

# THE WATERSHED OBSERVER



Grand Beach, Photo: Paul Mutch

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– Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation CEO Tim Sopuck

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Being at the lake means being part of a community. Thinking back, I remember the comradery I saw in boaters on the opening day of the spring fishing season, and the pride myself and other children felt when we attempted to waterski across our lake only days after the ice had left.

LWF seeks to channel this community spirit into a collective voice for our shared waters. We may have different lake memories, but we share a connection: we’re all lake people.

Witnessing the impacts of harmful algae blooms was what first motivated me to sign up as an LWF member. Now, I am proud to be part of a community of people advocating for evidence-based decisions to protect our waterways.

Whether you are a longtime member or have just recently joined, consider your LWF membership as a democratic vote for the health of our watershed. The larger LWF’s membership, the more power we have when we speak up for our lakes, rivers and wetlands.

There are many ways to get involved: take part in our summer campaigns, participate on social media or follow our advocacy work online. I encourage you to share your enthusiasm – it is infectious! – and become an active part of the LWF community.

– Roger Mollot, LWF President



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### PROTECTING MANITOBA'S WETLANDS

Manitoba's threatened wetlands are once again on the provincial legislative agenda in 2018.

Introduced as Bill 7 in November 2017, the Sustainable Watersheds Act proposes to amend existing legislation to improve provincial water management. Suggested changes include establishing nutrient targets to track water quality and creating opportunities for conservation districts to partner with Indigenous nations.

Bill 7 will also enable new regulations to protect Manitoba's threatened wetlands and proposes higher fines for illegal drainage.

Wetlands are vital natural habitats teeming with life, offering cost-effective, ready-made solutions for phosphorus reduction, flood mitigation and climate-change resilience. Yet over 70 per cent of Manitoba's wetlands have been drained and we continue to lose wetlands at an alarming rate.

LWF has long advocated for strengthened protection for Manitoba's threatened wetlands through strict regulation and increased enforcement. We have also called for targeted investment in phosphorus hotspots, coupled with effective monitoring to ensure ecological outcomes are being met.

LWF is pleased to see a commitment to no net loss of wetland benefits in Bill 7. We will continue to provide scientific guidance to ensure this important principle is achieved in practice.

Keeping water on the land by preserving threatened wetlands is critical to protecting Lake Winnipeg. We're dedicated to ensuring that evidence-based wetland legislation makes a meaningful difference to the health of our waters.

**Stay up to date on our advocacy by visiting our website; we post all our government submissions under Resources for Citizens.**

### HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT, TOO!

Sugar Me Cookie Boutique, a bakery in Gimli, is known for its scrumptious treats – including traditional Icelandic Vinarterta. Owner/operator Carrie Arsenault makes the classic dessert torte from a treasured recipe passed down through her husband's family for generations.

This year, Sugar Me Cookie Boutique is donating one dollar from the sale of every full Vinarterta to LWF. Pick yours up at the bakery in Gimli or order online at [sugarmecookieboutique.com](http://sugarmecookieboutique.com).



### MEET LWF'S NEWEST TEAM MEMBER

We're excited to welcome Michelle Jordan, who joins the LWF team as Finance & Office Administrator. If you see Michelle this summer, make sure to say hello!



# LAKE WINNIPEG HEALTH PLAN UPDATE



SETTING THE STANDARD FOR WASTEWATER TREATMENT

## UPGRADING WINNIPEG'S SEWAGE TREATMENT FACILITIES MUST BE A CIVIC PRIORITY

Every time we brush our teeth, flush our toilets or wash our clothes, we create wastewater – and all of it has to go somewhere.

Wastewater infrastructure delivers the water used in our homes and industries directly into the lakes and rivers we use for recreation.

City of Winnipeg sewage treatment facilities represent the single largest point source contributor of phosphorus to Lake Winnipeg. Winnipeg's North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC) was built in 1937 and is the oldest – and largest – of three city sewage plants, treating approximately 70 per cent of the city's wastewater. The NEWPCC is currently the fourth largest phosphorus polluter among all wastewater treatment facilities in Canada. Online compliance reports show phosphorus concentration in NEWPCC effluent routinely exceeds the provincial licence limit – at times reported to be over five times higher.

Over the years, planned upgrades to the NEWPCC have been stalled due to squabbles about best practices and cost – and

these chronic delays are having a detrimental impact on the health of Lake Winnipeg.

It's time to make a dedicated investment in our wastewater assets – and, with limited civic infrastructure funding, it makes sense to invest where we'll get the biggest bang for our buck.

**Civic leaders must ensure that the North End Water Pollution Control Centre meets the phosphorus limit of 1 milligram per litre by the licence deadline of Dec. 31, 2019.**

We cannot allow Lake Winnipeg to remain a victim of political inaction and costly delays. Immediate, aggressive phosphorus reduction through upgrades to Winnipeg's sewage treatment facilities must be a civic priority.

*Learn more about Winnipeg wastewater online at [lakewinnipegfoundation.org](http://lakewinnipegfoundation.org), where you can find our Sewage S.O.S report, originally published in the Winnipeg Free Press.*



## FLUSHING MONEY DOWN THE POTHOLE

A significant chunk of projected capital spending in Winnipeg is earmarked for upgrades to the North End Water Pollution Control Centre to enable the facility to meet provincial licence requirements.

The hefty cost of these upgrades has been used to justify multiple increases to water and sewer rates over the past several years. Yet not all of the money being collected from rate-payers is being used as intended.

For years, the City has instead siphoned a portion of water and sewer revenues to pay for other projects, from road work to discounted property tax rates. These borrowed revenues – called dividends – add up to a considerable sum. Winnipeg's 2018 budget, for example, projects water and wastewater service dividends of approximately \$38 million.

If improvements to Winnipeg's sewage facilities are, in fact, a priority, they need to be treated as such – and not just because construction costs continue to rise. Wastewater fees are designed to fund operational costs and capital projects related to wastewater quality. Using them instead to address budgetary shortfalls elsewhere does not demonstrate a commitment to solving the problem at hand.

Victoria Beach; Photo: Jeopie Wolfe

## SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



### GIVING BACK BY GETTING INVOLVED

Florence Eastwood has had an interest in LWF's work for some time, but it was her offer to help with LWF's education program that brought her in the door two years ago. That spontaneous afternoon visit kicked off a connection which has deepened ever since.

She began volunteering, a task that came easily to her, having recently retired after a 33-year career as an elementary school teacher. Last summer, Florence joined LWF's board of directors. It's another good fit; not only does she

have a background in community organizing but, for the past two years, she's also served on the board of TNC - Canada, the Canadian affiliate of The Nature Conservancy, one of the largest conservation organizations in the world.

"I'm excited," she says about the new opportunity with LWF. "I think it's the board's job to build the base, to say: 'Where should we be going? What's the vision? Who can we include? Who can we activate? Who can we get involved?'"

"This is an area where I really want to use my skills to help make a difference," she continues. "And the lake – it's in front of me. It's been in front of me for 65 years."

Growing up, Florence spent summers at the family's Matlock cottage, built in 1910 by notable area contractors the Ross brothers. It's been in the family for 69 years and is now owned by her nephew.

"As soon as school was over, Mom would pack you up and all the gear that she wanted to take to the lake – including all your bikes, the sewing machine, the whole kit and caboodle," she says. "We spent our days in the water. We lived in our bathing suits."

Florence took up birdwatching in her 20s and has a particular fondness for Netley Marsh. Over the years, she's noticed changes – and not for the better. Twenty-five years ago, the marsh was bursting with birdsong. "It's terribly, terribly quiet in there now."

Having seen first-hand the degradation to Lake Winnipeg and surrounding areas, Florence feels compelled to contribute her time and energy to her new role with LWF.

"The lake talks," she says. "I think the foundation's really made people listen. It's a voice for the lake."

### LAKE WINNIPEG REAL ESTATE VALUED AT OVER \$2 BILLION

A 2017 study commissioned by LWF confirms that Lake Winnipeg property values make significant contributions to Manitoba's economy.

The analysis considered residential and cottage properties around the lake's south basin, extending south from Riverton on the west side and south from Victoria Beach on the east side, roughly bounded by Highways 8 and 59.

The total assessed value for all properties within the study area was \$2.49 billion, with residential properties – both permanent and seasonal – accounting for approximately 84 per cent of

this value. Property tax revenue was an estimated \$40 million annually, representing roughly half of the total tax base for south basin municipalities.

South basin properties and the tax revenue they provide contribute important – and often overlooked – economic value to Manitoba. If this value is eroded as a result of Lake Winnipeg's deteriorating health, municipal and provincial budgets may suffer.

LWF's study underscores how important the voices of homeowners are in the collective conversation about Lake Winnipeg. As citizens and rate payers, Lake Winnipeg property owners have an opportunity to speak up to protect both their properties and their beloved lake.



## LWF IN CONVERSATION: TIM SOPUCK



Tim in his glory: fishing with his daughter, Julia, at their family's secret spot in the Whiteshell. Photo: Linda Girling

### MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION CEO AND LONGTIME LWF MEMBER ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LAND AND WATER

Tim Sopuck is a career conservationist, having spent 27 years working for Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) – the past 10 as its chief executive officer.

Created in 1986, MHHC is a non-profit crown corporation that works with landowners in rural Manitoba to conserve fish and wildlife habitats. Over three decades, MHHC has had a positive impact on 350,000 acres of land, 200,000 of which are now permanently protected. "It's a pretty significant footprint," Tim says, "but we do it all outside the concrete ring, so it's not surprising that within the city, we're pretty unknown."

That relative anonymity may soon change thanks to a new \$100 million conservation trust announced in the 2018 provincial budget. Revenues from the trust – estimated at \$5 million annually – will be administered by MHHC through a granting program. Specific details are still being worked but suffice to say, it's a game-changer.

"It's only the biggest thing that's ever happened in my career," Tim acknowledges, laughing.

Water will no doubt be a funding priority. "Every land-use decision is a water choice," Tim quips. "I'm excited by the idea that the conservation trust will put more funds in the hands of organizations and other community groups that have a real good track record of delivering efficient programs."

Tim has been an LWF member since the foundation's formation and says LWF has become an important, credible voice for Lake Winnipeg. Beyond the advocacy, he also acknowledges the practical possibilities of LWF's on-the-ground efforts, such as

phosphorus data collected by the Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network.

"I believe they can help inform our project delivery. When we do wetland conservation, this might help us with targeting where we should focus our efforts."

Tim's commitment to conservation is more than a professional obligation – it's also a deeply personal ethos. Born and raised in Manitoba, he grew up fishing and hunting, and spent childhood summers at his family's cottage in Whiteshell Provincial Park, which he and his sister now co-own. Another formative experience from his youth was the year and a half he lived with a Cree family at South Indian Lake in northern Manitoba, helping with trap lines and working as a commercial fisher's assistant.

Being a resource user has provided insights which have served him well in the conservation world, where finding common ground is key.

"We can only win through collaboration and genuine respect and understanding for the landowners and land users," he says. "You have to understand the reality of people – in the case of agriculture, the reality of making a living off land that's very expensive and is fraught with all kinds of risk... You better come to that kitchen table with a little bit of humility and a desire to understand their situation if you expect that you're going to have any kind of conservation outcomes."

The challenges facing Lake Winnipeg may be daunting, but Tim remains optimistic about the future. It's just the kind of guy he is.

"I'm going to be 63 this year, and I feel no less excited when I come to work, thinking about the opportunities, than I did when I first started my career," he says.

"Whether you believe this was granted to us by the Creator or the glaciers or both, Manitobans have been the beneficiaries of a remarkable gift, and that's an abundance of water.

"It provides a wealth of opportunities," he adds. "I really hope that we can all come to an understanding of our roles in sustaining that for our kids."

# LWF'S GRANTS PROGRAM

## INVESTING IN LOCAL WATER PROJECTS

Funded through the generosity of our members, LWF's grants program supports real-world solutions for Manitoba's lakes and rivers. This spring, we funded five exciting projects.

The **Village of St-Pierre-Jolys** will install interpretive signage to educate citizens about wastewater treatment improvements that use constructed wetlands to filter water.

The **Assiniboine River Basin Initiative** will compile operating guidelines for wastewater treatment facilities across Manitoba, North Dakota and Saskatchewan, creating a regional resource for communities to use when planning upgrades to their wastewater treatment systems.

The **Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District** will implement a water-quality monitoring program on Kerr Lake.

The **West Souris Conservation District** (WSCD) will develop a water-sampling program near Oak Lake. Both monitoring programs will operate as part of the Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network.

WSCD will also consult with local producers in southwestern Manitoba to identify opportunities to re-establish water-storage capacity in targeted areas and reduce phosphorus loading to regional waterways.

LWF is privileged to be able to channel the passion and concern of lake-lovers across our watershed into meaningful, collective action.

*cut mail-in form here*

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