

RAINY LAKE CONSERVANCY



Preserving the Rainy Lake Watershed

A Namakan Lake Reflection

Following the Sturgeon by Laurent Robichaud

My interest and passion for lake sturgeon was born of a spectacular spawn event on the Groundhog River in North-eastern Ontario. Since 1994 and almost every year since then, I returned to Camus Rapids and Upper Falls to watch those gentle river giants perform their annual spawn ritual.

A few years ago, I heard about the Namakan River and the rise of a possible hydro-electric dam project at High Falls. According to local sources, lake sturgeon is present on this river system. After reading the aquatic study reports and telemetry movements of sturgeon, I realized a



Jay Dickison, left

Laurent Robichaud, right

piece of the puzzle was missing. I then decided to go search for the exact spawning bed location.

In late April 2010 I drove down to the Namakan and camped at High Falls and watched the beginning of the spawn. Surfacing sturgeon were observed in front of the historical portage and below the big rock island that almost splits the falls in half. Later in the week I spotted adult sturgeon moving in on the East side of rock island near the base of the falls. Day after day till the end of my stay, I watched big sturgeon swim in the same pool. Cool nights and near constant water temperatures prevented

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American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts New Conservation Tools for Rainy Lake

The Rainy Lake Conservancy Board of Directors, in partnership with the owners of Echo Island, is currently examining an exciting new initiative to preserve and protect Rainy Lake and other parts of the watershed for future generations.

As some of you know, in the fall of 2010, the American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts (AFoCLT) was granted donee status by the Government of Canada.

- This status allows AFoCLT, a U.S. charity, to accept conservation easements and land donations from American citizens who own property in Canada.

- The donors then become eligible for U.S. tax benefits.

- In due time, AFoCLT transfers their gifts of land or conservation easements to a qualified Canadian Land Trust who will then either own the land or hold the easement, depending on the specific type of gift.

- For many American members of the Rainy Lake



Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Bonnie Sutherland announce donee status

Conservancy, this new tool will provide an added incentive to protect their land and the lake they love in perpetuity.

Members of the Rainy Lake Conservancy's Easement Committee have thoroughly investigated the costs, the investment of time, and the complexity of doing a cross border easement through the

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A Note from the President



In October, Gila and I spent three days in Peterborough, ON at the annual meeting of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) engaged in seminars, networking, and representing our area of the province. The Rainy Lake Conservancy -- as a member of this

alliance -- is one of the close to 40 voluntary private land conservation organizations in the province dedicated to benefiting communities and natural heritage systems through the acquisition of lands and easements and through related public education and other activities.

At the OLTA meeting, there was a noticeable satisfaction and excitement expressed by many when the federal Finance Minister, Jim Flaherty, announced that an American-based organization, called the American Friends of the Canadian Land Trusts, has been designated to receive and temporarily hold the donation by a U.S. taxpayer of Canadian land, or similarly, the donation of a Canadian conservation land easement, and that such donations can be exempted from Canada's capital gains tax provisions. Meanwhile, it is important to note that under U.S laws, such donations are likely to continue to also benefit from the provisions of America's charitable tax deduction rules.

The aforementioned are legally and administratively complex, and therefore of course require the involvement of professional advisors before being acted on. However, there was a sense at the OLTA gathering that the Flaherty announcement marks a turning point for the land conservation movement in the province.

Likewise, in my view, this change marks the very beginning of an era for the Rainy Lake Conservancy, wherein our organization has a realistic chance of fulfilling that part our mandate related to the eventual acquisition and long-term management of carefully selected lands and easements.

Stephen Challis, President

A Glance into Namakan Hydro Project

Gemini Power Corp, one of the partners in the proposed Namakan River hydroelectric project, says this on its website: "Construction is currently on-hold pending successful resolution of ongoing and outstanding development partnership issues."

We are hopeful that the proponent is having second thoughts about developing the sites that could threaten the unique wilderness and fragile ecosystems of the Namakan River. Check the Gemini web site for the latest official status: <http://geminipowercorp.ca/highfallsdevelopmentpartnership8.php>.

On a related matter, the Rainy Lake Conservancy will provide modest financial support for sturgeon research on the Namakan River to Lakehead University under Brian McLaren's Species at Risk Stewardship program.

Environmental Research contact: Paul Anderson

Generous Donors Support Conservation

The Rainy Lake Conservancy Fundraising Committees for U.S. and Canadian donations wish to thank you, our members, for your generous contributions to the Rainy Lake Conservancy and to the Minnesota Land Trust's Rainy Lake Fund over the past year. Your financial support makes our conservation work in the watershed possible. This year, we are especially grateful to James and Roz Hawley and the Hawley Foundation for their very generous donation.

Cross-Border Donations contact: Dale Callaghan

Following the Sturgeon

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me from observing spawning females. When I left High Falls I felt confident I knew the exact lake sturgeon spawn location.

Not completely satisfied with my first visit, I returned last May with a friend of mine to try and capture the sturgeon main event. This year the power and presence of High Falls took centre stage. Compared to 2010, the spring run-off had swelled to about 5 times. All through the week we saw very few surfacing sturgeon. We even attempted to look for eggs but were unsuccessful due to dangerously turbulent waters below the falls. We then concentrated our attention on Eva Island Back Channel but again no sign of any spawn activity.

We returned home with a greater appreciation of the character and complex nature of the Namakan River. The existing aquatic life and surrounding scenic magnitude combine to cry out "Save High Falls." The loss of High Falls greatly overshadows the human and hydro energy gains.

White Family's Legacy on Rainy Lake An Owner's Perspective by Carolyn Wallis

The White family will be leaving a legacy on Rainy Lake. Our family has always wanted to protect our special piece of nature – Echo Island – for all generations to come in our family and for the broader public enjoyment of the natural, scenic landscape of islands on Rainy Lake.



Donating a conservation easement over the island is the legacy that we can leave to protect the red and white pine habitat of Rainy Lake, the natural shoreline and hopefully provide a boost for other island owners to follow suit.

Now that the Canadian government has enabled American owners of Canadian islands to be able to take a tax deduction for donation of a conservation easement to the American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts, and to avoid Canadian capital gains tax on the value that is being diminished, the White family is eager to move forward on the easement. Our easement looks to be the first to be done in Ontario! The paperwork is doable, and partnering with Rainy Lake Conservancy to get 'er done offers us a green light to move forward.



Echo Island white pines (top), Echo and Little Echo in the mist (above)

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American Friends organization. Discussions have taken place with Carolyn Wallis, representing the owners of Echo Island, with the Executive Director of AFoCLT, the Executive Director of the Georgian Bay Land Trust, and with our old friend and legal counsel, Ian Attridge. We are confident that the Rainy Lake Conservancy has access to the resources needed to receive this easement from AFoCLT. We believe along with members of Sam and Stephanie White's family that this first easement will pave the way for others, not only on Rainy Lake, but throughout the province of Ontario.

Tax and Easements contact: Dale Callaghan

Mark Your Calendar – See You There!

Each year in August, the members of the Rainy Lake Conservancy gather together to receive updated information on the activities of the Conservancy and to meet like-minded lake dwellers. Lake dweller or not, member or not, you are invited to attend.

These annual members' meetings contain news on what the Conservancy's committees have been doing throughout the year, and a good speaker is always a feature of the afternoon. Hors d'oeuvres and beverages follow the meeting.

PLACE: La Place Rendez-Vous, Fort Frances

DATE: Sunday, August 7, 2011

TIME: 2PM

There's plenty of parking if you choose to come either by road or by water. Please don't think you are obligated to become a member if you attend – just come and see for yourself what the Rainy Lake Conservancy is all about.

IJC Task Force Recommendations

As reported in the fall 2010 newsletter, *the governments of Canada and the United States, in letters to the International Joint Commission (IJC) dated June 17, 2010, requested that the IJC review and make recommendations by July 15, 2011, regarding the bi-national management of the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River Basin and the IJC's potential role in this management.*

Key recommendations affecting Rainy Lake are:

- Create an International Watersheds Initiative Board under the IJC for the Lake of the Woods/Rainy River Watershed;
- Continue water-level regulation mandate for Rainy and Namakan lakes;
- Expand Rainy River water quality mandate to include Lake of the Woods and boundary waters upstream of the Rainy River;
- Provide alerting function for entire watershed.

The IJC will hold a meeting in International Falls in mid August to gauge public reaction. Implementation of the recommendations should be a positive factor for the Rainy Lake Conservancy in helping us accomplish our mission to preserve and protect Rainy Lake and the surrounding watershed.

Rainy Lake Conservancy representative: Paul Anderson

Farewell to Cory MacNulty



In July when Cory MacNulty leaves Minnesota, the northland will be losing one of its most dynamic voices for conservation, land protection, water quality, and advocacy. For seven years Cory served as executive director of the Voyageur National Park Association. In that role she has worked closely with the City of International Falls, Voyageurs National Park staff and many dedicated north country organizations including the Rainy Lake Conservancy.

In an extensive effort to research, understand and ultimately oppose the hydroelectric dam project on the Namakan River, Cory served as chair of the coalition engaged in this effort.

During the past few years, Cory has become a strong advocate on behalf of our watershed in Washington DC and in Minnesota and Ontario, bringing energy and passion to our gateway communities and raising awareness of the issues and needs of the watershed and the Park. We will miss her leadership, enthusiasm and perhaps more than anything, her friendship.

Government Relations and Networking: Dale Callaghan

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Up Close and Personal Nature Outings July: Inhabitants of a Bog

Meet the inhabitants of a bog ... while keeping your feet dry! Join us for a comfortable guided walk along the Cranberry Peatlands Interpretative Trail (10 miles west of Fort Frances) on Sunday July 17, 2011, at 10:00 am, weather permitting. Learn about the flora and fauna of this wildlife-rich wetland as you stroll along the dry boardwalk. This trail is rated "easy" for distance, accessibility and terrain. Picnic snack provided at the viewing platform, as well as a door prize and birding themed takeaways. Meet at the Ontario Travel Information Centre in Fort Frances at 9:30 am; some carpooling available.

August: Nature's Recyclers

Discover nature's recyclers hard at work ... on the Oberholtzer Trail. See many forms of nature's decomposers in action – and more – on a guided hike on the Oberholtzer trail. The trail winds through scenic pine forest and wetlands on the shores of Rainy Lake at Voyageurs National Park's Rainy Lake Visitor Centre and is easily accessible by car and boat. Before heading onto the trail, David Driapsa will give a half-hour presentation about Ernest Oberholtzer and his home on Mallard Island. Dave Driapsa is a historic architect working with the Park. This nature outing will be held Sunday, August 14, 2011 at 2:00 pm, weather permitting. Total length: one mile return; the first ¼ mile rated "easy" for terrain and accessibility and the second ¼ mile rated "moderate" for hills. Picnic snack provided, as well as a door prize and outdoor themed takeaways. Meet at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center at 1:45 pm.



Amanita muscaria

Bring your binoculars and camera for either hike, and to optimize wildlife viewing please do not bring pets along. Call Andrea Trembath with questions (807-274-4770). An RSVP to trembath@jam21.net would be helpful but not required.

Nature Outings contacts: Ginny Sweatt and Andrea Trembath

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