

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY

Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed



Spring 2015 Newsletter

Annual General Meeting
Sunday, August 16, 2 p.m.
La Place Rendez-Vous, Fort Frances, ON



President's Message



I am happy to report that your Conservancy has been very busy over the fall, winter and spring. The Committees have been actively working with other watershed organizations on actions supporting the preservation of the Rainy Lake Watershed, as well as directly supporting research being conducted on lake sturgeon and wolves – all of which relates to understanding how to protect Rainy Lake's special habitat. We have also reported to you that the RLC was successful last year in having four conservation easements, totaling 136 hectares (337 acres), donated for both mainland and island properties. What we all talked about as a great idea is a reality – we now know what needs to be done, how to do it and what it costs to complete an easement. That is a huge step toward protecting the waters, shorelines and island ecosystems of Rainy Lake.

This summer, your board members will be developing a new five-year Strategic Plan for the Conservancy. Your ideas are welcome. If you want to participate in the thinking and drafting, please let me know.

I know many of you are now at the lake and those of you living in International Falls and Fort Frances are already having the good fortune of getting out on the Lake. I presume by now you've all had a delicious walleye dinner!

I hope to see many of you at the Conservancy's Annual Meeting at 2 p.m. on Sunday August 16th at La Place Rendez-vous in Fort Frances. We will have our usual annual reports, election of board members, great speaker and time for socializing.

Thanks to all of you for supporting the Rainy Lake Conservancy.

Carolyn White Wallis

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Tribute to a life-long resident of Rainy Lake

Ann Watson, who passed away in February 2015, spent most of her 89 summers on Rest and Berry Islands in the South Arm of Rainy Lake. She, along with her husband Jim, and their children, Lucia, Peter and Jimmy, treasured the time they spent on Rainy. Ann and Jim, who were married for 67 years, attended the same high school in Minneapolis but met on Rainy Lake where their families both had cabins.



According to their daughter Lucia, it was a rustic setup at Berry Island, where the family spent their summers. One cabin was for eating and cooking with a big wood stove in it and the other cabins were for sleeping. The kids spent their days swimming, fishing for northerns, walleyes and smallmouth bass, picking blueberries, pumping water with a hand pump, filling the wood box, and making blueberry pancakes and biscuits on the wood stove.

Many of us remember Ann not only as a gracious hostess but also as a faithful supporter of the Rainy Lake Conservancy. She and Jim, along with a few other cabin owners, attended one of the first meetings of the Ontario Government's Lands for Life Round Tables held in Fort Frances back in 1998. That meeting led to the establishment of the Conservation Reserves on most of the Crown Land Islands of Rainy Lake and also was a motivating factor in the formation of the Rainy Lake Conservancy.

Ann was a director on the RLC Board in its early years and continued to be member of the Conservancy for the rest of her life. She believed in the goals and accomplishments of RLC and requested that charitable donations in her memory be made to the Rainy Lake Conservancy. Her friends and family honored her wishes and together they have donated over \$4,000 to support RLC's work on the lake she so loved.

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Effects of Artificial Lake Level Management and the IJC Rule Curves

This year's 12th annual International Rainy/Lake of the Woods Watershed Forum in International Falls brought together a record number of attendees: more than 150 academics, municipal, provincial, state and federal agency staff, and members of the public. It was held at Rainy River Community College on March 11-12, and included 30 technical sessions and other activities.

The technical sessions had two themes: (i) Lake of the Woods phosphorus, algae and climate change studies, and (ii) the main focus of this year's forum, the *Effects of Artificial Lake Level Management: Multidisciplinary Preparation for a Review of the IJC 2000 Rule Curves for Rainy Lake and Namakan Reservoir.*



High and dry, May 2015

Rainy and Namakan lakes are each controlled by a rule curve which sets a band of levels that rises and falls according to the time of year. When the International Joint Commission (IJC) established the current Rule Curves in 2000, commissioners asked that the curves be evaluated after 15 years to see if they improved matters for the fisheries without harming riparian and other economic interests. More than 20 studies are now complete or nearing completion after looking at the impacts of the rule curve on various economic and ecologic indicators.

Researchers at the Forum presented information on the potential application of satellite remote sensing for water quality monitoring, what sediment cores may tell us about the phosphorus history of the lakebed, and the potential “legacy effect” of historical phosphorus loading.

Other sessions focused on the impacts of water elevation management on northern pike, loons, beaver, muskrat, wild rice, property damage, lake sturgeon and contaminant flow from mine wastes. The science from these studies will be incorporated into a Shared Vision Model which will allow everyone to see the benefits and disadvantages of one water elevation management approach over another as part of the upcoming rule curve evaluation.

The Forum is organized annually by a volunteer committee led by the Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation with members from universities, government agencies and non-governmental organizations active in research and resource management in the watershed. The RLC is one of 15 groups that helped sponsor the event. Paul Anderson represented the RLC at this year’s Forum.

This year’s Forum was especially significant for the RLC because two of our members, Dale and Phyllis Callaghan, were awarded the Wilson Stewardship Award.

Named in honor of its first recipient, Gerry Wilson, for her contributions to stewardship on Lake of the Woods, the award recognizes outstanding achievements of individuals, groups, or projects that are making a significant contribution to environmental stewardship and sustainability of the Rainy-Lake of the Woods watershed ecosystem, through education, outreach, civic engagement and participation in stewardship initiatives or program development and projects or programs focused on protection, restoration, preservation or reduction of environmental impact and development of sustainable practices.



Kelly Saunders, Dale and Phyllis Callaghan, Paul Anderson

For more information on the forum and to read the abstracts of presentations, see: <http://lowwsf.com/>

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Namakan River Lake Sturgeon Study

Jim Burchfield has started a final season of fieldwork, which is a requirement of support from the Rainy Lake Conservancy and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) in 2014 and 2015. Among other tasks, he is canoeing the Namakan River to look for evidence of staging and spawning.

Jim is making use of the six years of acoustic receiver data on the river that tracks migrating sturgeon over two calendar years in Bill Lake, one of the three lakes occurring along the course of the river. This spring Jim completed his PhD dissertation, which he defended successfully at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay.

In his final chapter, he argued effectively that a slow growing population of lake sturgeon is delayed in recovery by the availability for recruitment, which needs to be protected as much as possible along the Namakan River and likely largely above High Falls, situated just downstream of Bill Lake.



Jim Burchfield with a baby lake sturgeon, Namakan River

Thanks to the generous donations of RLC members, the Rainy Lake Conservancy is able to collaborate with NSERC, Lakehead University and the Fort Frances District Office of the Ministry of Natural Resources to support this valuable fisheries research in the watershed. Also, thanks to Paul Anderson and Stephen Challis of the Environmental Research Committee, and Professor Brian McLaren, Lakehead University, for their work to have the RLC listed as an NSERC Industrial Partner, and for preparing and submitting the application to NSERC for their financial contribution to this study.

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Proposed Upstream Sulfide Mining Study

Findings from a recent study commissioned by Voyageurs National Park Association and the National Parks Conservation Association document the risks to Voyageurs National Park and Rainy Lake from proposed upstream sulfide mining projects in Minnesota. In the spirit of promoting science-based decisions regarding development in the Rainy River watershed, RLC supported this research with a small donation.

The International Joint Commission is also currently recommending a study to scientifically assess the risk to our watershed from new mining proposals on both sides of the border.

The VNPA-NPCA report, fact sheet and map can be found online at:

<http://voyageurs.org/advocacy/sulfide-mining/>

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It's RLC Membership Renewal Time!

Except for those individuals or families who have a complimentary or gifted membership, all of the recipients of this Newsletter should have received by now an email or letter correspondence with instructions on how to renew your current RLC membership. Current RLC Memberships (except those which are complimentary, or gifted) expire on July 31, 2015, so please do renew your membership either online, by mail, or at the RLC AGM (2:00 p.m., August 16, La Place Rendezvous, Fort Frances, ON.)

Note: a complimentary membership is granted to any individual or family who donates a total of \$500.00 or more to the RLC. The RLC membership period runs July 31 to August 1 of the following year. Where possible, the complimentary membership will be granted for the year in which the qualifying donation(s) occur; however, depending on the time of year when they are received, the RLC may grant the complimentary membership for the subsequent membership year.

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How to Donate

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. You can choose from one of the following methods to make a donation:

Mail your donation:

- to: Minnesota Land Trust (Rainy Lake Fund), 2356 University Ave. N. Suite 240, St. Paul MN 55114

- to: Rainy Lake Conservancy, P.O. Box 223, Fort Frances, ON, P9A 3M6

Online donations by Canadians or Americans to the Rainy Lake Conservancy using a credit card are available at the RLC website, here:

<http://www.rainylakeconservancy.org/Online-Donations>

RLC Mission Statement

The Rainy Lake Conservancy works 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 and Notices

Thank you to Mary Lysne for the photo of Ann Watson.

A hard copy or email version can be sent to you or to someone you suggest; contact Chery, the RLC Office Administrator, at info@rainylakeconservancy.org, or by telephone: 807-345-4687.

If you wish not to receive this newsletter, please reply indicating: "Unsubscribe."

Newsletter Committee Members: Carolyn Wallis, Stephen and Gila Challis, Dale and Phyllis Callaghan, Margaret Ann Hudson.

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