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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rice Lake Plains Prescribed Burn Open House scheduled for March 4th

Cobourg, ON – This spring, experts will return to conduct the ninth season of prescribed burns on the Rice Lake Plains. Partners of the *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* are hosting a **Prescribed Burn open House on March 4th from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Harwood Fire Station (5424 Front St)**. Representatives from organizations planning prescribed burns in the County will be available to answer questions.

The 2014 spring burns will take place within the Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) Hazel Bird, Webber and Barr properties, Burnley Carmel (Ontario Parks) the Northumberland Land Trust McEwen property and on the Alderville First Nation Black Oak Savanna. These prescribed burns are essential to restore and revitalize globally rare tallgrass prairie and savannah habitat in Northumberland County.

"Tallgrass prairie and savannah plant species depend upon fire to live. As natural fires have long been suppressed in southern Ontario, conservation scientists across North America use professionally-managed prescribed burns to bring new life to these wildlife habitats," says Mark Stabb, NCC's Central Ontario Program Manager. "We encourage our neighbours to come to the open house to learn more about this season's plans, and to address any safety concerns they may have."

Prescribed burns are intentionally set and professionally managed fires that burn across a pre-determined area under strictly controlled circumstances in order to restore natural habitat. Fires clear scrub and brush allowing sunlight to reach the soil where native grassland seeds lie. Native prairie species flourish following a fire, restoring the native grassland habitat of the area. Fire also helps to remove invasive species. Burning only occurs under specific weather conditions that will allow a safe, controlled fire.

The prescribed burns conducted on the various Oak Ridges Moraine sites will be carried out by trained professionals. Burns sponsored by the *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* partners will be managed by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Alderville First Nation, Ministry of Natural Resources and Lands & Forests Consulting, an independent prescribed burn consulting firm. Detailed burn plans, fire permits and insurance are obtained in advance for each site.

For safety reasons, the public will not be allowed access to the prescribed burn areas during the burns. Media representatives and the public are welcome to observe burning operations from a safe location, to be determined by fire control staff.

The prescribed burns are part of ongoing habitat restoration efforts of the *Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative* partners, which include the Nature Conservancy Canada, Northumberland County Forest, Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority, Lower Trent Conservation, Ontario Parks, Alderville First Nation, Willow Beach Field Naturalists, Long Pine Marsh Land Trust and the Northumberland Land Trust.

PLEASE NOTE: Prescribed burns are weather-dependent and site-specific. Typically they occur in mid April to early May, after snow melt and once sites are dry. Announcements of individual prescribed burns will be issued as soon as details are known.

For further information on the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative, visit the website at ricelakeplains.ca

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