

## **History of the Rainy Lake Conservancy, Significant Events: 1996-2020**

In the summer of 1996, a group of Rainy Lake cottagers met to discuss the possibility of forming an organization to preserve the natural beauty and ecological values of Rainy Lake and other parts of the watershed. Thought turned to action. In 1999 the Rainy Lake Conservancy (RLC) became a non-profit Canadian organization, and in 2001 the RLC received charitable status from Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CRA). Since 1999, thanks to the efforts of members, supporters, presidents, directors, committees and a network of organizations, RLC has made notable contributions to conservation on Rainy Lake and in the area.

- **1997:** attended meeting of the Ontario Government's Boreal West Round Table and submitted a proposal to designate crown land islands and selected mainland shorelines as Conservation Reserves
- **1998:** crown land on selected islands of Rainy Lake designated by the Ontario Government as Conservation Reserves (officially regulated in the summer of 2006)
- **1999:** Rainy Lake Conservancy (RLC) becomes non-profit Canadian organization
- **1999:** First Annual General Meeting of the Rainy Lake Conservancy hosted by Elizabeth and Henry Hyatt at Windsong Island
- **2001:** charitable status granted to RLC by Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CRA)
- **2001-2002:** worked in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy of Canada to spearhead the first comprehensive biological inventory of the Canadian side of Rainy Lake: 514 vascular plant species, 21 provincially rare plant species and significant fauna identified by Northern Bioscience biologists; project supported by a \$21,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant
- **2002:** promoted conservation through summer-long exhibit at the Fort Frances Museum, presentation at International Joint Commission meeting in Fort Frances, and display at the local Farmers Market
- **2002:** presented Land Protection/Conservation Easements workshop led by speakers from the Nature Conservancy of Canada and open to RLC members and interested cottagers
- **2002:** attendance by 2 RLC representatives at Lake Superior Land Trust meeting in Ashland, Wisconsin, thus beginning a 2-year relationship with

land trusts around Lake Superior; sharing of common concerns, success stories, contacts and expertise --a great benefit to fledgling RLC

- **2002:** attendance by 2 RLC representatives at Superior Mixed Forest Ecoregion Planning Workshop in Thunder Bay; workshop also attended by NCC, TNC, MNR and other conservation groups; important decision taken to include Lake of the Woods and an area from Southeastern Quetico Park through Rainy Lake to Lake of the Woods as an ecoregion
- **2002-2003:** collaborated with other land trusts in Ontario to effect the regulation of Bill 119 which will permit U.S. conservation organizations to accept conservation easements and fee simple donations of Canadian land owned by U.S. citizens
- **2003:** RLC recipient of Fort Frances Museum Heritage Award for publication of *A Century of Wilderness Preservation in the Rainy Lake Watershed* and *Natural Heritage of Rainy Lake*; summer exhibition at the museum highlighting ecology, history, recreation, and conservation of Rainy Lake
- **2004:** Memorandum of Understanding signed by RLC and Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) for joint funding of land and water conservation projects in the area straddling the border between Ontario and Minnesota
- **2002-2006:** participated in water quality testing through the Lake Partners Program, Great Ontario Dip-IN, Rainy River Community College/Minnesota Pollution Control Agency programs.
- **2005:** membership on Board of Directors of the Rainy Lake Fisheries Charity Trust, a local organization formed to conduct fisheries research on Rainy Lake
- **2004-2006:** worked with Voyageurs National Park (VNP) to locate loon nesting sites on Rainy Lake
- **2004-2006:** lead applicant for \$48,999 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to support establishment of Nature Conservancy of Canada field office in Fort Frances, construction of phase one of the Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists Cranberry Peatlands Interpretive Trail, and land protection in the area through conservation easements and property donations. Partners in the grant were: RLC, Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists (RRVFN) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)
- **2006:** participated in the lake of the Woods District Property Association Dock Talk program to promote good lakeshore stewardship on Rainy Lake
- **2007:** continued to work with the Minnesota Land Trust and NCC to support conservation easement programs on Rainy Lake

- **2007:** received the Ontario Trillium Foundation's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Great Grants Award in the Environment category along with our partners in Northwestern Ontario Conservation Partnership (RRVFN and NCC)
- **2007:** worked with other interested organizations and individuals to research and provide input regarding the proposed dams on the Namakan River
- **2007:** attended planning meeting in Fort Frances to designate the historic voyageurs waterway from Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods, as a **Canadian Heritage River**; designation presently supported by Fort Frances Museum, Quetico Provincial Park, Old Fort William, Thunder Bay, and some communities along the route
- **2007:** assisted MNR with summer research on invasive species in area lakes and contributed financially to Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters radio ads on controlling invasive species in our lakes
- **2007:** attended meetings of recently formed **Heart of the Continent**, a coalition of 20 groups from both sides of the border to sustain the health, beauty, diversity and productivity of the border region area, for present and future generations
- **2008:** assisted with funding for a conservation easement on Ernest Oberholtzer's Review Islands on the U.S. side of Rainy Lake
- **2009:** participated in a formal assessment of the Rainy Lake Conservancy's organization conducted by the Ontario Land Trust Alliance; received high marks for complying with the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices
- **2009:** celebrated 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rainy Lake Conservancy
- **2009:** provided financial assistance for Voyageurs National Park's research and monitoring study of the double-breasted cormorant, focusing on the survival, diet and health of cormorant nestlings on the Canadian side of Rainy Lake
- **2010:** provided funds to purchase underwater camera used in Lakehead University juvenile sturgeon research on the Namakan River
- **2010:** expanded water sampling Lake Partner program to include 10 sites on Rainy and Namakan Lakes.
- **2010:** representatives served on the IJC Citizen Advisory Task Force for the management of water in the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River Basin
- **2010:** American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts (AF), a U.S. charity, granted donee status by the Government of Canada, thus allowing AF to accept Conservation Easements and fee simple donations of Canadian lands from

American citizens who own property in Canada: **a major turning point in RLC's efforts to preserve key properties in the Rainy Lake Watershed.**

- **2011:** entered into a partnership with American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts (AFOCLT) and the owners of Echo Island, Rainy Lake, to complete a Conservation Easement to protect the conservation values of the island in perpetuity
- **2012:** with other local partners, NCC and the Government of Canada, adopted NCC's Lake of the Woods/Rainy Lake Natural Areas Conservation Plan: RLC now collaborating with NCC to support the securement of core conservation areas, the enhancement of community support for conservation and of biodiversity values, and the development of partnerships in the Rainy Lake/Lake of the Woods area
- **2012:** hired RLC's first administrative support person in the summer of 2012 to support the work of board members, executive officers and RLC committees
- **2013:** Namakan River Hydro Development cancelled due to costs of connecting to the power grid and the environmental impacts of the dam
- **2013:** published RLC's first electronic newsletter to better communicate with members and supporters
- **2013:** Rainy Lake Conservancy recognized by Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) for completing first Cross-Border Conservation Easement (CE) in Ontario; CE currently held by American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts with intent of transfer to RLC in future
- **2013-2015:** co-sponsored Lake Sturgeon research by Lakehead University PhD student, Jim Burchfield, through the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada's (NSERC) program
- **2014:** recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of the U.S. as a publicly funded charity; RLC now eligible to receive the transfer of Conservation Easements from American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts; over 360 acres of privately-owned land on Rainy Lake now protected by RLC and AF
- **2014:** summer of the big flood: many sheds and cabins flooded, docks lifted, shoreline vegetation destroyed, debris found floating everywhere; public outcry, resulting in publication of International Joint Commission IJC Basin Report, outlining plans to address information gaps and monitoring needs related to the Rule Curves established for Rainy and Namakan Lakes in 2000

- **2014:** 8 rare species recorded by Northern Bioscience biologists while conducting inventories on 4 properties slated for Conservation Easements (New England Violet, Canada Warbler, Eastern Wood Pewee, Northern Pin Oak, Fairy Slipper, Laurentian Tiger Beetle, Bald Eagle and Large Marble Butterfly)
- **2014:** 4 Conservation Easements completed by American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts and RLC on south arm islands of Rainy Lake (365 acres; 148 hectares)
- **2014:** conforming with the new rules governing non-profit organizations in Canada, membership of the Rainy Lake Conservancy approved by special resolution a new By-Law to replace the letters patent and existing RLC By-Laws
- **2015:** two Rainy Lake Conservancy members selected by Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation as recipients of the 2015 Wilson Stewardship Award for their significant contribution to environmental stewardship and sustainability in the watershed
- **2015: continuing support for research in Rainy Lake Watershed:** Jim Burchfield, PHD student, Lakehead University, completed his final season of research on Lake Sturgeon in the Namakan River; results show that a slow growing population of Lake Sturgeon needs to be protected on the Namakan River and likely above High Falls, downstream from Bill Lake.; collaboration by RLC, Lakehead University and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research of Canada (NSRC) to support research
- **2015:** representation at first Rainy/Lake of the Woods Watershed Lake Associations Event, held at Rainy River College, International Falls.; exchange of information by members of 20 lake associations around the basin and presentations by Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, IJC, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Federation of Ontario Cottagers, MN Sea Grant Aquatic Invasive Species Agency
- **2015:** encouraged science-based decisions regarding development in the Rainy Lake Watershed by supporting VNP study on effects of proposed upstream sulfide mining projects in Minnesota.
- **2015:** donation of a 3-acre island in Haymarsh Bay, North Arm of Rainy Lake, accepted by RLC and AF
- **2016:** training workshop for RLC Conservation Easement monitors, led by Minnesota Land Trust monitor; workbooks produced for each property, including monitoring forms and backup documents

- **2016:** RLC representative selected to serve on Rainy/Namakan Rule Curve Public Advisory Group and Rainy/Lake of the Woods Watershed Board
- **2016:** supported local Cultural Heritage Tree Project involving Fort Frances High School students in tree labelling and ID project to increase public knowledge about our natural heritage
- **2016:** Rule Curve Study Board formed by IJC to make scientifically supported recommendations to the IJC for modifying or retaining the 2000 Rainy and Namakan Lakes rule curve
- **2016:** 2 Conservation Easements donated, a 53-acre island and a 10.4-acre island; 443 acres (approx. 179 hectares) of property on Rainy Lake now protected by American Friends and RLC
- **2016:** tracked progress of Steep Rock Mine Rehab Project to look into the risks and problems that development on the site, like flooding of the pits or failure in the many water management structures, might cause; comments summarizing RLC's concerns submitted to MNRF by RLC Environmental Research Committee
- **2017:** Strategic Plan for the 2017-2020 developed by Board of Directors: focus on Land Conservation, Science and Policy, and Education and Outreach.
- **2017:** RLC represented at **International Land Conservation Network Conference** in Minneapolis as part of the American Friends of Canadian Land Trust's presentation: conference focused on sharing of cross-border initiatives by delegates from the U.S., Mexico, Canada, South America, Chile, the U.K., Australia, the European Union, France and other countries; summary by RLC representative of the long, successful history of cross-border projects in the Rainy Lake watershed, starting with the formation of the IJC in 1909 and continuing to include the recent efforts of RLC, AF and the Minnesota Land Trust in preserving private lands on both sides of the international border between Canada and the U.S.
- **2017:** received 2 grants from the Ontario Land Trust, totalling \$11,391.88 to assist RLC with the costs associated with the recent cross-border conservation easements.
- **2017:** conclusion by IJC that the 2000 rule curves performed as expected in Namakan/Rainy Lake; decided to reduce peak water levels in flood years on Rainy Lake and reduce the artificially large drawdown of both lakes during the winter period; recommended an early drawdown of the lakes in the fall before freeze-up with less drawdown during the core winter period

- **2017:** donation of 2 small islands (total acreage 5.3 acres, 2.1 hectares) to American Friends with intent to transfer them to RLC in the future
- **2017:** supported wolf and beaver research in Voyageurs National Park
- **2018:** 2018 Supplementary Order of Approval in the Matter of Emergency Regulation of the Level of Rainy Lake and Other Boundary Waters issued by IJC; new order regulating the rule curve (based on the recommendations of the advisory board) in effect August 2018
- **2018:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Binational Lake Associations Conference at Sunny Cove Camp, Rainy Lake, attended by RLC representative
- **2018:** Conservation Easement on Rainy Lake island (12.2 acres, 5.0 hectares) completed by AF and RLC
- **2019:** new Canadian Land Trust Association's standards and practices adopted by RLC Board of Directors with commitment to work on areas that need to be addressed
- **2019:** The ownership of Haymarsh Bay Island Olsen Island and American Narrows Island were transferred by American Friends of Canadian Conservation (formerly Canadian Land Trusts) to the Rainy Lake Conservancy.

**Properties Protected on Rainy Lake since 2014:**

**Total: approx. 448 acres (181 hectares)**

**Echo Island (2014) French Island (2014) Bleak Bay Property (2014)**

**Channel Lot (2014) Haymarsh Bay (2015) Copenhagen I. (2016) Wilderness I.**

**(2016 ) American Narrows Island (2017) Olsen Island (2017) Midway Island (2018)**

**Presidents since 1999: Sam White, Burgess Eberhardt, Phyllis Callaghan, Dale Callaghan, Anne Newhart, Stephen Challis, Carolyn Wallis**

