

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

A Little Boy's Rainy Lake Reflection

From 1929-1936, local legends Don and Lena Johnson worked at Camp Koochiching as caretakers. Although they lived at the camp year round, they didn't have their own place to stay. During the winters, the growing Johnson family stayed in the camp director's cabin and in the summertime they pitched a tent or stayed wherever space was available. Buck Johnson, their son, remembers growing up as a little boy at camp. He remembers the camp's 18-foot put-put boat which had a round bottom, was pointed on both ends, and had a single cylinder motor on it. "You cranked the motor by hand and it would just go forward. The motor had a knife switch on it, and if you were quick enough," Buck says, "you could get it to go in reverse." It had a great big propeller, a rudder, and a large flywheel. Buck had ridden with his dad in the put-put and had even steered it, but never by himself. One day Don was working on the camp's back dock



Buck Johnson holding his model of the 40'x8' boat that hauled canoe trippers and groceries for Camp Koochiching from about 1924 to 1948.

and needed the put-put. Don asked Buck who was about 8 years old if he could bring it around from the front. This was Buck's big chance to show how grown up he was. Of course he said, "Sure." But he couldn't start it; he was too little and the flywheel was too big, so he got someone to start it for him. It was his first time in command of a boat, a real skipper, going at canoe speed. Off a point between the front and back dock, there is a reef Buck didn't know about. Sure enough, up onto the reef went the put-put with the propeller sticking out over the water. He didn't know what to do. "I kind of thought that the rock might get out of the way if I waited long enough," he said. "Dad saw me and came over in a canoe. He got the boat off the rock and went back to his work, and I drove the put-put the rest of the way." Buck has enjoyed a lifelong passion for the special boats of Rainy Lake ever since.

As told by Buck Johnson to Mary Lysne

Loon Nesting Platforms: Three Researchers Give Their Opinions

Patty Freeman, Cory MacNulty and Jen Fox

One of this summer's nature outings is to construct loon nesting platforms. In anticipation of this activity, I've asked three loon researchers to give us their personal, unofficial opinions on loon platforms.

"I have a couple of opinions. One is that, as much as I love loons, they are aggressive birds; grebes and other water birds can be terrorized by loons. If we put out platforms for loons, are we inadvertently having a negative impact on other water birds? I would be interested to read a study where someone has looked at the impact of increasing loons where you have other water birds. Putting up platforms for them is a little unnatural, although

nesting now on Rainy Lake is not as natural as in the past because of the regulation of the water levels. So I'm inclined to think nesting platforms are a good thing. There are so many factors, sometimes you just have to do something and look at the results."

Patty Freeman

"I have mixed feelings about loon platforms. Research shows that platforms do increase loon reproductive success even in areas where loons were successful before. Obviously where there is direct impact of water level fluctuation on reproduction, loon platforms can have good results. Personally I'd love to see loons reproduce naturally.

Loon Nesting Platforms continued on page 4

Money Well Spent

Over the past six years, RLC has received a total of \$77,400 in grants. These funds have allowed us to do important conservation work in the watershed without unduly burdening our members.

- 2000 – \$2,500 received from the local MNR to begin the first systematic natural history inventory of Rainy Lake.

- 2001 – \$21,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to complete the inventory and produce posters, pamphlets and the history of local conservation efforts.

- 2002 – \$5,000 grant from the Ontario Land Trust Alliance to hire conservation lawyer, Ian Attridge, to help bring about the regulation of Ontario government legislation permitting U.S. residents to receive tax benefits in the U.S. for conservation easements on Canadian properties.

- 2004 – \$48,900 OTF collaborative grant to RLC to help fund the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) Office in Fort Frances and the first stage of the Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists' interpretive trail for the Cranberry Peatlands bog site, and to develop a conservation plan for Northwest Ontario (NWO), including Rainy Lake.

Update of 2004 OTF Grant: Over the past winter NCC has developed a series of conservation maps for the region between Thunder Bay and Kenora.

Ilka Milne has informed us that the maps, including identified target species, will be presented to area partners for use in the development of the NWO conservation plan. The bog's interpretive trail got a new section of boardwalk with another 150 feet planned for construction this spring. Beaver bafflers are being installed in an attempt to lower the water level to prevent flooding of the boardwalk. Look for more information on beaver bafflers in our fall newsletter.



Bog's new boardwalk by Ilka Milne

to prevent flooding of the boardwalk. Look for more information on beaver bafflers in our fall newsletter.

Grants contact: Phyllis Callaghan

In the Community

This spring RLC again had a booth at the Fort Frances Home & Leisure Show. People stopped by the booth to guess at our fish-age quiz, stayed to talk with booth volunteers, picked up literature, and learned more about our projects in the watershed.

Marketing contact: Mary Lysne

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President's Message

The Rainy Lake Conservancy is made up of people who care about the future of that special natural resource we all share – Rainy Lake.



To help keep Rainy Lake special, RLC and the Nature Conservancy of Canada are working on four conservation easements involving private land on Rainy Lake islands. In addition, RLC is providing financial assistance to the Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation to complete the conservation plans for the Oberholtzer islands (further details in the fall newsletter). We distribute lakeshore stewardship information to the public and are setting an example by cleaning up at least one Rainy Lake beach this summer. (If you would like to help out, please contact me.)

Last year RLC contributed financially to the establishment of the Rainy Lake Fisheries Charity Trust and has a member on the board. Their first project includes a four part study of the smallmouth bass population on Rainy, under the direction of Dr. Steven Cooke and Dr. Bruce Tufts, Carleton University (Ottawa). Field work, conducted by a graduate student, will focus on examining the responses of smallmouth bass to "catch and release" angling, with the intent of developing strategies to minimize mortality stress. Nesting studies will also be conducted to better understand reproductive dynamics in northern climes. This is an exciting new project. We expect that the research will indicate ways of maintaining a healthy fishery – an indicator of a healthy lake.

As property owners on the lake, you and I can do our part by being good stewards of our shorelines and by considering long term conservation plans for our private properties, two actions which will contribute to a healthy lake for generations to come.

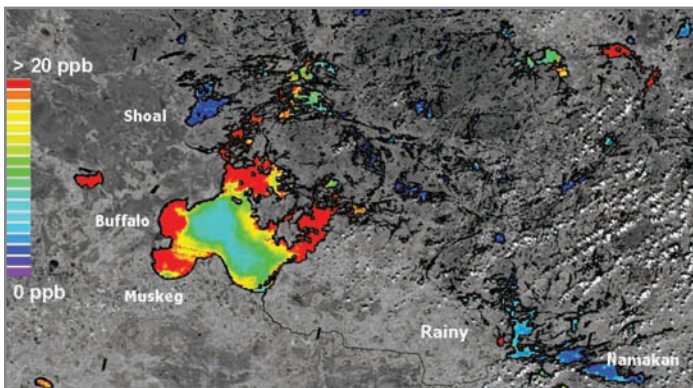
*Dale Callaghan, President
Rest Island, Rainy Lake*



Booth at Home & Leisure Show by M.Lysne

Coordinating Satellite/Water Data

In the summer of 2005 a special water quality monitoring project was conducted to evaluate the application of satellite imagery to estimate water quality conditions in large lakes. A key aspect of the project was to “ground truth” the satellite. In other words, calibrate what the satellite estimates as water quality versus what is really measured on the lake when the image is taken overhead. For example, the levels of chlorophyll-a in the photo below are determined by coordinating the satellite imagery with water samples taken August 1, 2006. Rainy Lake’s blue coloring means that its chlorophyll-a levels were relatively low, an indicator of good water quality. *Environmental Research contact: Paul Anderson*



Estimated chlorophyll-a levels in Lake of the Woods and Rainy Lake

Three Special Friends

The members of the Rainy Lake Conservancy mourn the passing of three dedicated supporters of conservation on Rainy Lake. Our sympathies extend to the families of W. Gerald Peterson, Thomas A. Martin and Torvald Eberhardt. We will miss these special people who have been our fellow members, friends and neighbors. Thank you too to the many friends who have chosen to honour these men with In Memoriam donations to the Conservancy. *President Dale Callaghan*

Help Wanted

The Rainy Lake Conservancy could use an *experienced* web manager to assist with updating our web site. RLC could also use a few volunteers to help fold, sort and stuff materials before the AGM and fold, stuff and label the newsletters in the spring and fall. No experience necessary! The pay? Lots of heartfelt appreciation.

*Communications Director: Mary Lysne
info@rainylakeconservancy.org*

Touching Antenna

To keep up to date with our responsibilities as a land trust, and to learn about environmental issues in the basin, RLC representatives attended three important workshops this year: the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) gathering in Barrie, Ontario, the 3rd Annual Lake of the Woods Water Quality Forum in International Falls, and the Lake Superior Land Trust Partnership meeting in Ashland, Wisconsin. Phyllis and Dale Callaghan attended OLTA workshops which focused on subjects ranging from the new standards and practices for Ontario land trusts to inventories for land donations, effective marketing strategies, fund raising and board recruitment. The gathering provided a great opportunity to exchange ideas with other Canadian land trusts.

The February meeting of the Lake Superior Land Trust Partnership brought together representatives from Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Ontario to discuss land protection issues. Jane Prohaska, Minnesota Land Trust, gave an excellent presentation on record keeping, an essential skill for conservation organizations. Paul Anderson represented RLC at the Lake of the Woods Water Quality Forum, intended for researchers and resource people interested in research and management activities related to watersheds flowing into Lake of the Woods. Paul reported that the workshops and speakers were exceptional. RLC is also in touch with government agencies and other organizations on a regular basis to keep informed about developments in the watershed.

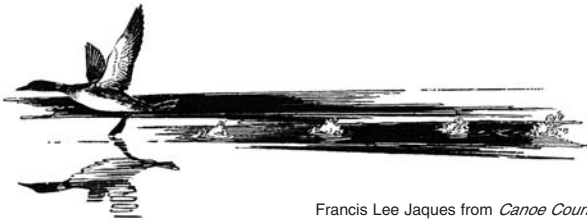
Government Relations and Networking contact: Dale Callaghan

Annual General Meeting in August

The Annual General Meeting of the Rainy Lake Conservancy will be held on **Sunday, August 6th, 3:00 p.m. at La Place Rendez-Vous**, Fort Frances. After a short business meeting and election of directors, MNR biologist Darryl McLeod will speak to us about current developments impacting Rainy Lake: the work of the Fisheries Trust, the 2006 forest management plan, the proposed damming of the Namakan River and other topics of interest. Members are invited to a social after the meeting. Come by boat or car – the Rendez-Vous has ample parking space for both. Current members are entitled to vote in person or by proxy at the AGM. Please make sure that your membership is up to date. *AGM contact: Dale Callaghan*

Nature Outings

If you're interested in building your very own loon nesting platform, this year's "nature outing" is for you! Paul Larsen has generously offered to acquire and cut materials for platforms, assuming he knows how many people want to participate. Current platform designs and good educational material will be available for participants. When we know who wants to join us in this project, we will get back to you with cost, date and time. Please contact Trish Hogan at trishmike@northwinds.net or 218-286-5873 or Ginny Sweatt at vsweatt@aol.com or 218-244-0408.



Francis Lee Jaques from *Canoe Country* p.43

If there is interest in a lake geology tour in August, we will contact Peter Hinz, Ministry of Mines, Kenora, to see if he would lead it. Those of you who are interested in this, please contact one of us as we would need to demonstrate enough interest before asking Peter to commit his time.

*Nature Outings Committee: Claudia Horne
Trish Hogan and Ginny Sweatt*

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Newsletter Editor: Mary Lysne
Assistants: Margaret Ann Hudson,
Betty Anne West and Kay Larsen

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Loon Nesting Platforms continued from Page 1

On the other hand, if I had loons that usually nested but were unsuccessful, I'd be tempted to use a platform. You don't necessarily want to add platforms where you already have nesting loons because you could potentially attract loons to an occupied territory and create competitive behavior. If people are considering putting a loon platform out, they definitely should consider the eagle prevention platforms and be informed about where to place them." *Cory MacNulty*

"Overall, I have mixed feelings about putting out platforms, but I think if landowners wish to put out platforms on their own land/water, keeping predator vulnerability and chick access in mind, they can go ahead and try it. To simulate a floating mat, putting mud and aquatic vegetation on it is a must. I think it's a good idea to ensure good cover around the platform by, for example, putting it on a wetland shoreline surrounded by cattails and reeds in a well protected area. I don't like to tamper with nature, so I hesitate somewhat on the platform issue. However, one could certainly argue that by having dams and regulating water levels, humans are tampering with the whole system. We would prefer that nobody in the Copenhagen-Home-Rest-Goose-John Island areas put out platforms this year. This is the final year these territories are being monitored for the water levels study, and we need them to stay natural." *Jen Fox*

In the 1990s over 900 lakes across Canada were surveyed. From that study comes this information: "the reproductive success of loons ... was 0.80 young on lakes with stable water levels. However, on average only 0.63 young were produced per pair on lakes with water level changes of more than 30 cm (12") during the nesting season. This difference suggests that there is a very good chance that loons plagued by water level changes could be helped by platforms." *Editor's note*

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