

# RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

## A Rainy Lake Reflection

A Summer on Sandpoint by Frances Shelfantook

When I was growing up, most of my relatives were working in logging in the woods or on the lake, and it seemed like every summer we were at a different place on Rainy Lake. One summer my Aunt Cynthia and her three kids and my mother and her five kids spent six weeks on Sandpoint Island. It was 1927 and I was 14 years old, the oldest of the eight kids. We went to Sandpoint after school was out. On our trip there, my mother and aunt took a lot of canned goods, and they brought flour, honey, and other foods that would keep. We baked bread and we fished from an old punt. We had lots of peanut butter but not jam. Mother didn't believe in a lot of sugar, so we were limited in the amount of sweets we got. Milky Way bars were a big treat. There was a kind of powdered milk called Klim (milk spelled backwards) that we used when



Frances Shelfantook

we ran out of fresh milk. And we liked apples. My mother believed in an apple a day. They were cheap in those days: a 40-pound box of apples didn't break the bank. When you had lots of kids you needed a lot of apples.

My Uncle Archie Shaw ran the cruiser that took mail, supplies and employees between Kettle Falls and Fort Frances. The cruiser was a link between Shevlin-Clark's operations and the woods where the men were

logging. Uncle Archie kept tabs on us that summer and brought us supplies like fresh milk and meat. On the way from Kettle Falls to Fort Frances Uncle Archie would stop at Sandpoint to pick up our grocery list. He'd take the list to Watson and Lloyd's outfitters in town, then on his way back to Kettle Falls he would bring the groceries to us.

The blueberries were wonderful that year! We

*Sandpoint Summer continued on page 2*

## Photographing Those Amazing Lake Sturgeon

from Dr. Brian McLaren's Presentation at the 2010 Annual General Meeting

What might researchers do with an underwater camera? And how would they do it? What would they learn? Since the Rainy Lake Conservancy donated \$2200 to help purchase an underwater camera, those questions became the focus of this year's guest speaker at the 2010 annual meeting.

The speaker was Dr. Brian McLaren\*; his Masters students/researchers are Matt Lebron and Cam Trembath.

What are they doing with the underwater camera? They are studying, in particular, juvenile Lake Sturgeon in the Namakan River. How do they do this with a camera? The camera is pressure rated to hundreds of feet, much deeper than the Namakan River, but quite suitable for the research



Dr. Brian E. McLaren

effort. The camera is submerged using a 4-pound downrigger ball, then positioned to locate and record information about the Lake Sturgeon's environment.

And what are they learning from this camera – and also from the other facets of their research including surgically implanted transmitters? *Food*. Using the camera, they were able to photograph the river's substrate to see how it supports the food that attracts Lake Sturgeon to the Namakan River. The researchers learned that sturgeon in the Namakan River prefer Canadian Shield rock with a sandy gravel bottom. *Juvenile growth and survival*. Interestingly enough, juveniles' primary growth happens in May. An important part of their survival is to avoid being predated. Researchers learned that most juveniles don't hang out with adults. Instead, they hang out in Bill Lake above High Falls in the Namakan River,

*Photographing Sturgeon continued on page 3*

## A Note from the President



Many readers, like me, will have witnessed many sunrises over Rainy Lake. This splendid experience cannot fail to impress and remind us of the great fortune we have in being able to visit, occupy, and experience this jewel of geography.

At such times too, I

have often considered the fact that even though we are here for but a brief instant of geological time, it seems we increasingly occupy this land and lake area in ways which will have effects long into the future.

A little over a decade ago the Rainy Lake Conservancy was created. The founders saw the need to combine time, talent, and resources to speak for, and to encourage and support others to speak for, this wondrous and rare basin. The facts show that in the intervening years, through their work, the founders, and those they have attracted to and supported through the Conservancy, have significantly contributed to the long-term protection of Rainy Lake.

The Rainy Lake Conservancy is now entering a period of transition. From a variety of necessity, many of the founders have or must soon step into a background role. I urge you to join and work with me towards our main objectives for this year: to maintain the Conservancy's core commitments and purposes, and, at the same time, to look for opportunities to achieve positive renewal.

In August, the Board of Directors agreed on our priorities for 2010-11. These are to: monitor and provide input as needed related to the proposed Namakan River dams, provide input to the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs five year policy review, complete the Echo Island conservation easement, and to inquire into the feasibility of hiring staff to do both future conservation easement tasks and provide other administrative support.

*Stephen*

Stephen Challis, President

## In Appreciation

For many years, two firms have provided pro bono services to the Rainy Lake Conservancy to assist us in achieving our mission. Our heartfelt thanks go to the local accounting firm of Stewart, Sande and Zimmerman, and to Donna Romyn for keeping our books in good order. We also wish to thank the legal firm of Stikeman Elliott LLP, Ottawa, and Justine Whitehead for assisting the Conservancy with legal matters.

We appreciate as well the loyal support of our dedicated core of volunteers who keep the Conservancy alive and well, and the generosity of all our members who make donations to the Rainy Lake Conservancy or to the Minnesota Land Trust's Rainy Lake fund. Without your commitment, we would not be able to accomplish our mission of preserving and protecting this beautiful lake for generations to come.

## Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) Review

This fall the Government Relations Committee prepared a submission to the MMAH's five year review of land use planning and development in Ontario. This undertaking, in conjunction with other land use planning ministries, will assess the need for revisions to the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) of 2005. Our submission has addressed the Rainy Lake Conservancy's concerns over possible overdevelopment on Rainy Lake if the 2005 PPS is not revised. We also expressed concerns over the lack of ministry oversight in unincorporated townships, especially as relates to cases involving sewage disposal systems and their inspection, and the general lack of staff to implement policy. In preparing our submission, we consulted with other groups submitting comments, including the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ontario Land Trust Alliance. If you have questions or would like more information about our submission, please contact Dale Callaghan.

*Government Relations contact: Dale Callaghan*

## Sandpoint Summer continued from Page 1

older kids looked after the little kids while our mothers picked berries. When we moved up there at the end of school, we brought 2-quart sealers (canning jars) with us, and we canned the berries without sugar. We older kids taught the little kids how to swim. Our mothers had bathing suits and cooled off in the water but they didn't swim.

That one summer on Sandpoint Island was so beautiful, so idyllic. It was a sort of therapy and a wonderful rest for my aunt and my mother.

## Shifting Leadership

Healthy organizations are like living organisms, changing and growing, new replacing old. As the Rainy Lake Conservancy continues to grow, the make-up of the board grows and changes also. Policies for the selection of new board members are in place, guiding the nominating committee as it seeks out young people representing different parts of the watershed. And so we welcome



Candy Ginter

Candy Ginter and Chris Causey to the board, at the same time as we offer gratitude and say goodbye to departing board members Claudia Horne and Donna Romyn. We welcome Stephen Challis as our new president while Dale Callaghan shifts to past president. We say well done to departing executive officer Anne Newhart.

Nominating contact: Stephen Challis



Christopher Causey

## Photographing Sturgeon

continued from Page 1

whereas the adults travel back and forth in the river system and spend a lot of time below High Falls. Of the 132 juveniles caught, 90 were captured above



Multi-SeaCam with recording and viewing components

High Falls. *Other cool sturgeon facts.* Dr. McLaren shared many amazing facts about Lake Sturgeon. For example, they have no bones, only cartilage. They are aged by counting the rings in the cartilage much like counting the rings in a tree.

Conservancy members and guests took home a crucial fact from Dr. McLaren: "If you don't know what's under the water, you don't know how to protect it."

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\* Dr. Brian McLaren is Assistant Professor/Chair Graduate Studies, Faculty of Natural Resources, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay. He has a BSc. in Biogeography and a Ph.D. in Forest Sciences.

AGM contact: Kay Larsen

## Hydro Project on Namakan: Update

The next steps for the Namakan Coalition (including the Rainy Lake Conservancy, Voyageurs National Park Association, and Quetico Foundation) depend on the hydroelectric project's final Environmental Report due within the next 6 months. We expect significant changes in the proposal since there was so much criticism to the Draft Environmental Report. We will have only 30 days to respond to the final report. Please monitor the proponent OPEG's web site ([www.opeg.ca](http://www.opeg.ca)) for the latest status.

Environmental Research contact: Paul Anderson



A portion of High Falls on the Namakan River

## Changes in Water Quality Monitoring

Due to funding limitations at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Rainy Lake Conservancy's water monitoring program has changed. We are now working with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment to include our past 7 Canadian and American sites plus 3 new sites under the Lake Partner program. In 2011 we will begin monitoring a total of ten sites (8 on Rainy, 2 on Namakan). Thanks to volunteers Ed Kalar, Chris Causey, Paul Larsen, Brian Johnson, Candy Ginter, Paul Anderson, and Burgess Eberhardt. Environmental Research contact: Paul Anderson

## IJC Task Force

The governments of Canada and the United States, in letters to the International Joint Commission (IJC) dated June 17, 2010, requested that the IJC review and make recommendations by July 15, 2011, regarding the bi-national management of the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River Basin and the IJC's potential role in this management.

Recommendations are to address potential structures and mechanisms for governance as well as priority issues or activities to be addressed by or through such mechanisms. A Task Force has been established by the IJC to assist it in responding to the governments' request. Given the required focus on outreach and public discussions with government agencies, tribes, First Nations and the general public, the Task Force is establishing a Citizen Advisory Group. The Rainy Lake Conservancy is represented on the Citizen Advisory Group.

Conservancy representative: Paul Anderson

## Plan Ahead for Next Summer's Nature Outings

Discover Nature's Recyclers Hard at Work ... on the Oberholtzer Trail. See many forms of nature's decomposers in action – and more – on a guided hike on the Oberholtzer trail. The trail winds through scenic pine forest and wetlands on the shores of Rainy Lake at Voyageurs National Park's Rainy Lake Visitor Centre and is easily accessible by car and boat. To be held Sunday, August 13, 2011 at 2:00 pm, weather permitting. Total length: one mile return; the first ¼ mile rated "easy" for terrain and accessibility and the second ¼ mile rated "moderate" for hills. Picnic snack provided, as well as a door prize and outdoor themed takeaways. Meet at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center at 1:45 pm.

Meet the inhabitants of a bog ... while keeping your feet dry! Join us for a comfortable guided walk along the Cranberry Peatlands Interpretative Trail (10 miles west of Fort Frances) on Sunday July 20, 2011, at 10:00 am, weather permitting. Learn about the flora and fauna of this wildlife-rich wetland as you stroll along the dry boardwalk. This trail is rated "easy" for distance, accessibility and terrain. Picnic snack provided at the viewing platform, as well as a door prize and birding themed takeaways. Meet at the Ontario Travel Information Centre in Fort Frances at 9:30 am; some carpooling available.

Bring your binoculars and camera for either hike, and to optimize wildlife viewing please do not bring pets along. Call Andrea Trembath with questions 807-274-4770. An RSVP to [trembath@jam21.net](mailto:trembath@jam21.net) would be helpful but not required.

*Nature Outings contacts: Ginny Sweatt and Andrea Trembath*



Hikers and Eastern Kingbird on the Cranberry Peatlands Interpretive Trail, July 2010

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#### PRO BONO PROVIDERS

Justine Whitehead representing Stikeman Elliott in Ottawa  
Donna Romyn representing Stewart, Sande & Zimmerman in Fort Frances

## Freshwater Society Gathering

Rainy Lake Conservancy members boated to Harry and Ginny Sweatt's island July 27th where Blyth Brookman, chair of the Freshwater Society board of directors, presented a Powerpoint program based on the Society's vision of water stewardship in Minnesota, which includes Rainy Lake. They are raising awareness in children and adults throughout the state of the need to conserve the quality of ground and surface water and ways to protect it. The Freshwater Society sponsors an annual lecture series, sends speakers into school classrooms and has developed a clever set of posters for classrooms, as well as organized neighborhood groups of kids and parents to rake boulevards of debris and leaves to keep them from entering the sewers which feed debris into the rivers.

After the presentation lunch was served to those in attendance and lively discussion followed at the long picnic table on the screen porch!

#### MISSION STATEMENT

To work with property owners, governments and local communities to preserve and protect the natural beauty, historic features, and ecological and recreational values for present and future generations, particularly within but not restricted to Rainy Lake.

Visit our web site at [www.rainylakeconservancy.org](http://www.rainylakeconservancy.org)