

# RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

## A Rainy Lake Reflection

A Trapper's Reflection by Elaine George Wilson

I wasn't your typical girl. Instead of cooking and sewing alongside my mom, I could be found outdoors – with a rifle in hand out hunting with the men, with a fishing pole down at the river, or out working on the farm despite my grandmother's disapproval. Outdoors was where I loved to be.

When I met Pud, it was our mutual love of the outdoors that brought us together. We both lived on farms near the village of Emo and enjoyed spending time together hunting and fishing. Shortly after we married, we decided to purchase a trapline on the east arm of beautiful Rainy Lake. It was no surprise to my family that I wanted to head into the unknown and live in the wilderness. They knew it was where I wanted to be.

Pud and I were just two farm kids who knew nothing about the perils of Rainy Lake. In November of 1956, we made the 55-mile trip across Rainy Lake before it froze. With only a

canoe, a small motor and the vast wilderness surrounding us, we learned to survive in the wild. Two hundred square miles of lakes, rivers, ponds, timber and rock became our home. Our trapline stretched from the east arm of Rainy Lake almost to the border of Quetico Provincial Park. We lived in a houseboat that rested on the banks of Falls River about a mile upstream from Stokes Bay. When we went out on the trapline, we took with us only what supplies we needed for a period of five days to a week while we stayed in small cabins and lean-tos scattered over the line. Where some people saw trapping as only a masculine endeavour, I didn't. I trapped alongside Pud and together we raised our three children on the trapline.



Elaine Wilson by Lainie Holmes

## Is Climate Change Impacting Local Lakes and Wetlands?

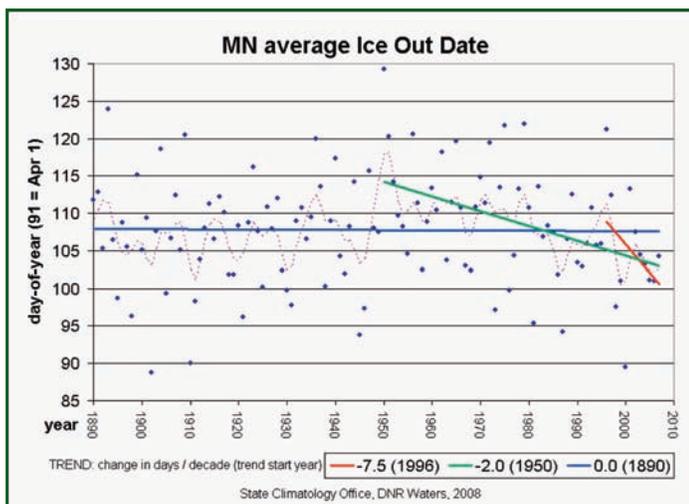
As a lake lover, you likely pay attention to ice-in and ice-out dates. It's the spirit of the people in this region to notice how our watershed changes with the seasons. Scientists who are researching climate

change trends confirm that ice-out is occurring earlier than it has historically, while ice-in is occurring later.

Mark Seeley, professor in the Department of Soil, Water, and Climate at the University of Minnesota, reports that average ice-out dates throughout the watershed over the past two decades are 5–7 days earlier than those of previous decades. Rainy Lake, for example, broke up April 6th this year, the earliest ice-out date on record and only two years since the last record early date of April 10th set in 2010.

Further, John Magnuson, a limnologist, and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin Center for Limnology in Madison, have concluded that the length of time lakes in the Northern Hemisphere are ice-covered has generally become shorter.

But what are the effects of a shorter ice-cover season in our watershed beyond the opportunity for an earlier spring? The Rainy Lake Conservancy is



## A Note from the President



In a recent discussion with one of our members, the question was put to me: "What exactly is the Rainy Lake Conservancy trying to achieve in its relationship with the Nature Conservancy of Canada?" My answer was: "Land trusts are in it for the long haul."

What I meant was that although the Rainy Lake Conservancy – in its role as a nascent land trust – has a variety of short and medium term objectives, it is really the long-term goals that matter in our work with the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

So, for example, the Rainy Lake Conservancy recently realized its objective to have the Rainy Lake/Lake of the Woods area designated as one of the 100 or so ecoregions across the country. The Nature Conservancy of Canada believes these regions are critical for the protection of Canada's natural habitats and species. And related to the foregoing, we worked with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to create a Natural Area Conservation Plan. Such a document aims to prioritize by answering, specifically: What is the current state of the ecoregion's species and habitats, and what are the priorities and strategies needed to maintain or improve their health? The Plan – covering the entire Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods watershed – was adopted by the Nature Conservancy of Canada a few months ago.

But, it is the long-term goals that matter. And, what are they? To answer this, I have to first answer: What has happened to the Rainy Lake watershed in my lifetime? What has happened in the last 100 years? And, what will the watershed look like a hundred years hence?

Both the Rainy Lake Conservancy – and the Nature Conservancy of Canada as a more well established player and partner – act on the preceding questions as non-governmental actors. We operate methodically and openly. Our method is to incrementally and reasonably advance our goals over the long haul.

Please consider how you can both shape and contribute to the long-term goals of the Rainy Lake Conservancy.

Stephen Challis, President

## Land Conservation Updates

**Echo Island Conservation Easement:** Completing all phases of the cross-border process required by American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts (AF), the IRS, the Canada Revenue Agency and the Rainy Lake Conservancy is a time-consuming exercise. The next steps include appraisal of the island by a U.S. appraiser; approval by the IRS that we are a publicly supported Canadian charity, equivalent to a U.S. 501(c)(3); and final approval of the package by AF and the Rainy Lake Conservancy. Fortunately, the IRS approval, if granted, will be in place for future easements and will not have to be repeated.

**Rainy Lake to Lake of the Woods Natural Area Conservation Plan:** The long-awaited Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) conservation plan was passed in February 2012. With the plan in place, we look forward to continuing our partnership with NCC which began in 1998 with our combined efforts to protect Goose Island. In the years that followed, we collaborated on the first biodiversity study on the Canadian side of Rainy Lake, the Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists' bog walk and the establishment of the NCC field office in Northwestern Ontario. We will continue to work together to achieve the major goals of the conservation plan: securement of core conservation areas, including islands; enhancement of community support and participation in conservation; enhancement of biodiversity values; and development of conservation partnerships in the Rainy Lake/Lake of the Woods area.

*Conservation Easements and Land Securement contact: Dale Callaghan*

## Generous Donors Support Conservation

Thank you to all of our members who donated directly to the Rainy Lake Conservancy and/or to the Rainy Lake Fund of the Minnesota Land Trust over the past year. Your generous donations support our efforts to preserve and protect the watershed for present and future generations. With your financial assistance, the Rainy Lake Conservancy is able to contribute to research projects, monitor developments that could adversely affect the health of the watershed, promote conservation easements, and provide public education on good lakeshore stewardship. We have also established a reserve fund to help finance present and future land protection projects. We welcome your continued support. This year the conservancy extends a special thank you to James and Roz Hawley and the Hawley Family Foundation for their gift of \$25,000 and to Mary and Kurt Lysne whose gift will help defray start-up costs for an administrative support person and for the Conservancy's new data base management software.

*Cross-Border Donations contact: Dale Callaghan*

# Environmental Monitoring Updates

**Namakan River Hydro Project:** The project remains officially on hold, but we have received indications from Gemini Power that they intend to proceed with a new design. We are awaiting more information.

**Mining and exploration:** A significant level of mining activity continues across Northwestern Ontario. The following table summarizes the most advanced projects. These projects are being monitored informally by the Environmental Research Committee.

*Environmental Research contact: Paul Anderson*

Mining in Rainy River Watershed			
Bending Lake Iron Ore	125 km NE of Fort Frances near Turtle River	Exploration	2017
Hammond Reef Gold	30 km NE of Atikokan on Seine River	Development	2016
Rainy River Resources Gold	65 km NW of Fort Frances near Pinewood River	Development	2016

*Rainy Lake Conservancy, May 2012*

## Climate Change continued from Page 1

helping to examine that by co-sponsoring climate change monitoring of wetlands. In cooperation with national parks, Lakehead University and University of Minnesota-Duluth, soil chemistry and aquatic plant diversity are currently being studied in beaver ponds

because they are places of ecological importance.

Researchers are concerned that wetlands are at a risk of drying up or becoming seasonal, resulting in a loss of carbon sinks. The data being collected will determine if this is happening, and if so, how biodiversity is impacted.

In addition, the Rainy Lake Conservancy has participated in data collection to study the formation of algae blooms throughout the watershed. Blooms are partly caused by warmer spring temperatures. Caliper Lake south of Nestor Falls is found to contain increased toxin bloom levels, with other lakes and rivers containing a less noticeable increase in blooms. These toxins can irritate the skin and, if ingested, can cause diarrhea and vomiting. At much higher toxic levels, liver and nervous system damage can occur.

Data collection and research are key to understanding such changes in water quality as we continue to better understand the impact of climate change.

*by Joanna Loney*



*Vegetation sampling in a beaver pond  
Photo by Katie Schaefer*

# Summer Events – Save these Dates!

This summer there are two dates you'll want to reserve for Rainy Lake Conservancy activities.

➔ ① Annual General Meeting, Sunday, July 29th. Don't miss this event!

Each year the members of the Rainy Lake Conservancy gather together to receive updated information on the activities of the Conservancy and to meet like-minded people. Lake dweller or not, member or not, you are invited to attend.

Our speaker this year is conservation easement specialist John Vigen from Ramsland & Vigen in Duluth. Using a PowerPoint presentation, he will explore the basic concepts of a conservation easement and how a landowner can design and implement one. Examples and valuation procedures will be discussed. The information Vigen will present is based on U.S. Internal Revenue Service standards.

A social time with hors d'oeuvres and beverages follows the meeting.

PLACE: La Place Rendez-Vous, Fort Frances

DATE: Sunday, July 29, 2012

TIME: 2PM

There's plenty of parking if you come either by road or by water.

➔ ② Nature Outing, Saturday, July 14th

Come aboard the *Otter*, Voyageurs National Park tour boat, for a tour of Kabetogama Lake including lunch at the beautiful, historic Ellsworth Rock Gardens. For details and to reserve your place on the tour, see the attached flyer.



*Rainy Lake Conservancy booth at the Fort Frances Home & Leisure Show  
May 11-12, 2012*

## We Need You

Loyal members, it's time to step up to the plate and share your talents to keep the Rainy Lake Conservancy strong and healthy! As you know, the Conservancy has operated successfully for many years thanks to the efforts of a group of dedicated, passionate volunteers. Volunteers have been our life blood and we thank them for their service as presidents, executive officers, directors, members of committees and individuals who faithfully attend meetings, provide input and donate money to keep the organization going. Everyone in the Conservancy contributes in some way! In the natural order of things, however, some of the long serving key volunteers are stepping down and we now need people who can continue the tradition of sharing their time, energy and skills.

Please contact us soon and let us know what you can do to help maintain our strong position, and increase our future effectiveness in preserving the integrity of the watershed we all treasure.

*Phyllis Callaghan, volunteer 1998-2012*



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Newsletter Editors: Mary Lysne and Joanna Loney  
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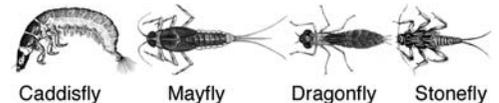
## Lake Sturgeon Research Conclusions

by Dr Brian McLaren

Matt Lebron, from Sioux Narrows, Ontario, was a student until April 2012 at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, in the Faculty of Natural Resources Management. Matt's Master's degree research was financially supported by the Rainy Lake Conservancy and the Rainy Lake Fisheries Charity Trust.

With fieldwork completed on the south arm in 2010 and 2011, and with considerable in-kind support from Voyageurs National Park, Matt carried out a survey of how physical lake characteristics might predict benthic macroinvertebrate communities and lake sturgeon feeding along shorelines of Rainy Lake.

Common benthic macroinvertebrates



Matt found that on Rainy Lake, shoreline reaches with short fetch (< 1 km of potential wind across water) supported greater biomass of mussels, caddisflies and dragonflies, while long fetches (> 2 km across water) were characteristic of greater snail biomass.

During July and August, greater total biomass, as well as greater biomass of snails and crayfish, occurred where littoral-zone slopes were steep and exposed. Mayflies experienced a large decline in biomass from June to July, suggesting that lake sturgeon might feed efficiently if they selected exposed shorelines with short fetch during June and then switched to exposed shorelines with long fetch and steep littoral-zone slopes during July and August.

Based on Matt's study and on lake sturgeon locations from radio telemetry gathered at Voyageurs National Park in 2006 and 2007, his supervisor, Dr Brian McLaren, concludes that it is important to protect exposed shorelines as part of a strategy to ensure lake sturgeon populations. Matt's study illustrated how a simplified set of physical lake characteristics offers predictive information about a complex lake ecosystem.

### 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)