

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

Spring 2014 Newsletter

President's Message



Welcome to our "e-newsletter", transmitted via email using our online membership and website management tool. Our plan is to use this method to keep you abreast of the RLC news, notices, and other topics of interest. This format is easier to create and distribute, and it presents opportunities for linking, where appropriate, to external content, such as to documents, websites, photo galleries, and videos. Your comments or questions about this edition are welcomed, and for a future edition: your story ideas, news, announcements, photos, and videos. Please just reply to this email; Chery Wilson, our Office Administrator, will assist, or forward the matter.

A pdf of this version can be viewed and downloaded here: [Spring 2014. Newsletter](#), and it can be viewed at the RLC website. A hard copy or email version can be sent to you or to someone you suggest; please contact Chery. If you wish not to receive this newsletter, please reply indicating: "Unsubscribe."

As described below, it has been a busy and productive winter season for the RLC. We are making big strides forward. I hope to be able to meet with many of you (at the lake!) in the months ahead to discuss these matters.

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by **Stephen Challis**

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French Island, Channel Lot, and Bleak Bay Conservation Easements

Elizabeth Hyatt, who, with her husband Henry, was one of the first members of the Rainy Lake Conservancy, has generously decided to donate Conservation Easements on all of her Rainy Lake properties – French Island, 27 acres (10.9 hectares), the Channel Lot, a 2 acre (.8 hectares) parcel directly across from the east side of French Island, and her Bleak Bay remote property, a 337 acre (136 hectares) portion of the mainland just north of the US/Ontario border and the Brule Narrows passage into Voyageurs National Park. Mrs. Hyatt's Bleak Bay property is the largest privately-owned parcel on Rainy Lake and is surrounded by Crown land, as is the Channel Lot. These easements will be donated initially to the American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts and eventually transferred to the Rainy Lake Conservancy. The donations will not occur until later in the year after all documentation is completed. Conservation Easements were dear to Henry Hyatt's heart. He and Elizabeth worked tirelessly for many years to see them take hold on the lake. These donations will be a giant step in making their dreams come true.

Mrs. Hyatt's donations are entirely in line with the RLC's priorities, and they are likely to be transformative to accomplishing our mission to protect the natural environment of Rainy Lake. The American Friends' Board voted unanimously to approve the initial applications from RLC for these easements and everything appears on track to be able to close on all of them in 2014.

By working through the long process necessary to complete the Echo Island Easement, we have paved the way; we now have the process down; the template of an easement that is legal in Ontario and in the United States has been approved by many attorneys; and all should be smooth sailing for future easements.

We are looking forward to more easements in the coming years. If anyone is interested in receiving the "template easement" document and getting questions answered pertaining to your island, please contact Carolyn Wallis, walleye531@verizon.net, 610-225-0184 or Dale Callaghan at dcallaghan@terrapintech.com. All of this is due to the hard work of every one of you who have stuck with RLC through thick and thin. All for one and one for all – corny, but true in this case.

by Carolyn Wallis.

NSERC, the RLC, and Lake Sturgeon

The Rainy Lake Conservancy and Lakehead University have recently formalized and expanded their partnership on lake sturgeon research with a two-year scholarship total grant of \$21,000 per year that the RLC was able to leverage from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC). The RLC, now recognized as an Industrial Partner by the NSERC, is responsible for \$6,000 per year of this amount, and in exchange participates in the direction of the PhD student at LU, Jim Burchfield.

So far, with Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources funding, Jim has collected information on the population size and sex and age structure of lake sturgeon on the Namakan River and confirmed the location of the primary spawning sites. As requested by the MNR, he has adapted a blood hormone based technique to infer the sex of captured sturgeons without invasive surgery. This summer he is hoping to use acoustic surveys and egg mat surveys to

document additional spawning sites identified by the Lac La Croix community and by local fishermen, and he is hoping to track the habitat use by larval lake sturgeon as they migrate downstream. Jim will be using video surveys and traditional benthic survey techniques.

by Jim Burchfield.

Profile: Jim Burchfield, PhD candidate, Lakehead University

I am originally from Rancho Cucamonga, California, where I grew up around mountain streams and in the ocean. In 2009, I earned my bachelor of science in Neuroscience and Behavior from the University of California, Santa Cruz, where I simultaneously worked as a laboratory technician in biological oceanography. In 2010, I began work in fisheries oceanography at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Southern Alabama, where I worked to help compare offshore invertebrate communities before and during the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. In 2011, prior to beginning my work at Lakehead University, I began work with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Coastal Chinook Research and Monitoring Program as a creel and stream surveyor, monitoring returns of Chinook salmon to Oregon's Salmon River as part of work associated with the Pacific Salmon Treaty.



My work at Lakehead University focuses on factors that affect lake sturgeon recruitment on the Namakan River, which supports one of the healthiest populations of lake sturgeon in North America. My focus is on determining how habitat use by larval and juvenile lake sturgeon affects their survival to adulthood. During the spawning season, we use acoustic techniques to determine the sturgeon's exact spawning location and time, track the downstream migration of larval sturgeon using sampling equipment in the river, and then work to determine their habitat use after settling using remote camera equipment. Ultimately, I'd like to figure out how a healthy population of juvenile sturgeon supports a healthy population of adults.

by Jim Burchfield.

Introducing the Lake Sturgeon

The lake sturgeon is sometimes called a relic from the age of dinosaurs. It has no scales but is covered with five rows of bones like plates on its back, sides, and stomach. It can live to the ripe old age of 100 years and can grow over 8 feet long and weigh up to 800 lbs. It feeds by using its protruding mouth to suction up bottom dwelling organisms like crayfish and other crustaceans as well as insect larvae. Lake sturgeon don't reproduce until they are 20-25 years old and then they don't spawn every year. Their reproductive rate is therefore low. Once their stocks have been reduced by over harvest, destruction of food sources and dam construction, it is difficult to recover healthy populations. They are presently listed as a Species at Risk in Ontario.



A Hike to Surveyor's Peak, Sandpoint Island

I have long been curious about the view afforded from the hill on the southern side of Sandpoint Island Provincial Park. When crossing the lake by boat in a variety of directions, it appears to be the highest spot in the South Arm.

On the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend, Professor Brian McLaren and I made an "ascent." We discovered there is no path up from the main beach at Sandpoint, the way is blocked by a large creek, so we accessed the steep, rocky slope up from the first long narrow bay to the west of the beach.



It's a great view, especially in the autumn, and it does seem to be the highest elevation for many kilometres looking to the east, south and west. There are "competing" spots looking to the north.

We weren't the first party to reach the spot. We found a brass Reference Marker embedded in the rock and left by surveyors working in the 1910s and 20s for the International Boundary Commission. The Marker is documented in their reports. Hence the name we gave to the spot: "Surveyor's Peak."

This summer I hope to investigate whether or not there is a viable, less steep path to the "Peak" from Goose Portage.



by Stephen Challis

International Rainy Lake/Lake of Woods Watershed Forum, March 12-13, 2014, International Falls, MN

The RLC co-sponsored, along with twelve other organizations, this worthwhile science and policy conference. In its 11th year, the forum attracts a wide-range of researchers, decision-makers and the general public to review and discuss current and future projects. A detailed report on the event was published in the International Falls Daily Journal, click here: [Forum](#).

RLC Membership Notices: Coming Soon

The recipients of this Newsletter will be receiving in the near future a separate correspondence by email with details on how to either: (i) renew an existing membership, or (ii) re-activate a lapsed membership, or (iii) become a member for the first time.

Depending on your current membership status, instructions will be provided to you on how to do one of: register and pay online, or mail-in and pay by cheque.

Please watch for these important notices.

RLC Annual General Meeting: Save that date!

The RLC AGM will be held **Sunday, August 17, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. at La Place Rendez Vous in Fort Frances**. A guest speaker and board elections will be followed by refreshments, snacks, and time for socializing. **Please do attend.**

How to donate to the RLC

Donations made by U.S. citizens to the Minnesota Land Trust's Rainy Lake Fund or by Canadians to the Rainy Lake Conservancy are tax deductible. Your donations support our mission to preserve the ecological, cultural and historic values of the watershed.

Please mail your donations to:

- Minnesota Land Trust (Rainy Lake Fund), 2356 University Ave. N. Suite 240, St. Paul MN 55114.
- Rainy Lake Conservancy, P.O. Box 223, Fort Frances, ON, P9A 3M6.

Note: Online donations using a credit card will soon be available at the RLC website. Watch for further details in the next newsletter.

RLC Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Rainy Lake Conservancy is to work with property owners, governments, and the local communities to preserve and protect the natural beauty, historic features, ecological and recreational values for present and future generations within but not restricted to Rainy Lake.

Newsletter Credits

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