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Poplar River First Nation; Photo: Alex Martin

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Healthy soils, healthy waters

“The greatest threat to the planet is the belief that someone else will save it.”

– Robert Swan, English polar explorer

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Greetings from your recently elected President! Unlike many LWF members, my love affair with Lake Winnipeg did not start with childhood summers in cottage country but rather, on a 1969 Department of Fisheries and Oceans research cruise, bouncing around the north basin on board the HMS Bradbury. I was a young chemist working for the fabled Experimental Lakes Area, enlisted to analyze lake samples for phosphorus.

The love affair did not begin well. The weather was windy, the lake was rough and the Bradbury rocked us violently. I spent my waking hours trying not to break glassware, spill reagents or lose my lunch. Then, after days of misery, the waters calmed and Lake Winnipeg revealed its staggering beauty: breathtaking vistas, pelicans gliding inches above a sea of glass and shimmering moonrises. Top it all off with a visit to the exotic beaches of George Island and I was smitten.

Fast-forward 50 years and the Bradbury has retired to the Selkirk Marine Museum. I have not. I am still bouncing around the lake – now on the research vessel Namao – still measuring phosphorus. Not surprisingly the lake and I have changed over time. For me, it’s the usual grey hair and wrinkles; for the lake, it’s the tarnish of all too frequent algae blooms. Not much to be done for me – but there is a lot we can do for the lake.

I would like to acknowledge my predecessors: Robin Mather, Ann Doherty, Bruce Smith, Karin Boyd and, most recently, Roger Mollot. They have created a foundation with devoted members, award-winning staff, experienced board directors and the support of a Science Advisory Council populated by some of the best aquatic scientists in the world. Now all we have to do is turn all of this horsepower into actions that lead to positive outcomes for our lake. – Mike Stainton, LWF President

Mike Stainton explains water-sampling protocols at a demonstration on the Assiniboine River; Photo: Paul Mutch



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With an annual donation of \$50 or more, you’ll become an LWF member, adding your voice to the call for a healthy Lake Winnipeg now and for future generations. LWF members receive our newsletter twice a year and have the right to vote at our annual general meetings.

Join us today: lakewinnipegfoundation.org/donate

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NEW SUPPORT FOR CITIZEN-LED SOLUTIONS

The Lake Winnipeg Foundation was recently awarded a four-year grant totalling \$260,000 from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to support a growing citizen-science network across Manitoba.

Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network (LWCBMN) volunteers use scientifically vetted protocols to collect water samples which are then analyzed in a lab to measure phosphorus concentration. By identifying phosphorus hotspots across the watershed, citizen scientists and conservation groups are generating valuable water data to support evidence-based decision-making.

Since 2016, the network has expanded from 12 sites to over 100, from 200 samples to 1,500 collected annually. The new federal funding, part of a \$3.8 million pot set aside for 23 projects under the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program, will be used to further increase network capacity and support more citizen-led sampling activities.

ECCC's investment recognizes the incredible leadership of LWF members who, for more than a decade, have been steadfast in their efforts to educate, advocate and act on behalf of Lake Winnipeg. It is this passion and dedication that drives LWF. With new tools in hand, we will continue to champion citizen-led solutions, speak up for healthy waters and call for accountable, evidence-based action.



(l-r): Saint Boniface-Saint Vital MP Dan Vandal; LWF Executive Director Alexis Kanu; Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium Managing Director Al Kristofferson; Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna; Winnipeg South MP Terry Duguid; Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation CEO Tim Sopuck; Lake Manitoba First Nation Elder Mary Maytwayashing; Photo: Marlo Campbell



Chelsea Lobson; Photo: Paul Mutch

LWF STAFF MEMBER WINS NATIONAL AWARD

LWF's Community-Based Monitoring Co-ordinator, Chelsea Lobson, won BioTalent Canada's 2018 MAGNUS Catalyst Award for Top New Hire.

Chelsea leads the Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network, working collaboratively with scientists, local watershed groups and citizens. She co-ordinates day-to-day monitoring efforts, analyzes water samples and shares findings with communities.

We're thrilled to have such a dynamic young scientist on our team. Congrats to Chelsea on this well-deserved honour!

IN MEMORY OF DIANNE SALLANS

LWF lost a dedicated volunteer, a former board member and treasurer, and a stalwart supporter with the passing of Dianne Sallans on May 28.

Dianne and I were family friends and school friends – but most of all, we were lake friends. Every summer was spent at our respective Victoria Beach cottages. The childhood years were idyllic: swimming, biking, canoeing and playing in the lake. The teen summers were filled with bonfires, card games, berry picking, hikes and fooling around in the lake. As mothers and then grandmothers, we were able to enjoy the fun all over again.

Dianne cared deeply for the community of Victoria Beach and was committed to preserving the health of Lake Winnipeg for future generations. She will be missed but long remembered for her dedication, her generous spirit and her many talents.

By Janet Sampson, LWF member

LAKE WINNIPEG HEALTH PLAN UPDATE



CONSERVING THE BOREAL FOREST

Pimachiowin Aki: A UNESCO World Heritage Site on Lake Winnipeg's eastern shore

An expanse of boreal forest on the east side of Lake Winnipeg has received global recognition for its ecological and cultural significance.

Pimachiowin Aki (pronounced "Pim-MATCH-cho-win Ahh-KEY") is Canada's newest UNESCO World Heritage Site, a designation awarded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to areas considered to be "of outstanding value to humanity."

The 29,040 square-kilometre region on the Manitoba-Ontario border includes the lands of four First Nations – Bloodvein, Little Grand Rapids, Pauingassi and Poplar River – as well as Manitoba's Atikaki Provincial Park, and Ontario's Woodland Caribou Provincial Park and Eagle-Snow Conversation Reserve.

Sophia Rabliauskas was born and raised in Poplar River First Nation, and has been active in the decade-long effort to achieve World Heritage status – a process that involved two unsuccessful bids before the UNESCO designation was awarded July 1 in Bahrain. Sophia was there to hear the announcement in person.

"It was amazing," she says of the experience. "It was great to be part of history – the legacy that our communities have achieved."

In the Anishinaabe language, Pimachiowin Aki means "the land that gives life." The region's ecosystem is a vibrant blend of forest, rivers, lakes and wetlands that supports a rich diversity of species – including migratory birds and one of the largest herds of caribou south of Hudson Bay. It also provides a vital ecological service for Lake Winnipeg: purifying the water

that flows into the lake by filtering out the phosphorus that drives algae growth.

The area's cultural value is equally important. Pimachiowin Aki is the first of Canada's 19 World Heritage Sites to be designated as a "mixed" site, meaning it has both natural and cultural value. Recognition of both aspects was crucial, Rabliauskas says, as taking care of the land is an important teaching that has been passed down through generations. "We have a sacred connection to that land," she says. "Without the land, we wouldn't be here as people."

Keeping the boreal forest healthy will safeguard the source water that flows into Lake Winnipeg. The UNESCO designation creates new opportunities for increased conservation, collaborative management and community-based initiatives that will benefit land, water and people.

"Every decision that's made by our communities is for the future of our children and children that are not here yet. We want to be able to give them the life that we've had – to enjoy the beauty of the land and the gift from the Creator," Rabliauskas says. "Because of the work we're doing, we've been able to maintain some of that beauty of our country here in Canada – and we're willing to share it with others."

FEATURE STORY: LAKE WINNIPEG BY KAYAK



Now that's a selfie! Alex, having fun in Poplar River First Nation; Photo: Alex Martin

Alex Martin is an 18-year-old kayaker who had an epic adventure this summer, successfully paddling the entire 1,750 km shoreline of Lake Winnipeg by himself! Here's his account of this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

On June 27, I took the first of many paddle strokes on a kayak trip to circumnavigate Lake Winnipeg. While many of my friends were welcoming the summer after high-school graduation by sleeping in, I had traded a suit jacket for a paddling jacket and took to the open water.

The purpose of my trip was to raise awareness about the importance of water stewardship and I approached the Lake Winnipeg Foundation to help me with this. In the months leading up to my departure, we visited schools around Winnipeg to talk about the trip and the lake.

It was also a fun trip for me. I love kayaking and this had been an adventure I had wanted to do for a few years. It had become a personal paddling goal, a bucket-list item.

The trip took me one month to complete (I had originally planned for two). The lake's shoreline was incredibly diverse, ranging from the sand beaches of the south basin to rocky cliffs on the shores of the north basin. Being in a kayak allowed me to experience our great lake in close-up detail.

While I travelled into many remote areas, my time in communities around the lake showcased the friendliness of lake-lovers, many of whom offered me something to eat or a place to stay. In First Nations communities around the lake, I was met with kindness and generosity, as well as a vast amount of knowledge about the surrounding areas.

Many people ask me about my experience with algae and zebra mussels. The south basin had the worst algae on my trip, although the lake was generally a lot clearer than in past years. That said, it's always disheartening to see the bow of the

kayak turn from white to green. I only came across zebra mussel-stricken beaches in the south basin, especially on the east side. Some stretches of beach would be too thick to easily land my fiberglass kayak without seriously scratching the gel coat.

In total I saw nine bears, three woodland caribou, two elk, one deer, no moose, and wolves almost every day in the north basin. I saw two owls, lots of pelicans, seagulls and shorebirds, and hundreds of eagles. A typical day would start between 5 and 6 a.m. I would be on the water within an hour of packing up and having breakfast, and paddle until I got hungry. After lunch, I would paddle until I was tired or until it was cool enough that my tent wouldn't overheat. It was more of a challenge in the north basin to find suitable campsites without rocks or cliff walls but to me, that was all part of the fun.

Lake Winnipeg is a beautiful lake. I had an incredible journey this summer and was thrilled with the number of people who followed the trip through my website, lakewinnipegcircumnavigation.com. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who showed me true Manitoban hospitality during my trip, it was greatly appreciated. Adventure on!

By Alex Martin, expedition kayaker

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LWF is proud to be part of a passionate community of lake-lovers. Thank you to the following individuals and organizations who gave generously between Oct. 1, 2017 & Sept. 30, 2018. Together, we're ensuring our lake is healthy and safe, now and for future generations.

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PARTNER PROFILE: IISD EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

CANADA'S ACCLAIMED FRESHWATER RESEARCH FACILITY TURNS 50

Located in northwest Ontario, IISD Experimental Lakes Area (IISD-ELA) is a unique natural laboratory comprised of 58 small lakes and their surrounding watersheds. Established by the federal government in 1968, the area was chosen for research because the lakes are pristine and the surrounding region has very low human influence.

Dr. Michael Paterson has worked at the facility since 1992 and is currently its senior research scientist. Two things make IISD-ELA unique, he says: whole-ecosystem experiments and long-term datasets.

Unlike small-scale lab studies, whole-ecosystem experiments mimic the scale at which society interacts with nature, making scientific predictions more reliable. "These little lakes are the smallest slices of whole ecosystems that contain all of the relevant parts – the food webs, independent fish populations, lake sediments, watershed, all of these things – and you need all of that stuff in place in order to understand human impacts on the environment," he explains.

Time scale is also important. IISD-ELA has decades of biological, environmental and meteorological data. Long-term datasets from the area's untouched 'control lakes' establish baseline parameters and provide valuable information about natural variations over time, while continued monitoring of the experimental lakes can lead to a deeper understanding of any post-manipulation ripple effects.

"Some things happen very quickly and other things we don't see for years," Paterson says. "You really need to follow all the parts of the ecosystem for many, many years in order to see what the long-term responses are."

Almost all IISD-ELA research has a practical application. One of the facility's newest experiments, for example, is studying the impacts of diluted bitumen on aquatic ecosystems and testing the effectiveness of various remediation techniques, should a spill occur.



IISD-ELA science through the years (clockwise from top left): Acid slinging at Roddy Landing; a group tour of Lake 227; collecting plankton for testing; sampling in a constructed enclosure on Lake 260; All photos: John Shearer

Past work on the effects of acid rain informed the development of North American emission restrictions, while reservoir research changed the way hydro-electric projects are designed. Other IISD-ELA research influenced the Minamata Convention, a global treaty designed to protect humans and the environment from the harm caused by mercury exposure. And of course, IISD-ELA is where scientists definitively proved the connection between phosphorus and algae blooms, a breakthrough which led to critical policy responses to the challenges of eutrophication in Canada and beyond.

Technologies have evolved since IISD-ELA was created (who would have guessed back in 1968 that fish could be implanted with hydro-acoustic transmitters that note their location every three minutes?) and emerging environmental concerns continue to spur new research. Another big change took place in 2014 when the federal government relinquished management of the site; it now operates as a non-profit organization with an expanded mandate that includes a more robust education program and ongoing relationship-building with the Indigenous nations on whose traditional territories IISD-ELA is located.

Five decades in, IISD-ELA continues to be on the cutting edge of freshwater research. Happy 50th birthday to this vital scientific resource!

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

GOING THE DISTANCE FOR HEALTHY WATER

Winnipegger John Sawchuk wanted to do something special to mark his 70th birthday. As a lifelong fitness enthusiast and avid triathlete, it just made sense to celebrate the milestone with a physical challenge.

"I wanted it to be a bit of a stretch for me but not something that was unachievable," he says.

After settling on a plan – to swim, cycle and run a combined total of 777 km in the 28 days leading up to his birthday on Aug. 21 – he decided to add a fundraising component. Choosing LWF as the beneficiary was another no-brainer: like fitness, Lake Winnipeg has been a constant in John's life. His father built the Wanasing Beach cottage he and his wife now own, and summers have been spent enjoying all that cottage life has to offer.

The Purejohn 70 Challenge began on July 26 and raised approximately \$4,900. "It was a lot of fun – interacting with the foundation, the media attention, tailgating a police car on Highway 59, smelling the summer clover during a run, talking to people on the beach," John says. "The hardest part was keeping up with the email messages and Facebook posts!"

The challenge also provided an opportunity to get the word out about the condition of the lake and the need to do something to address it. "It's easy to measure the dollars but this was really an awareness campaign," he says. After all, improving one's own health and improving the health of Lake Winnipeg are two subjects which share certain commonalities.



Endurance athlete John Sawchuk crosses the finish line of his final 10-km run in Assiniboine Park to the cheers of supporters. Photo: Marlo Campbell

"You can't just do it overnight. It takes a team – and it takes a long time. Commitment. Persistence. Adaptability. Finding creative ways to meet the needs."

Perhaps one of John's favourite quotes sums it up best: "The race is not always to the swift but to those who keep on running."



Walk for Water 2018 in Gimli; Photo: Jesse Vanderhart

WALK FOR WATER 2018 by the numbers:



LWF GRANTS IN ACTION



Miniota area farmer Brian Oliver (left) and Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District Manager Ryan Canart examine vetch growing in the 10-acre test field; Photo: Marlo Campbell

FIELD TESTING SOIL SOLUTIONS FOR MANITOBA'S WATER

"You could almost say that every drop of water that gets into Lake Winnipeg starts by landing on soil," says Ryan Canart, manager of the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District (UARCD). We're driving down a gravel road in southwest Manitoba, a stone's throw from the Saskatchewan border, on our way to visit Brian Oliver, a local producer who farms near Miniota, just north of Virden.

Canart is explaining "regenerative agriculture." The farming approach focuses on improving soil health and is based on four principles: reducing tillage to minimize disturbance of the soil's profile; keeping a living root in the soil for as long as possible; increasing biodiversity; and integrating livestock production with crop production.

Supported in part by a 2015 grant from LWF, UARCD is working with five farms to implement various soil-regeneration techniques. The five-year project aims to demonstrate that regenerative agriculture can have multiple benefits – including increased profitability.

That last point is key, given the high risks faced by today's producers. "When you're hanging half a million dollars out in the field, you just want to do what you know is going to work," Canart says. "I think people from the city don't really appreciate the economic implications of making a mistake on the farm. It could be huge."

Healthy soils are more resilient to erosion and have greater water-storage capacity – important benefits in an area dealing with an overabundance of surface water. On the production end, profitability increases because the soil requires less fertilizers and pesticides. Keeping water on the land also means algae-causing phosphorus stays in the soil instead of being flushed off fields into the creeks and rivers that ultimately flow into Lake Winnipeg.

Arriving at the farm, we head out to the 10-acre test field. Previously, it was used to grow alfalfa. Our visit finds a waist-high mix of vetch, turnips, phacelia and other plant species. The oats have already dried up but the peas are still green, and we pick a few to munch on. Just past the fence, 16 cows completely ignore us. Soon, they'll be brought in to graze this field.

Building nutrient-rich soil requires a shift from bacteria-dominated soil systems to those which are more fungal, Oliver explains. "In conventional fields, you go out there and kick at the stubble, you'll see what you grew three years ago," he says. "With fungal soils, that's all consumed by bugs."

Though external factors like weather make it difficult to replicate results, Canart thinks there's value in providing area producers with concrete examples of alternatives to current farming methods.

"Good things come when you increase organic content," he says. "The short-term benefit for Brian might be a smaller fertilizer bill – but at the same time, he's going to increase his organic content which, in turn, is going to reduce the amount of water running off his land, which is going to eventually reduce the flooding and erosion damage, and improve the water quality in the watershed."

By Marlo Campbell, LWF Communications Director

A NEW GIMLI TRADITION SETS SAIL

The Gimli Yacht Club and the Kiwanis Club of Gimli & District joined forces this summer to host the inaugural Save the Lake Fundraiser.

On June 30, upwards of 200 people attended the family-friendly event which featured something for everyone: educational presentations from LWF Executive Director Alexis Kanu and Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium Managing Director Al Kristofferson; sailboat rides, kayak rides and motor boat rides; children's eco-demonstrations; and of course, a delicious fish fry lunch. There were even souvenir T-shirts!

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us in Gimli, and to the dedicated organizers and volunteers whose hard work made this event such a success.

The 2018 Save the Lake Fundraiser generated almost \$5,000 for healthy water and rumour has it planning has already begun for next year's event. See you then!



Gimli Harbour; Photo: Paul Mutch

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OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION: PRIORITIZING WINNIPEG SEWAGE TREATMENT

Look inside to learn more.



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