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## A wild and precious week

News

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*"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"* – Mary Oliver, American poet

The late-June sun was setting as we pushed away from the culverts off Highway 314 just northeast of Lac du Bonnet, the starting point of the Manigotagan Canoe Route. Three friends and I were about to begin a white-water adventure through the Manitoba wilderness, navigating rapids as we paddled our way towards Lake Winnipeg. We had five days to complete over 100 km.

The Manigotagan River winds its way through the boreal forest, which sustains all kinds of life. As we made our way along the route, we saw four moose (two adults and two calves), a black bear, an owl, snapping turtles, painted turtles, eagles – and approximately a billion mosquitoes.



Travelling two to a canoe, our group shot 16 sets of rapids and portaged 21 times. My paddling partner, Caleigh, and I would scout out a line safe to paddle through, picking those that avoided tree branches and other large debris known as "strainers." The key was to follow the deep water V which indicated the main flow of current, the cleanest path through the rapids. By the end of the trip, however, we were aiming for the "haystacks" (waves with whitecaps), welcoming the spray of water as our canoe bounced forward; the longer and more turbulent, the more fun.

Each campsite along the way brought a new discovery. Waking up at Turtle Falls, I changed into my swim suit, eager to escape my stifling hot tent. When I unzipped the fly and stepped out, I yelled in surprise: unbeknownst to me, a snapping turtle with a foot-and-a-half wide shell had nestled up to the side of my tent! Noticing that she had been spotted, she quickly moved on her belly down the hill and slid into the water. Now that I knew I wasn't alone in the water, my morning dip was no longer as enticing. As it turned out, we were travelling during prime snapping turtle hatching season. At numerous portages

and campsites, we discovered holes dug into the dirt and broken egg shells spread about nearby. The thought of baby snapping turtles taking their first swim in these turbulent waters amazed me, and taking on these rapids as a grown human protected by a Royalex canoe didn't seem as courageous anymore.

Since I was a little girl, I've had an intimate connection to Lake Winnipeg. I grew up spending time at my family cottage in Sandy Hook, paddling on our raft, searching for fire rocks on the beach, using fish flies as Monopoly playing pieces, picking fresh strawberries at Plum Ridge Farm and venturing into Gimli on really hot days to walk the pier while eating ice cream. That connection to the lake continues today through my work with the Lake Winnipeg Foundation.

Protecting waterways like the Manigotagan River is vital to protecting Lake Winnipeg. We can all play a role. For example, all the campsites along our trip route had a toilet located away from the water. This is just one way recreationalists like myself can act responsibly, since human waste is a significant contributor to phosphorus loading into Lake Winnipeg.



My "wild and precious week" gave me the opportunity to experience the connection between the boreal forest, its waterways and wildlife, and my own actions. My friends and I achieved our goal, arriving in the community of Manigotagan five days after we had begun our journey. I feel fortunate to have had such a rewarding adventure.

By Dana Mackie, LWF Office & Community Relations Coordinator

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