participants are okay in general with hunting but not on conserved lands – “there is enough crown land out there”; others talked about no way of policing things like foraging…
    - Once you let one person, you have to assume that everyone is going to do it… a thought that hunting would be incompatible with people walking around on conserved areas.
    - Conversely, one participant brought up the point that it would be similarly difficult to actually prohibit hunting so working with these communities of people may lead to better outcomes.
- “I am personally against all of that – even Indigenous use – I am not for that either. I think that if we are preserving areas because it is sensitive then there shouldn’t be any access allowed, particularly hunting, fishing, and harvesting”. (*)
- A number of participants were supportive of Emily Creek being used for duck hunting because it had been used for duck hunting in the past, but think that it should be the exception.

- "Hunting is part of a good management plan, because otherwise some things can get out of hand. And again, if you achieve a harvest that is equal to the growth then you maintain a balance."
- As long as benefits outweighing risks – part of our long-term relationship with the land
- Concern of the effects that may come along with an activity like this – garbage, overcrowding, motorized vehicle use.
- Could be done for educational purposes on traditional livelihoods.

Question: How have your views of conservation changed over time? Are they more open to community engagement, people using conserved land?

Changed over time

- Used to think of provincial parks as gold standard from the idea of low impact use. With the uptick of people in parks, sees these places as no longer relaxing – now less likely to go to a provincial parks and will instead go to privately conserved lands. Like that land trusts are more community oriented instead of trying to encompass the broad Canadian landscape (2).
- The importance of conservation has gained significance over time – noticing places that should be conserved… "the more days you live the more you realize how important our land is. It is what we were given. It is what the first nations were given then they first came here, and it is what proceeding people were given. It has been here for all of us, and we just need to take care of it.".
    - The urgency of the climate crisis – feeling distressed so initiatives like conservation important for the environment. (5).
- Coming to understand that sometimes trails are needed (previously thought land should be locked from people), otherwise people aren't interested in protecting the land.
- More attuned to natural processes in ecosystems and less attuned to the industrial side (harvesting operations, etc.).
- Seeing conservation as more complicated than black and white/good and bad; becoming more realistic.
    - Used to see private sector as inherently bad but now can see that working together is good.

Have not changed over time

- Came to the organization in the first place because KLT's mission and values were aligned (5); "my views are what brought me here".
- Work/worked in this industry so have a pretty solid and static view of where values are in conservation (3).

Question: What do they see as the risks of community-based conservation? What do they see as the benefits?

Risks

- Risk that KLT loses sight of goals of the organization, spreads resources too thin (in this participants eyes – nature first) – "it is not about whether folks in canoes or seadoo's or

four-wheelers or snowshoes can access the land, it is about corridors for wildlife, a place for nature to follow its own course"; struggling with a balance (2).

  - Many organizations out there **just** doing CBC things, thoughts that KLT should let other places do it… One participant talked about how when thinking about stewarding land, MNR and conservation authorities should do that; similarly, for trail building, this participant thought that the municipality should do that.

- Bringing different kinds of people onto conserved land means that different people might have different ideas of what respectful use is – one participant talked about the it being analogous to the yellow sign on a road that has 4 pictures – 1 tractor, 1 walker, 1 bike, and 1 car and say it's a shared road. Everyone has a different idea of what shared is, and it might not be aligned.
  - Different philosophies of land use practices because of the diversity of the area (rural, urban, political alignment, religious beliefs etc.) (3)
- When working with municipalities, politics can get involved; keeping things in balance from the political standpoint
- More work for KLT – trying to make everyone happy.
  - Local people very attached to their land and maybe don't want to see things changing.
- More financial output into these initiatives than gains (6).
  - And for what? If are pouring money into these initiatives with no gain, it is a waste of money… "unless a landowner is planning on donating their property or easement, why should we be helping them steward their land?" (this was a common sentiment).
- Legal liability (if KLT were to allow motorized vehicles like snowmobiles onto KLT land).
- Ecological risk: "yes, human health benefits, maybe more environmental awareness in people. But the ecological damage that trails do is something that bothers me. And the more people with their dogs and eventually bikes and unauthorized harvesting and things like that – it defeats the purpose of trying to protect land" (*this is an extreme example, but many participants had a similar thought that allowing more people onto the land could negatively impact biodiversity) – (this was a common sentiment among participants).
- Adjacent landowners becoming frustrated as human traffic to these properties increases and additional infrastructure (parking lots) needed (4).

Benefits

- Getting people into nature; overtime, this participant saw less destruction to properties and thinks that may be attributed to partnerships and people taking ownership (4).
  - "Conservation and wise use means invite people in and say this is our legacy, this is what we do. So you can appreciate nature, you can understand it more, and can therefore have a better sense of what nature means to you".
  - "If we won't have these experiences in nature, I don't think you are as attuned or interested in protecting nature… the motto is protecting the land you love, but how do you necessarily protect something when you don't know what is being protected or its value?".

- Financial gains for KLT (5).
- Connecting KLT with the municipality.
- Seeking partnerships with private landowners – encouraging good stewardship and landowners know their own land well so is an opportunity for place-based knowledge (3).
    - "Local stewards of these properties";
    - "You will find no greater champion for local environmental areas than those who actually live there, enjoy them, and understand them";
- Additional donations of land as people see what KLT is about;
- Educating people on what conservation actually is – this participant believes that the public thinks that conservation is putting land away and protecting it and now allowing people to use it… but would like people to know that this isn't the intent even if there are some controls on protected properties.
- General education on biodiversity and the importance of protection (5).
- Landowner relations: having a good relationship with people who are living adjacent to KLT properties – landowners won't feel as threatened (4).
- "As partners, we are stronger together".
    - In regards to hunting, "it is better to actually work with these group than villainize them".
- Greater public awareness of KLT – hard to garner support without people knowing what they are doing (5).
    - One participant compared KLT to other conservation authorities in the area – said that other conservation authorities may be better well known because they do a broader range of things than KLT.
- Benefits the mental and physical health of people who visit the area.

Question: Reasons for volunteering and volunteering in conservation?

- So little 'undisturbed' land left so see this as important work (3).
- Covid-19 has exacerbated the need for conserved land; pressure from people wanting to be outside is immense and although getting people out into nature is important, also important that some properties are protected simply for the protection of nature and not for people's right to be out for recreational uses.
- Quiet moments by self in nature (3).
- Individual nature connection (3).
- Being part of a group of people with similar interests and ideals **or** learning from these people (6).
- Honing in individuals skillsets of volunteers – being able to cater skillset to KLT work.
- Feeling that work is important and benefitting the community/environment – seeing results of the work (i.e. land protection or education) (7).
- Actions can help with climate change issues – climate change and the biodiversity crisis being the "biggest threat facing humans" (7).
- Continuing involvement in the field after retirement/lending unique skills to an organization that they respect (6).
- Loss of faith in larger agencies or government – want to be involved in an organization that is actually doing something (3).
- "Volunteering, in general, keeps everything going" – civic duty (5).

    - Giving back – with time rather than money.
- Volunteering turns people into advocates – initially you might be interested in something but increasing involvement nuances understanding and passion.
- Part of identity (3), aligns with values "there is science behind it".
- Networking and professional development.

Question: How aware were volunteers of the new community-based conservation (CBC) developments?

- Less familiar with the actual name (didn't know to call it CBC) but recognize individual initiatives.
- In my question I read off a list of what KLT constitutes as CBC – in their answers, most participants tended to focus on one thing on the list that I read… In general, they either focused on:
    - Public trail use.
    - Landowner stewardship.
- Many participants think of the CBC in a way to gain **financial support for** the organization more than the implicit benefits of the approach.
- "the need for *outreach and educating the public* is what the land trust is all about. So, I am 100% behind that approach".
- "Aware of it on the periphery".

Question: Are KLT likely to lose established volunteers as they move towards the community[-based] conservation (CBC) approach?

*this is not possible for me to answer because I would be making assumptions of my participants. I compiled a few points below of some sentiments towards CBC (very mixed in response - some more in favour than others)

- Theoretical support by some participants but things like "… I would not want to be involved in these conversations because I don't know how you would mediate the uses of other people and community".
- "There is absolutely no reason in my mind that a private not-for-profit land trust that is supposed to be protecting land should be building trails and doing that sort of thing, which I see as the role of the municipality. So, sorry I am totally against that". (*)
- Thoughts that getting people (the public) outside is a good thing (3).
- "the need for *outreach and educating the public* is what the land trust is all about. So, I am 100% behind that approach".
- Defining success in the approach… The goals of KLT and supporters versus greater ecological good…
    - What is the primary mandate?... seeing it as more of a dichotomy than both.
- "we are kind of grappling with the idea of some more intense uses, events, and things that aren't quite so low impact" – looking at these activities from a scientific lens and wondering which properties or ecosystems can withstand more impact.
- Finding a balance – community engagement but also people involved to remind of ecological sensitivities.

Appendix K

Executive summary sent to Kawartha Land Trust

Executive summary
Lily Dart, June 2022

In the winter of 2021, I developed a research project with the support of Kawartha Land Trust, to investigate volunteers who are involved in the organization. As the organization worked towards developing a new community[-based] conservation approach, the staff were curious about how the volunteers feel about these changes.

Research objectives

The research broadly aims to understand how Kawartha Land Trust volunteers construct and understand conservation and its relationship with community. The specific objectives of the thesis are to: a) explore what drives volunteers to engage with Kawartha Land Trust; b) understand the perspectives of volunteers regarding land conservation and community; c) examine the role that volunteers have in the sustainability of the organization. As Kawartha Land Trust moves towards more pluralistic ways of caring for the land, it is important to reflect upon any trends in representation in their volunteers (and who is not represented), how these individuals frame conservation and if this understanding is similar or dissimilar to the organization, and the power these individuals have over organizational vision and operations.

Methods and collaboration

Following receiving ethical approval from Trent University, I worked with Kawartha Land Trust staff to recruit volunteers to participate in the research. I received an overwhelming amount of interest from the volunteers (the majority of the participants were formal volunteers, i.e. trustees, board of directors, committee members, and property stewards), and conducted interviews (n=14) between June and October of 2021. In addition, I interviewed a few staff members (n=3) to better understand the role that volunteers have in the organization, and the general staff perspective.

This research was conducted in partial fulfilment of the degree requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sustainability Studies at Trent University. However, due to the nature of community-based research, an important outcome is a final report to Kawartha Land Trust with a summary of the thesis findings and recommendations I have to the organization based on these findings. For the sake of continual collaboration and transparency throughout the research process, I have proposed a meeting in June 2022 to present the findings before they are published in the thesis. Through this process, I would be pleased to receive feedback or additional thoughts.

Summary of findings

The essence of the thesis findings indicate that **the formal volunteers involved in Kawartha Land Trust are generally homogenous in their demographics, leading to an overwhelmingly aligned understanding of what conservation *should be* and how the community *should be* engaged. Due to the unique power of formal volunteers in the organizational governance structure, their uniform understanding of the relationships between humans and the land may lead to limits on imagining how community[-based] conservation can be deployed**. Based on

these findings, a number of recommendations emerged, which I will present in the meeting and in a formal report following the completion of this thesis.

Appendix L

Presentation of results to Kawartha Land Trust

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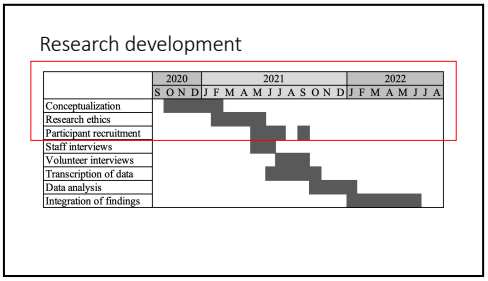

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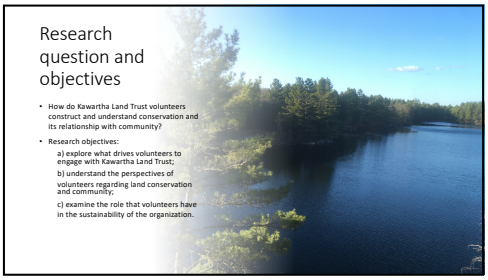

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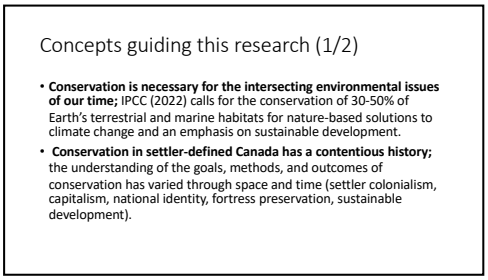

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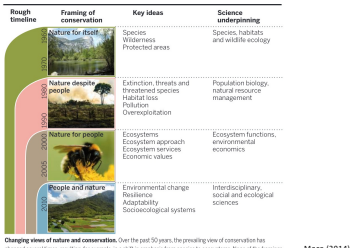
Concepts guiding this research (2/2)

- **Conservation in settler-defined Canada currently conducted through government programs and non-governmental programs (NGO);** land trusts are an interesting example of NGO environmental governance due to stakeholder relations.
- **Volunteers important in missions and operations;** precarious funding of non-profits and expansive workload necessitates strong volunteer force.
- **How individuals define and understand the goals, methods, and outcomes of conservation based upon intricacies of human cognition, subjectivity, and experience…**

7



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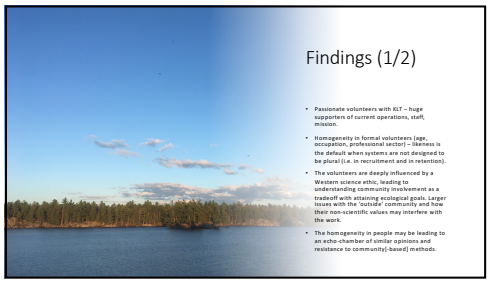
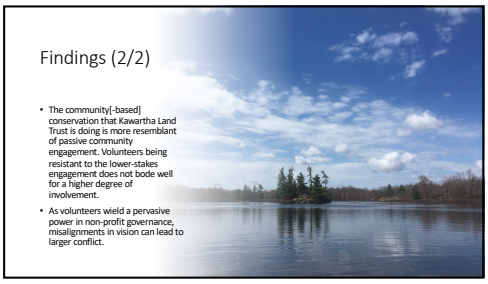


Findings (1/2)

- Passionate volunteers with KLT – huge supporters of current operations, staff, mission.
- Homogeneity in formal volunteers (age, occupation, professional sector) – likeness is the default when systems are not designed to be plural (i.e. in recruitment and in retention).
- The volunteers are deeply influenced by a Western science ethic, leading to understanding community involvement as a trade-off with attaining ecological goals. Larger issues with the 'outside' community and how their non-scientific values may interfere with the work.
- The homogeneity in people may be leading to an echo-chamber of similar opinions and resistance to community[-based] methods.

9



Findings (2/2)

- The community[-based] conservation that Kawartha Land Trust is doing is more resemblant of passive community engagement. Volunteers being resistant to the lower-stakes engagement does not bode well for a higher degree of involvement.
- As volunteers wield a pervasive power in non-profit governance, misalignments in vision can lead to larger conflict.

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Recommendations

a) To nuance understanding of what community[-based] conservation can look like.
b) To acknowledge the trade-offs of the community[-based] conservation approach.
c) To continue engaging Indigenous communities and Indigenous ways of knowing.
d) To design a system of volunteers to be plural.
e) To continue intentionally planning social events for volunteers.
f) To create a 'volunteer coordinator' position.

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Questions and discussion

- Do you feel that my research represents your organization accurately?
- Is there anything that surprised you? Is there anything that did not surprise you?
- Gaps in my knowledge
  - Tell me more about your governance structure.
  - Tell me more about the distinction between your formal and informal volunteers.
  - What is the latest with your community[-based] conservation?
- Any general questions, thoughts, or additions?

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