

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY

Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed



Spring Newsletter, May 2017

President's Message



This Spring finds us working on two conservation easements in the South Arm – Midway Island (12+acres), and Red Pine Island (60+ acres) that we did not finish last year and two potential donations of uninhabited islands. We all should extend huge thanks to Barry and Ann Sampson and Harry and Ginny Sweatt for their generous support of the conservation of Rainy Lake. You will receive more details once we have settled on these donations.

We will try to hold another workshop this summer for those interested in monitoring our easements. We are now up to 7 easements that need annual monitoring and as noted, quite a few more are in the queue. More information will be sent out via email to all members. I hope many of you can sign up and take on the annual monitoring visits to these properties.

I am proud to report that our Conservancy received two grants this winter from the Ontario Land Trust Alliance. As a small organization, grants are key to getting our message out and helping us to accomplish our very large mission of preserving and protecting Rainy Lake.

The IJC Rule Curve Study Board has just released their Draft Report – see their press release in the newsletter for those details. The performance of the Rule Curves has a major impact on all our properties as well as on Fort Frances and International Falls.

Please note that the RLC Annual General Meeting will be on Sunday, August 13th, at 2 p.m. at La Place Rendezvous in Fort Frances. I look forward to seeing many of you there. We will have a presentation on the Trans Canada Canoe Trail that is opening this year and runs through Rainy Lake!

I hope all of you are well and will enjoy a great summer on the lake. *Carolyn Wallis*

Rainy Lake Conservancy Receives Grants from the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA)

The Rainy Lake Conservancy received a \$6,750 grant from the Ontario Land Trust (OLTA) Cross-Border Conservation Training Program (CCTP), which assists land trusts with costs associated with land securement to help conserve Ontario's diversity. CCTP is an initiative of OLTA and the American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts and is supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. RLC will use this grant to develop materials to provide to families and their advisors who are considering conservation easements or land donations. We know there is a need for information that will help answer questions and frame the conversation about what Rainy Lake Conservancy is interested in accomplishing and what the family's intentions are. The materials will include guidelines for what RLC is looking for in easements and what values we are hoping to achieve in partnership with potential donors: Q&A on the easement process; timing and fees that families should anticipate; and a map showing all of our current easements and Crown lands that conserve the lake's natural resources.

RLC was also pleased to receive an OLTA Technical Assistance Program (OLTAP) grant of \$4641.88 to reimburse RLC for the legal fees that we incurred last year for conservation easements. This grant will allow us to have more funds to put towards the process of gaining future easements, supporting more research on the Lake's ecology and species and being able to accomplish our mission of protection the natural habitat and clean water of Rainy Lake. The OLTAP grants are supported in part by funds from the Government of Canada.

Rule Curve – International Joint Commission Update



International Rainy—Namakan Rule Curve Study Board



IJC Board recommends additional flood protection and further ecological benefits, finds 2000 Rule Curves performed as expected

May 1, 2016 The International Joint Commission's (IJC) International Rainy and Namakan Lakes Rule Curves Study Board, (the Board) released its draft report "Managing Water Levels and Flows in the Rainy River Basin" for public consultation, closing June 1, 2017.

The Board was tasked with evaluating the performance of the 2000 Rule Curves and examining options for improved regulation of the water levels of Rainy Lake and the Namakan Chain of Lakes. It found that the 2000 Rule Curves generally performed as expected, bringing benefits to navigation, tourism, and ecology of the Namakan Chain of Lakes, some benefit to fisheries on Rainy Lake, but decreases in hydropower generation and higher water levels in flood years on Rainy Lake. The Board concluded that the 2000 Rule Curves are a viable option going forward, but that some modifications could provide additional benefits overall.

The Board examined a wide range of alterations to the 2000 Rule Curves, focusing finally on two key areas: reducing peak water levels in flood years on Rainy Lake, and reducing the artificially large drawdown of both lakes during the winter period for ecological benefits. Rule Curve Alternative B provides a spring target level range on Rainy Lake lower than the 2000 Rule Curves, for use in years when flood risk is deemed to be high (otherwise the 2000 Rule Curves are followed). This alternative would reduce, but not eliminate, peak flood levels in most flood years. Alternative C includes this conditional spring target, but also introduces an early drawdown of the lakes in the fall, before freeze-up, with less drawdown during the core winter period. This is intended to provide improved winter survival of muskrats, which typically cannot survive the drawdown in the 2000 Rule Curves. Increased muskrat populations would, in turn, result in improved wetland conditions and associated ecosystem benefits including reducing invasive Hybrid Cattails and promoting the growth of Wild Rice. The changes to the winter drawdown would also benefit fall spawning species such as Lake Whitefish and Cisco and survival of benthic invertebrates. This approach results in greater hydropower generation in the fall, but less in the winter, and is expected to result in a net reduction in power generation.

The Board is recommending Alternative C be adopted, along with a development of an ongoing Adaptive Management program, to monitor the effectiveness of Rule Curve changes and make adjustments based on monitoring results. Should the IJC determine that changes to winter water level targets in Rule Curve Alternative C for both lakes are not acceptable, the Board recommends that the conditional spring flood reduction component for Rainy Lake be implemented (Rule Curve Alt. B).

The Board provides seven major recommendations on the Water Levels Committee operations, including the development of Operational Guidelines for best practices such as wild rice production and the currently used Rainy River Sturgeon Protocol, as well as comments on data monitoring and public engagement. The Board also suggests the IJC recommend to Canada and USA a feasibility study of modifying the outlet of Rainy Lake for flood reduction. Finally, it provides recommendations for improved and ongoing engagement with First Nations, Tribes and Métis to improve water level management.

Throughout the Study, the Board has engaged with local individuals, groups, and communities. This included the 32- local member Rule Curve Public Advisory Group (*including RLC Board Member Paul Anderson*) appointed by the IJC to reflect the diverse interests in the watershed and the Resource Advisory Group consisting of resource scientists from state, provincial and federal agencies, as well as Treaty #3 representatives and several First Nation communities and the Métis Nation of Ontario. Based on feedback from these groups, and at more than 45 public and advisory group meetings and seminars, the Board has found the following: broad local support on the Namakan Chain of Lakes for the 2000 Rule Curve; strong support for the flood damage reduction approach for Rainy Lake provided the walleye fishery is safeguarded; and, with the exception of concerns raised over reduction in hydropower generation, general support for ecological benefits that

could be achieved through modifying the over-winter drawdown of Alternative C.

Any changes to the rule curves would be introduced by the IJC, following public hearings. The public and other interested parties have until midnight June 1st, 2017 to comment, either in writing at ParticipateIJC.org or by email at Rainy@participateijc.org or by regular mail at:

International Joint Commission
ATTN: RAINY – NAMAKAN RULE CURVES STUDY
234 Laurier Avenue West, 22nd Floor Ottawa, ON K1P 6K6 or
1717 H Street NW, Suite 801, Washington, DC 20006

For more information on the Study please contact: Matt DeWolfe, Canadian Study co-chair 800-661-5922 ex 3 or Scott Jutila, American Study co-chair 651-290-5631

Rainy Lake Conservancy Annual General Meeting August 13, 2p.m. La Place Rendez-Vous, Fort Frances

This year, following RLC's business meeting, members and the public will be treated to a presentation by Pam Cain on the "Path of the Paddle", the Trans Canada water trail canoe/kayak network in Northwestern Ontario, a partnership supported by regional stakeholders including the Rainy Lake Conservancy. Pam is on the Board of RLC and has been working for many years to help create a continuous canoe trail from Kenora to Thunder Bay through Lake of the Woods and Rainy Lake. This summer, students will be paddling the entire route- we may hear about some of their experiences and stories.

Membership in the Rainy Lake Conservancy

It's that time of year to renew your membership in the Conservancy. If your membership has lapsed, please consider renewing your membership and encourage your friends who might be interested in the Conservancy to go to our website and become a member. This can be done on our website: www.rainylakeconservancy.org. Click on Join/Donate and go from there. There is a video in the video library with instructions on how to navigate and sign up! Annual membership is \$40 for a family and \$30 for a single membership. Donations above and beyond membership dues are very welcome and easy to do.

Your dues and donations support our mission to preserve the ecology, culture and historic features of our watershed. Donations to RLC are tax deductible for Canadians. If you are a US member and would like to make a tax-deductible donation to support the work of the Rainy Lake Conservancy (much appreciated) you can do so by providing a credit card as an online donation or mailing a check to the Minnesota Land Trust @ 2356 University Ave. N., Suite 240 St. Paul, MN 55114 with a notation that it should be directed to the "Rainy Lake Fund". Donations are also welcome in memoriam.

The Mission 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.

A pdf of this Newsletter can be viewed and downloaded at the RLC website, click on “Newsletters”, Spring 2017.