



the watershed observer



Hecla / Grindstone Provincial Park; Photo: Paul Murch

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message from our chair

A recurring challenge we face as an organization that strives to employ evidence-based decision-making is: “how can we tell if things are changing?”

Excessive phosphorus has led to obvious blue-green algal blooms on Lake Winnipeg. People notice these. Viscerally. They can even be observed from space. But were they always there? Are they increasing in magnitude? Furthermore, how do we know declines in lake health are driven by phosphorus and not climate change, or zebra mussels, or flooding, or hydro-electric activities, or all of the above? Cumulative impacts and interconnected factors can make it challenging to focus on one single narrative.

So where do we get our information from to help assess our understanding of ‘change?’ At LWF, we have been reflecting on how we can diversify our knowledge base, while also refining our understanding of the problem and positioning phosphorus reduction as the first key step in solution-focused efforts to protect Lake Winnipeg.

Certainly, scientific initiatives (like LWF’s top-shelf community-based monitoring program!) can advance our understanding of the changes happening to Lake Winnipeg, as can computer modelling, geographic information systems, and other new technologies and tools. However, I have arguably learned more in conversation with Indigenous people on the lake. Recently, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview many First Nation fishers who provided insights on currents, water density, fish migrations, algae types, species diversity, weather patterns, and the impacts from climate change, hydro regulations, the Hecla causeway and invasive rainbow smelt. Knowledge that is tied to experience has value. LWF’s strategic plan recognizes this with an explicit commitment to “respect Indigenous rights and jurisdiction and uplift Indigenous knowledge for the protection of Lake Winnipeg.”

In this newsletter, you’ll find scientific information on algal blooms, and learn how open-access technology is ensuring that phosphorus data being generated by the Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network can reach those who are able to put it to use. You’ll also read about the nationwide call for a federal strategy on environmental racism – one that would require Canada’s government to collect data on the environmental harms experienced by Indigenous and other racialized communities. If passed into legislation, this could help broaden the diversity of knowledge available to decision-makers.

– Bruce Maclean, Chair, LWF Board of Directors

join our board

We’re seeking new directors! This volunteer opportunity is open to all current LWF members. For more information on directors’ responsibilities, time commitment, desired skills and the application process, please contact us at info@lakewinnipegfoundation.org.

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news

■ Manitoba's new government commits to protecting Lake Winnipeg

The protection of Lake Winnipeg has been identified as a key commitment of the new provincial government in the **October 2023 mandate** letters issued by Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew.

Mandate letters outline the premier's expectations for each cabinet minister, including priorities they are to focus on and objectives they are to accomplish.

Environment and Climate Change Minister Tracy Schmidt has been directed to "Work with experts and scientists to protect Lake Winnipeg and safeguard the health of all our waterways."

Minister Lisa Naylor, who leads the departments of Transportation and Infrastructure as well as Consumer Protection and Government Services, was asked to "work with other levels of government to get the upgrades to the North End Water Pollution Control Centre done." And Municipal and Northern Relations Minister Ian Bushie was tasked with working with municipalities to improve wastewater management, and establishing a multi-year funding model for municipal infrastructure and maintenance.

The health of Lake Winnipeg is both a provincial priority and a cross-cutting file, and we are encouraged to see it recognized as such by Premier Kinew.

To make measurable progress in improving Lake Winnipeg's water quality, Manitoba's government must ensure that policy and investment decisions are focused on phosphorus reduction, an approach that is both evidence-based and economically feasible. Immediately, we are calling on the government to accelerate phosphorus compliance at Winnipeg's north end sewage treatment plant, the single-largest point source of phosphorus to Lake Winnipeg.

We look forward to working collaboratively with Manitoba's political leaders and public service – and we intend to hold them accountable to their commitments.

■ Anti-racism learning at LWF

LWF's 2023-2027 strategic plan includes a commitment to educating our staff, board, members and partners on treaty rights and responsibilities, anti-racism, environmental justice and the impacts of colonialism.

This summer, our staff and board participated in a day-long facilitated anti-racism workshop. Together, we learned about white supremacy culture and the norms and beliefs that reinforce the idea that people of European descent are superior to other people. We discussed how we can identify and interrupt white supremacy within our organization, and talked about opportunities to centre the voices of Indigenous and other racialized communities to build an inclusive and impactful organization.

Staff from LWF and the Lake Winnipeg Indigenous Collective also completed a series of webinars on environmental racism with Chúk Odenigbo, an intersectional environmentalist working to connect social justice, human health and the environment. We were shown how racism is experienced by Black, Indigenous and people of colour in the environmental movement in Canada, and learned how we can better hold space for diverse perspectives and experiences. We discussed Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism to understand how different worldviews create new opportunities and new visions for our future.

In September, LWF Program Coordinator Claire Harvey attended the Black Leadership in Social Impact Summit. This two-day virtual conference brought together Black changemakers from across Canada to discuss systemic challenges facing racialized communities, celebrate successes, and consider how organizations can advance equity, inclusion and anti-racism. Claire's reflections on this conference can be found online at lakewinnipegfoundation.org.

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sewage update

New provincial government to oversee phosphorus compliance

The election of a new provincial government provides an opportunity to reset Manitoba's policy and management priorities for Lake Winnipeg. Robust evidence must be balanced with a realistic accounting of available resources to arrive at a solution not only designed to target the problem at hand, but also feasible to implement.

In the leadup to the Oct. 3, 2023, election, as thick green algal blooms covered Lake Winnipeg's north and south basins, LWF reminded provincial candidates that phosphorus is the culprit. Around the world, scientists and policy-makers have long agreed on the importance of reducing phosphorus to control algal blooms in freshwater lakes. Research at IISD-Experimental Lakes Area (IISD-ELA), headquartered here in Winnipeg, has led to aggressive phosphorus-reduction policies implemented in many jurisdictions since the 1980s.

Yet in Manitoba – the very province where globally recognized research on the link between phosphorus and algae originated – we are lagging desperately behind in addressing phosphorus pollution and its impacts on our freshwater lakes. Over the past four decades, phosphorus loading to Lake Winnipeg has increased unchecked. Winnipeg's largest sewage treatment plant, the North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC), was regulated in 2005 to meet a provincial phosphorus limit of 1.0 mg/L. To date, it has never complied with this limit.

Meanwhile, the costs to manage the causes and mitigate the consequences of phosphorus pollution increase. With new leadership in place, we are watching for the first opportunity for the new provincial government to address the ongoing non-compliance of this chronic phosphorus polluter.

Manitobans can afford no more delays.

■ Next steps for our collective advocacy

Together, we are looking to Manitoba's new government to acknowledge IISD-ELA research which unequivocally demonstrates that phosphorus causes algal blooms, and to **use this evidence to implement water-protection policies that aggressively control phosphorus to reduce algal blooms in Manitoba lakes.**

LWF renews our recommendation that NEWPCC's provincial operating licence be amended to require sustained phosphorus compliance as part of the imminent next phase of plant upgrades: the construction of new biosolids facilities. Phosphorus compliance can be integrated into the design of NEWPCC's new biosolids facilities using a chemical method of phosphorus reduction. This method offers a more cost-effective and timely solution than waiting for additional nutrient-removal facilities that may take decades and billions of dollars to complete. Passed over by the previous provincial government, this licence amendment would be a critical step towards evidence-based, cost-effective phosphorus compliance at NEWPCC, ending decades of delay.

LWF and our partners continue to closely monitor progress towards phosphorus compliance at Winnipeg's north end sewage treatment plant. We urge the new provincial government to seize this opportunity to meet its key commitment to protect Lake Winnipeg and safeguard the health of all our waterways.

new funding for biosolids facilities

On Sept. 29, 2023, Winnipeg's city council approved \$482 million in increased funding to cover the full cost of new biosolids facilities at NEWPCC, with a targeted completion date of 2030. **This funding is a necessary next step** in fulfilling the city's responsibility to Lake Winnipeg. We commend council for this commitment, and recognize the leadership of Councillor Brian Mayes and Mayor Scott Gillingham in moving this project forward.

monitoring algae

Multiple variables impact bloom severity, lake health

The green slime coating Lake Winnipeg's beaches this summer was a reminder of the consequences of eutrophication.

While algae are a normal part of freshwater ecosystems, increasingly frequent and severe algal blooms driven by phosphorus loading have negative environmental, social, economic and human health impacts.

Dr. Caren Binding is a research scientist with Environment and Climate Change Canada who specializes in remote sensing and aquatic optics. Dr. Binding leads **EOLakeWatch**, a program that uses satellite imaging technology – “Earth Observation” – to monitor algal blooms.

At their maximum, this season's blooms covered just over 10,000 square kilometres of Lake Winnipeg's surface, peaking in severity in mid-August with a large bloom in the southeast section of the north basin. The bloom observed by many in the south basin established itself slightly later; by late August and throughout September it was particularly intense.

The overall size and severity of 2023's blooms are consistent with those seen over the last five years, and actually smaller and less severe than blooms observed before 2018. They also weren't unexpected: predictors of algal blooms include the amount of phosphorus flowing into the lake and summer surface-water temperatures. Binding notes phosphorus loads in 2022 were above average, while September temperatures in Gimli were more than two degrees above recent norms.

Satellite imaging is a cost-effective way to obtain real-time information about lake conditions over large geographical areas, including remote regions. Combining satellite technology with data analysis, EOLakeWatch reports on multiple bloom metrics including size, intensity, duration and overall severity.

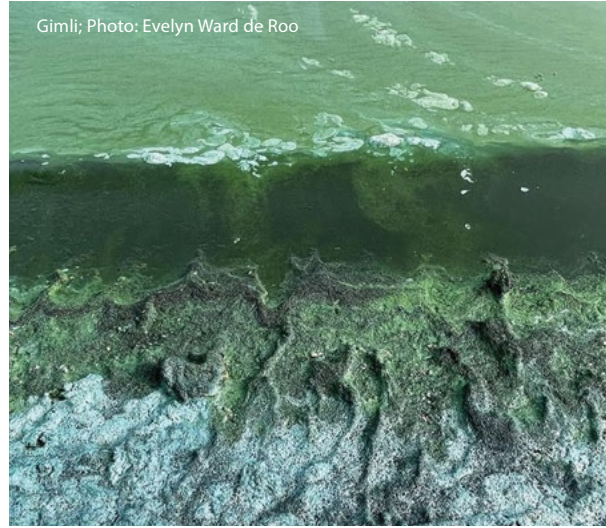
Monitoring more than one variable is important when assessing the impact of algal blooms on the overall health of Lake Winnipeg, Binding says. “A bloom might be very large but relatively low in biomass, or it could cover a small area of the lake but be extremely dense and therefore pose a greater risk for accumulation on shorelines, or the potential to produce toxins or lower oxygen levels.”

Something EOLakeWatch can't measure is toxicity. A single bloom can include many algal species, and identifying the presence of cyanobacteria (more commonly known as blue-green algae) toxins requires lab analysis of collected samples.

Still, satellite monitoring is extremely valuable, Binding says. “The availability of reliable bloom forecasts is particularly beneficial for lake stewardship efforts, providing opportunities for early warning of impacts to recreational and drinking waters, better targeting of sampling and mitigation efforts, and improving predictions of future lake responses to management actions.”



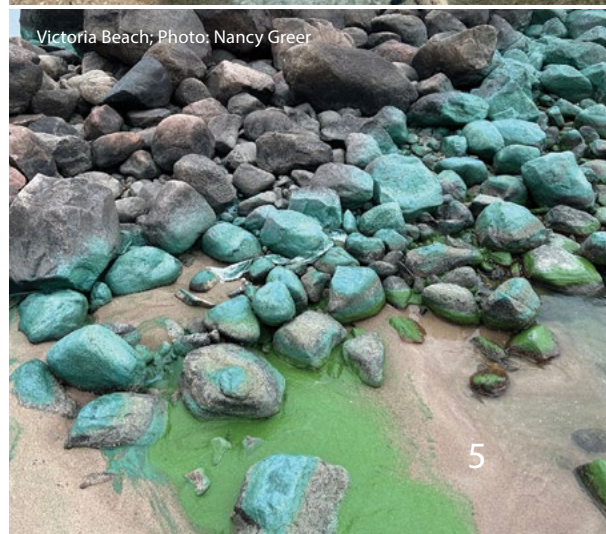
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data for decision-making

Lake Winnipeg DataStream offers open access to water-quality information

Reducing harmful algal blooms in Lake Winnipeg requires targeted phosphorus reduction in phosphorus hotspots. The Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network is generating valuable data that can identify phosphorus hotspots – but this data is only useful if it is accessible to those looking for it.

Enter Lake Winnipeg DataStream: an open-access online portal for sharing water-quality data. Launched in 2019 in collaboration with LWF, it's part of a national DataStream network developed and led by The Gordon Foundation.

"Better data means better decisions," says Carolyn Dubois, DataStream Executive Director. "When communities, decision-makers and scientists have the information they need, they can make evidence-based decisions to protect our freshwaters."

Featuring searchable maps and other visualization tools, Lake Winnipeg DataStream allows users to select and download a range of water-quality data collected by community-based monitoring groups, governments, watershed organizations and researchers: from individual datapoints from a specific location on a specific date to entire datasets generated over years. A new national website, [DataStream.org](https://datastream.org), launched on Nov. 2, 2023; among its features are a learning centre complete with how-to guides and other resources, and case studies showcasing how data is being used.

DataStream platforms, including Lake Winnipeg DataStream, were designed to be intuitive and easy to use, and the data shared on them is standardized and comparable, making it easy to track trends. But it's

the open-access nature of these online portals that's perhaps the key to their success.

"When data is open and available, groups can see who else in their area is out monitoring their freshwaters and what parameters they are measuring. This reduces duplication of effort and increases collaboration," Dubois says.

Having water data accessible also means existing resources go further. "Instead of each researcher or government department collecting their own data or spending hours looking for and reformatting other data, they can spend their time where it counts – creating solutions."

Across Canada, a chronic lack of data hampers effective freshwater decision-making. A 2020 report by WWF-Canada noted that 100 of 167 sub-watersheds assessed across the country were data deficient – a condition that effectively precludes evidence-based freshwater management. By providing a platform through which the Lake Winnipeg Community-Based Monitoring Network and others can effectively share relevant, usable information, Lake Winnipeg DataStream is promoting knowledge sharing and advancing collaborative water stewardship across the watershed.

"Partnerships are at the heart of everything we do." Dubois says. "We often say open data is a team sport. Collaboration is vital for success."

Explore phosphorus data and more online at lakewinnipegdatastream.ca.

environmental justice



How Bill C-226 is tackling environmental racism in Canada

Environmental racism refers to the ways decision-makers perpetuate inequity and uphold systemic racism when creating laws, allocating funding, and making decisions related to planning and industrial development.

Across Canada, Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities experience disproportionate negative impacts from polluting industries and other environmental hazards, and have uneven access to nature and environmental benefits.

Environmental racism can go unnoticed because affected communities often lack the political and organizational power and the economic means to push back against unjust, discriminatory practices. Historically, these same communities have been left out of environmental decision-making processes.

Unlike the United States, which established an environmental justice program almost three decades ago, Canada has no formal framework in place to identify, monitor or manage environmental racism. However, that could soon change.

Bill C-226, the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, is a private member's bill currently before the Senate, having passed third reading in the House of Commons on March 29, 2023. If it becomes a law, it would require the government to examine the links between racialization, socio-economic status and environmental risk, and develop Canada's first national

strategy – with timelines – to assess, prevent and address environmental racism.

Bill C-226 would also require information to be collected about the location of environmental hazards and the health outcomes of nearby communities. For First Nations around Lake Winnipeg, this will be important for addressing the impacts of water contaminants, chronic flooding, and loss of suitable fishing and hunting areas.

The **Lake Winnipeg Indigenous Collective (LWIC)** is part of a **group of environmental justice advocates** urging the Senate to accelerate the passing of Bill C-226. A similar bill, C-230, had previously received support in the House of Commons only to die on the order paper when the 2021 federal election was called, and there is concern that Bill C-226 could become stalled.

"Right now, we do not know the extent of environmental harm visited on racialized communities until impacts are severe or widespread," says Daniel Gladu Kanu, LWIC Director. "This bill addresses that ignorance by directing the government to collect relevant data that is essential to make better decisions for a clean environment for all communities."

Take action: Send a message of support for Bill C-226 to two Manitoba senators with significant roles in the debate. Senator Mary Jane McCallum (maryjane.mccallum@sen.parl.gc.ca) sponsored the bill, while Senator Donald Neil Plett (don.plett@sen.parl.gc.ca) is the leader of the opposition.

supporter spotlight



Jardins St-Léon Gardens co-owners (left to right) Luc, Janelle, Daniel and Colin Rémillard; Photo: Jardins St-Léon Gardens

Jardins St-Léon Gardens' local efforts highlight big-picture solutions

For many Winnipeggers, Jardins St-Léon Gardens is a must-visit seasonal shopping destination, known for its fresh, locally sourced fruits and vegetables and its friendly, bilingual staff.

Originally started in 1979 as a youth entrepreneurial project focused on agricultural food production (its name comes from the Manitoba town where its four-acre garden plot and greenhouse were located), the business moved into the city in the early '90s and shifted its focus to retail sales. It's been operating as an outdoor farm market on St. Mary's Road ever since.

Jardins St-Léon Gardens is now a second-generation establishment, co-owned since 2016 by Janelle, Luc, Colin and Daniel Rémillard, the three children and nephew, respectively, of founders Lise Mulaire and Denis Rémillard.

"We love doing this," says Colin. "It's a popular store, retail is fun, and it's also a very noble profession that we're all very motivated to do."

In addition to supporting local farmers and making local food accessible, Jardins St-Léon Gardens supports local ecological stewardship. To reduce plastic garbage, the market donates ten cents to a Manitoba environmental

organization every time a customer uses a reusable bag – incentivizing sustainability at multiple levels.

"Agriculture obviously is at the core of our company, so we know how huge the environmental impact of any sort of agriculture can be," Colin says.

LWF has been the market's charity of choice for several years – a decision Colin describes as "a perfect match." Lake Winnipeg is intrinsically linked to agriculture because run-off from fields contributes to phosphorus loading to the lake. "We can see the lake, we can see the impact, we can see when phosphorus levels are too high and we have algae all over the place. People talk about it – it's very relatable."

By supporting LWF, Jardins St-Léon Gardens is aiming to mitigate its own environmental impact, while also drawing attention to the need for systemic solutions to systemic challenges. Colin and his co-owners appreciate LWF's focus on public-policy advocacy to protect Lake Winnipeg.

"It's not like it's any individual person that's specifically to blame. It's just that we're operating in a system that keeps trying to maximize growth and profit," Colin says. "The goal is to highlight this massive, universal issue."

working together

Thank you for joining us this summer! We're humbled and inspired by the groundswell of support we've felt from so many communities around the lake.

Your donation – whether through Bike to the Beach, Walk for Water or online at lakewinnipegfoundation.org – directly supports our collective advocacy. As lake-lovers, we are united by our shared vision for a healthy Lake Winnipeg, and we know that individual actions add up to something larger.

Thanks to you, solutions are within our reach. Sustained community support through the years has made LWF what we are today: a tenacious advocate working to influence policy, guide investment, encourage evidence-based action and hold governments accountable to their commitments. Together, we are bringing the concerns of lake-lovers to the tables of decision-makers and pushing for phosphorus reduction to improve the health of our shared waters.

Thank you for joining in our collective efforts to protect Lake Winnipeg – now and for future generations.



Grand Beach, Provincial Parks Photo: Paul Mutch

cut mail-in form here

your gift makes a healthy lake winnipeg possible



Donate online at:
lakewinnipegfoundation.org/donate

OR



Mail your cheque and this form to:
Lake Winnipeg Foundation
107-62 Hargrave St, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 1N1

Please find a cheque attached for:

*All donations of \$50 or more will include a one-year membership.

- \$1,000 \$500 \$200
 \$100 \$50* \$ _____ (specify amount)

Name: _____ Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____ Lake Community: _____

This donation is in honour of: **OR** in memory of: _____

Please send recognition on my behalf to:

Name: _____ Address: _____

Too much paper? I would prefer to receive this newsletter via email

Want more info? Please send me monthly e-updates No, thank you

“When communities, decision-makers and scientists have the information they need, they can make evidence-based decisions to protect our freshwaters.”

– Carolyn Dubois,
DATASTREAM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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Winnipeg, MB, R3C 1N1