

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

A Rainy Lake Reflection — Working on the Drive by Herb George

Herb George was born in Fort Frances in 1936. When he was five, he and his family moved to Flanders, on the CNR line, where he remembers attending the school car and an old log school building for only four or five years.

By the time he was 14, Herb was working with his father on J.A. Matthieu's log drives. A few years later he joined the crew of the Hallet which at that time was the largest and most powerful boat on Rainy Lake. It hauled tows of 4000-5000 cords of pulpwood, a mile in size, to the Fort Frances mill and had a captain, first mate, cook and six deck hands. The Hallet made twenty 100-mile round trips each year, hauling a total of 70,000-90,000 cords of wood annually. Herb's main job for 14 years was running a "bug" which was a smaller diesel engine boat that prepared the tow for the trip to the



The Hallet with a smaller tug

Courtesy of the Fort Frances Museum

mill and kept it intact on its journey.

Herb tells of many close calls. One happened on a stormy night near Little Rocky Narrows. The tow broke when they tried to escape the wind on Seine Bay; then the bug started to sink and it got stranded on a rock. After a few minutes on the rock the tow hit them. In desperation, Herb and Dolphie Bruyere walked over boom timbers in the dark to reach a nearby island where they shouted for help. Hours later they were rescued by Billy Martin, captain of the Hallet. Neither Herb nor Dolphie could swim!

The last tow of logs on Rainy Lake came down the North Arm in 1974. Herb was recruited for the job and brought 22,000 cords of wood to the mill in twenty days. Herb is retired now and lives in Fort Frances. *As told to Dale Callaghan*

RLC Lands \$48,900 Trillium* Grant

RLC was delighted to hear in late June that, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and the Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists (RRVFN), we were the recipient of a generous grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to help preserve the natural heritage of our area. The funds will be used to support the NCC office in Fort Frances, the RRVFN bog walk in Alberton Twp. and to develop a community based conservation strategy and action plan for the region, including a conservation plan for Rainy Lake. As lead applicant, RLC will be responsible for the overall management of the grant.

Glen Treftlin, a member of Trillium's local grant review team, commented at the official opening of the NCC office August 16th that it was quite a feat on behalf of RLC, NCC and RRVFN to bring the project to fruition. He explained that of the \$170,000 allotted to the Rainy River District, only 5% is usually earmarked for the environment. The \$48,900 award therefore reflects the importance Trillium places on this project. MPP Howard Hampton added that this would not have happened without the activism of the Rainy Lake Conservancy and pointed out that the grant is very significant for the future of conservation in our area.

Grant Committee contact: Phyllis Callaghan



*Nature Conservancy of Canada grand opening:
Glen Treftlin, Howard Hampton,
Ilka Milne, Phyllis Callaghan, Bill Morgenstern*

* The Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Ministry of Culture, receives annually \$100 million of government funding generated through Ontario's charity casino initiative.



RLC Cooperative Efforts Continue this Summer

If you have been reading your newsletters over the past years, you will be aware that the Rainy Lake Conservancy (RLC) places a high value on working co-operatively with other organizations and government agencies to preserve and protect the Rainy Lake watershed. This year has been no exception.

In addition to our annual water monitoring programs, Paul Anderson and Kurt Lysne ferried groups of Minnesota volunteers to several sites around the lake for a more extensive study of water quality. The Lysnes also assisted Voyageurs National Park (VNP) in its loon nesting and loon banding projects.

Another 2004 highlight included a reception hosted by RLC for Gord Miller, Environmental Commissioner



Dale Callaghan and Gord Miller



Some attendees at the Commissioner's meeting

of Ontario, and his party of ten. Representatives from Friends of the Boundary Waters, VNP, and the Voyageurs National Park Association joined RLC on Copenhagen Island one cold and blustery June evening to learn about the work of the Commission and to inform the Commission about our efforts to preserve the watershed.

This October, RLC is working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) to organize a meeting of representatives from First Nations, Quetico Park, Lake of the Woods, MNR, the Field Naturalists, RLC, NCC, the local sportsman's club, and others, to provide input for a regional conservation action plan. We hope that this will mark the beginning of a future conservation partnership for Northwest Ontario.

Government Relations and Networking: Phyllis Callaghan

Thanks for the Donations!

Thanks to the many people who make voluntary donations in addition to their annual memberships.

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President's Message

Greetings from Rest Island, home of the biggest, healthiest white pine on Rainy Lake. It has a 39 inch diameter 3 feet from ground level. Can anyone beat that?

Readers will be glad to know that the Rainy Lake Conservancy is alive and well and is doing more than bragging about big trees! Over the summer, our members have been active in water testing, septic system education, loon research and nature hikes. Five of our members are also involved in conservation easement negotiations. In addition, RLC has accepted an invitation to serve on the board of a newly formed Fort Frances "Fisheries Trust" whose goal is to raise funds for fish research on Rainy Lake. Your board of directors feels that this is a very important project because a healthy fishery is a good indicator of a healthy Rainy Lake. We will be working with other local groups such as the Sportsman's Club, Abitibi Consolidated, the MNR, and the Bass Tournament Committee to support the initiative.



As we experience the beauty of Indian summer on the lake, we are constantly reminded that we are only the present custodians of a very special place. It is our responsibility to do what we can to preserve its unique qualities for future generations.

*Dale Callaghan, President
Rest Island, Rainy Lake*

Globally Live and On-Line

Four years ago in September our webmaster, Kris Lysne, launched RLC's website. The site has grown up significantly since its inception. It now contains links to many important organizations and valuable data. It lists current events and includes past newsletters and a membership blank, and it provides information about conservation easements. Our Mission, Vision, and Policy Statement are available on the site along with a photo gallery. If you haven't visited the site recently, drop in and browse at www.rainylakeconservancy.org.

Communications contact: Mary Lysne

Bog Project Moving Forward

The Rainy River Valley Field Naturalists' bog walk project is taking shape after a rather slow start this summer due to flooding. The parking lot with new culverts has been installed, and local high school students may soon be applying their GPS and GIS mapping skills to the bog. Stage one of the project, funded by our Trillium grant, also includes bridging of water crossings and the planning and installation of interpretive signs. This project will give local students an opportunity to learn first hand about wetlands and it also creates a venue for public enjoyment of nature.

Grant Committee contact: Phyllis Callaghan



The bog in Alberton Township west of Fort Frances

Phyllis Callaghan

What is a Bog?

by Al Harris

The word "bog" is often used to describe any kind of wetland, but the term actually refers to a very specific ecosystem.

Bogs are peatlands, which means they have peat soil made up of partially decomposed plants. In a cool climate like ours, peat accumulates year after year until the surface of the soil is eventually raised above the local water table. At this point, the wetland becomes a bog.

There's no groundwater movement through a bog. Water enters the bog as rainfall and flows outward. Surface waters are very acidic (pH of about 3.5 to 4.0) and have very low nutrient levels. The insulating layer of moss and peat means that soils often remain frozen until July. Bogs have a carpet of Sphagnum (peat moss), low shrubs like cranberry and leatherleaf, and a few species of sedges and herbs. Black spruce is often present.

Swamps and fens are other wetlands with peat soil, but are groundwater nourished and much more nutrient-rich and less acidic and consequently have many more plant species

Bogs are common in the Rainy River and Rainy Lake area. Many are about 5000 years old and were formed on old Lake Agassiz lakebeds.

Studying Our Water Environment

Good progress continues in the Rainy Lake Conservancy's effort to help develop a database to define the status of the Rainy Lake environment. The Conservancy remains a participant in several water quality monitoring projects as described in previous newsletters. We are also working on data analysis and providing public access to the data and interpretation of that data. In this regard, we are being assisted by the International Joint Commission and U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and now have available a preliminary version of a public website to show the collected data. In the months ahead, we hope to add additional features and data. (see <http://www.mvp-wc.usace.army.mil/wq/>)

RLC also participated in a unique project this past June and July involving nearly 20 agencies and groups to collect data from 41 sites on both the U.S. and Canadian sides of Rainy Lake. This represents the first time a complete survey has been taken on the 255,000 acre Rainy Lake.

The project was made possible by the Minneapolis-based North Star Chapter of the Academy of Certified Hazardous Materials Managers on behalf of the National Park Service. Other partners included the U.S. Geological Survey, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Department of Natural Resources, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Rainy River Community College, and the Water Resources Center.

Results should be available within a few months and will be accessible through our RLC web site.

Environmental Research contact: Paul Anderson

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Nature Outings

Many thanks to Tita Owre and Helen Heller who planned two interesting outings this summer. The "First and Last Annual Great Rainy Lake Toilet and Water Tour" was held on July 16th. Eight island homesites were available for viewing various disposal systems. As any Rainy Laker knows, this subject is of vital interest to us all!

On August 22nd, we gathered at Goose Portage, Sandpoint Island, where Pam Hawley, Fort Frances museum curator gave us a glimpse into the lives and travels of the fur-trading voyageurs. Since the day was chilly, we enjoyed a campfire and were easily able to empathize with and admire



Pam Hawley

Lady Frances Simpson, the young bride who kept a diary of her travels with the traders. Fort Frances was aptly named.



Voyageurs Rendezvous at Goose Portage

New outing co-chairs, Ginny Sweatt and Trish Thompson, are already making plans for next summer's outings. Check the Spring 2005 newsletter for details.

Nature Outings contact: Claudia Horne

Annual General Meeting 2004

Conservancy members and friends met at Sunny Cove on a rainy August 8, 2004, for the Annual General Meeting. Our new president, Dale Callaghan, introduced Ilka Milne, recently appointed program director for the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) in Fort Frances. The following are highlights from the committee reports: Water quality is higher in Rainy Lake's north arm; U.S. citizens are now eligible for tax deductions in the U.S. for conservation easements on their Canadian land; membership stands at 167. Check out our handsome website: www.rainylakeconservancy.org which contains links to Voyageurs National Park, the International Joint Commission, NCC, the Ministry of Natural Resources and many other organizations. Finally, our multi-talented speaker, Lee Grim, gave a riveting slide lecture about surveying and monitoring eagles and their nests in Voyageurs National Park.

AGM contact: Dale Callaghan

Report by Ginny Sweatt

Your New Board of Directors

The Rainy Lake Conservancy is guided by an 11-member Board of Directors. Each year one third of the board positions comes up for election. At the Annual General Meeting, members vote to fill those positions. We are pleased to announce the addition of Don Dickson, Trish Hogan, Kay Larsen and Ginny Sweatt to the board. Dale Callaghan and Paul Anderson left the board to join the Executive Officers as president and first vice president, and Phyllis Callaghan migrated to the position of past president.

Of special note is the "retirement" of Sam White and Burgess Eberhardt. Both Sam and Burgess were founding members of the Conservancy, served on the board and worked as president and past president. Their guidance will be much missed!

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY

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Newsletter Editor Mary Lysne

Assistants Margaret Ann Hudson, Betty Anne West

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MISSION STATEMENT

To work with property owners, governments and local communities to preserve and protect the natural beauty, historic features, and ecological and recreational values for present and future generations, particularly within but not restricted to Rainy Lake.

Visit our web site at www.rainylakeconservancy.org