

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

A Rainy Lake Reflection

by Ann Watson

The same year Harry Christianson built our cabin on Rest Island, Spike Davidson built our fireplace, and Gordon Schlichting built the mermaid. I was nine years old. Gordon was in architectural school. He had come to Treasure Island to work for the summer, and Uncle Henry and Aunt Mer Lysne, who had visited Denmark and seen the mermaid in the Copenhagen harbor, wanted a mermaid on Rainy Lake. Gordon went to town to the library to find out the simplest way to build it. Uncle Henry took Gordon to the rock and they built this square box out of lumber and filled it with cement. They used chicken wire for strength.

It was a brutally hot summer. Shirtless in the sun, Gordon worked on the rock, chiseling on the cement. Mother would make lemonade – lemons, water and sugar – and put it in a pail with a big chunk of ice in it. I would ask Spike if

I could row his flat bottom boat (it had flowers growing in the dirt in it) out to the rock, and I'd bring the lemonade to Gordon.

The ice for the lemonade came from our ice house. Al Henderson put up the ice for us. He had to use a lot of sawdust or it wouldn't keep. My brother and I had to take ice from the ice house by the lake, wash the sawdust off in the lake and bring the ice to the cabin. We built a carrier, like a stretcher, with sides on it and two long poles to carry the ice from the lake up the hill to the cabin.

Of course we all wondered what the mermaid would look like! The fins lapped in the water a little that year. That winter the fins cracked off. Uncle Henry and Gordon repaired the fins the next summer. Now 70 years later, she is still the Lady of the Lake.

Nature Conservancy of Canada to open branch office in Fort Frances, June 2004

For the first time in its history, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is establishing a second office in the same province, and it's going to be right here in Fort Frances! This is ground breaking news for the Rainy Lake Conservancy and other groups concerned with the protection and stewardship of natural heritage in Northwestern Ontario.

The NCC office will coordinate the efforts of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Rainy Lake Conservancy, the Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists and other area organizations and stakeholders to deliver a locally based, long-term commitment to conservation.

In the first two years, this partnership will develop and implement a Northwestern Ontario Conservation Strategy and Action Plan based on the identification of significant natural heritage features within the area. One of its first deliverables will be the establishment of the Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists' interpretive bog walk in Alberton Township, just west of Fort Frances, for environmental, educational and recreational purposes.

Water Quality Monitoring

First results are now available from two projects to monitor Rainy Lake water quality on a long term and comprehensive basis.

- Several RLC volunteers joined other Lake Partner volunteers in Northwestern Ontario to collect water samples and water clarity observations at 128 locations throughout the Lake of the Woods/Rainy Lake area. Many new locations in Rainy Lake and along the Rainy River were included in 2003. The Lake Partner samples were analyzed at the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and results are now available in a spreadsheet.
- The other program resulted from a partnership among the Rainy River Community College (RRCC), RLC, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The overall data package will be used to identify trends and problems, provide baseline data, and to help educate the public on issues and ways to help protect the Rainy Lake environment.



Water sampling test kit items by Mary E Lysne

The data are collected from May through September and include measurements of water clarity, phosphorus, chlorophyll and bacteria levels. Ten sites are being monitored including 3 sites on the Canadian side using RLC volunteers.

Although the limited number of data points to date does not support firm conclusions, the preliminary data show that Rainy Lake overall has excellent water quality and results compare favorably with other area lakes including Lake of the Woods.

We always need volunteers for the water monitoring projects. Thanks to our volunteers for the work last year.

*Environmental Research Committee
Lisa Colb, Paul Anderson*

Nature Conservancy of Canada continued from Page 1

RLC has a successful history of collaboration with the Nature Conservancy of Canada (conservation of Goose Island, Rainy Lake biodiversity studies, and ecoregional planning workshops). We look forward to continuing to work together to preserve and protect the watershed.

*Government Relations and Networking: Dale Callaghan
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President's Message

Welcome back to another season on the lake.

When we arrived back on April 28th, it was 80 degrees and the lake levels were up! Although temperatures fell sharply and it stayed cool throughout May, nothing interfered with the excitement of early spring on the lake – a time when everything is bursting with life and each day new water birds stop for a rest on their way north. The big birding news this year is that trumpeter swans joined the regular visitors at Tilson Creek!

Over the long winter, RLC has been busy applying for an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to support the interpretive bog walk project and the NCC office in Fort Frances. RLC



members also attended the ManOMin and Lake Superior Land Trust Partnership workshops to keep up with conservation initiatives in the area. We continue as well to look for ways to collect and share Rainy Lake data, and we network with government agencies and other organizations on a regular basis.

On June 23, RLC has been invited to meet with the 12 member Ontario Environmental Commission which is coming from Toronto to discuss environmental issues and concerns with local stakeholders. RLC is organizing a boat tour to give members of the Commission an opportunity to experience first hand the beauty of Rainy Lake and to learn about the goals and achievements of the Rainy Lake Conservancy.

During the summer, we will concentrate on increasing our membership, participating in water sampling and the VNP nesting study, and collaborating with our partners at the NCC Northwest office to develop a conservation action plan for the area.

*Phyllis Callaghan, President
Rest Island, Rainy Lake*

Easements Update

Following the regulation of Bill 119 four families are now engaged in the process of putting easements on their Rainy Lake properties.

Easements contact: Henry Hyatt

Annual General Meeting

Save the date! This summer's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, August 8, 2004, from 3:00 to 5:30 in the afternoon at Sunny Cove on the Canadian mainland. Sunny Cove is accessible by road and by boat, making it easier for both islanders and non-islanders to attend. One Board of Directors position is up for renewal and members will be asked to vote on that position. Guests are encouraged to attend the AGM this year although only members can vote. Prior to the meeting, members will receive an official Notice of Meeting with details, a map, and proxy forms.

*AGM contacts: Norma and Burgess Eberhardt
Dale Callaghan (807-274-4684)*



Nesting cormorants and cormorant chick by Mary E Lysne

Workshops and Conferences/Networking

The ManOMin Conference, International Falls MN, November 20-23, 2003

Called by the Rainy River First Nations, the ManOMin Conference theme was "The Rainy Lake Basin: Our Home, Our Future." To get a grasp of the "Big Picture" from a variety of sources on cross border environmental issues and related actions and to share with others who love this piece of the Earth was indeed enriching.

Lake Superior Land Trust Partnership Meeting, Ashland WI, February 10-11, 2004

Although Rainy Lake is not part of the Lake Superior Basin, we have been welcomed into the partnership of land trusts around Lake Superior and have profited by being part of a bi-national conservation network. Over the past 2 years, we have learned how other conservation organizations operate, how to obtain funding through grants, and ways to increase public support for conservation initiatives. The establishment of the NCC branch office in Fort Frances is due in part to our pleading the case for attention to our area.

*Government Relations and Networking Committee
ManOMin by Anne Newhart, LSLTP by Phyllis Callaghan*

Environmental Research Initiatives Summer 2004

- RLC is partnering with Voyageurs National Park (VNP) to provide transportation for a group of water samplers who will visit 40 randomly selected sites on Rainy Lake to sample PH, conductivity, DO, temp, Secchi depth, color, phosphorous and chlorophyll. The data will provide building block information regarding water quality on Rainy Lake.
- RLC is continuing to participate in current water monitoring programs.
- VNP is conducting a loon survey and would appreciate any information RLC members might have regarding nesting sites on the Canadian side of Rainy Lake. If you are interested in volunteering or if you have loons in your area or know of actual nests, please call Steve Windels, Biologist, VNP (218-283-9107) or Callaghans (807-274-4684).

Environmental Research Committee

PortPASS Update

Minnesota Senator Norm Coleman recently provided this information to us: Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) introduced Bill S.1362, the Secure and Fast Entry at the Border Act of 2003 (SAFE Act) on June 26, 2003. "The SAFE Act would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to make the use of PortPASS permanent. Currently S.1362 has been referred to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary where it awaits further action." Last June when the bill was read to the Senate, Senator Boxer was the sole sponsor. Unfortunately her term expires next year. Senator Coleman indicated he would take a close hard look at it now when it comes before the full Senate. Given his responsiveness, this is a good time to resend letters of support for the PortPASS. A sample letter is available upon request. If you have additional interest, by going to the senate website you can get the text of the bill which is, apparently, a little unclear about water vs. land crossing.

PortPASS contacts: Paul Larsen or Burgess Eberhardt

Membership

Current paid-up membership stands at 157, indicating a healthy, stable membership. Your support, both verbal and financial, enable the Conservancy to carry out its mission. Dues are \$30 and \$40 for individual and family memberships respectively and are renewable each July 31st.

Membership contact: Paul Larsen

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Nature Outing – A Voyageurs Rendezvous

August 22, 2004, from 10 a.m. to ?
Goose Portage Beach, Sandpoint Island

Pam Hawley, curator of the Fort Frances Museum, will help us create a rendezvous and reflect on the travels of the voyageurs. Fur trading led to much of the exploration and opening of the Rainy River District as vying companies sought control of the trade in the area. In this outing, Pam will offer an interactive overview of the history of fur trade and a look at the life of the voyageurs, the travels of LaVerendrye, Lady Frances Simpson, and the activities of the Northwest and Hudson Bay Companies. Pam has been at the Museum for twenty years and offers regular programs to schools and public groups on the history of the area.



Sketch by Frances Lee Jacques

After Pam's presentation, we are free to explore the island, swim, sun on the gorgeous beach, and eat. Please bring your own picnic lunch.

This is Crown land where there are no docks, so we will pull up on the beach. Try to boat-pool if you can. In case of rain, the outing will be cancelled.

Nature Outings: Tita Owre, Helen Heller

Environmental Bill of Rights

We are fortunate to have the 12-member Ontario Environmental Commission visit the Rainy River District June 23-27. In a meeting open to the public, Commissioner John Ferguson will explain what the new Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) is, what it is intended to do and how it works. Quoting from the Commission's website (www.ene.gov.on.ca): "The EBR is one of the most significant environmental laws enacted in the province in the last 30 years." The Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists, RLC, and local First Nations are encouraging their members to attend this informative public session to be held on June 24th at 7 p.m. in the Fort Frances Museum.

Editor: Mary Lysne



Goose Portage (a.k.a. Gooseneck Portage) on Sandpoint Island by Mary E. Lysne

Local Citizen Committees

Across the northwest, there are a number of Local Citizen Committees (LCCs) whose mandate is to advise the district forest managers of concerns with our forests and waterways. The committees are made up of people from all walks of life and many different philosophies, so when an LCC does reach a consensus on management practices it comes from a cross section of the community. Although reaching consensus can be frustrating, the committees are vital. Several members of the Conservancy serve on local citizen committees, lending their voices to forest management practices.

Environmental Research Committee: Gordon Martin

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Assistants Margaret Ann Hudson, Betty Anne West

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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