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Overview of Water Related Initiatives and Community Funding in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed

Introduction

Lake Winnipeg is an ecological resource of global significance. The 10th largest lake by surface area worldwide, it drains a region of close to one million square kilometers across four provinces and several states. It boasts one of the most important inland fisheries in Canada, and is a reservoir providing hydroelectricity for hundreds of thousands of households. Its watershed covers diverse ecosystems, from Prairie grasslands to the boreal forest. These regions house great biological diversity and are important stores of carbon, mitigating our contributions to global warming and atmospheric pollution. These ecological services are collectively worth countless billions to our economy and welfare, and yet Lake Winnipeg and its watershed remain poorly protected and subject to multiple threats.

Organizations and NGOs working on Water

The following is an overview of the primary organizations working on water issues .

There are countless local organizations with water as part or wholly key priorities and mandates across the Prairies. Many of these organizations focus on local watershed issues. These groups provide important data on water quality and quantity; mobilize local volunteers; and educate residents and industries of the importance of water, and they should be supported. It is not within the scope of a report such as this to document all their activities. Rather, here we focus on the larger regional and national organizations which set priorities and take leadership on water issues, remembering that the important grassroots efforts of local campaigns remain essential to achieving results.

Among the large NGOs, Sierra Club, Ducks Unlimited, World Wildlife Fund, and Greenpeace have all done work on water issues affecting the Lake Winnipeg Watershed. The citizens' group Council of Canadians has also developed a water campaign focusing on trade, privatization, and rights to water. At a regional level, there are key groups working on water in each region, such as Water Matters in Alberta.

The Prairie Water Directive

The Prairie Water Directive is a collaboration developed over the past several years to create a consensus on the need for protecting the Prairie waters. It sets out five key priorities for water issues on the Prairies, namely:

- A Human Right to water, and access for all Prairie residents
- Protecting and restoring riparian ecosystems;
- Managing “our” water demands;
- Responding and adapting to climate change;
- Strengthening governance over shared resources

This agenda has been signed on to by about 30 organizations so far across the prairies. A review provides a good grasp of the breadth of organizations working on water across the Prairies. Supporters include agriculture-based organizations such as the National Farmers Union, and Beyond Factory Farming, nature groups including the World Wildlife Fund, Nature Saskatchewan, research-based organizations, advocacy groups and a host of local grassroots groups across the Prairies. A simple outline of a strategy to protect water, the Prairie Water Directive will be a blueprint for organizing, education, and policy in the years to come.

The **Sierra Club of Canada** has been among the most active of the national organizations when it comes to water conservation. It has recently been awarded a two-year, \$400,000 RBC Leadership Grant for water-conservation work.

Much of this funding will go to grassroots organizing across the country, providing education on water conservation. This work flows from the Sierra Club’s work in organizing the Gordon Water Group and the Group of Concerned Scientists to put together *Changing the Flow: a blue print for federal action on water* (2007). The Sierra Club Prairie Chapter has been among the most active on water issues in recent years. The Edmonton-based group has been an instigator of an inter-provincial effort called the **Prairie Water Directive** (see above). As well, the Prairie group has been involved in water issues stemming from Alberta oil sands development.

Among the region’s environmental organizations, the development of Alberta’s tar sands has been a key priority due to its impacts on water. Most of these impacts as yet are only tangential to the Lake Winnipeg Basin, though inter-watershed diversion may become a concern in the future. Greenpeace, Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund and Pembina Institute have all been active in attempting to access, mitigate or arrest the impact of tar sands development on Prairie waters.

World Wildlife Fund has set national priorities for source water protection and established itself as a leader in protecting boreal habitats. Currently, much of its work focuses on the Mackenzie basin, but the priorities it has established have implications across the Prairies.

The Pembina Institute is a research and policy organization with offices in Ontario, BC and Alberta. Recently, its work has been concerned especially with climate change. Much of its research has focused on

tar sands developments. However, recently they have also done work on the effects of agri-fuel production, and water and agriculture.

Greenpeace, an international environmental activist organization, has been involved in agricultural issues for more than a decade. For the most part, its agricultural work has focused on the effects of genetically engineered organisms, but that expanded in 2007 to include a broader range of agricultural environmental concerns. Climate change and agriculture, and nutrient loading have been main areas of focus.

Ducks Unlimited has been known for its work on wetland restoration and protection for many years. It is unique among environmental organization for its education and outreach ability across rural Canada, and has a strong and favourable presence even in many communities that otherwise eschew the environmentalist label. Increasingly, its work on wetlands has brought the group into collaboration with researchers on climate change and ecological goods and services. Recently, Ducks Unlimited received a major grant from the Federal governments' Lake Winnipeg Basin Stewardship Fund to continue this research.

Water Matters is a relatively new organization working on water issues in Alberta. As well as its work on the Prairie Water Directive, Water Matters has been active in Alberta in the Land Use Framework Process and has been providing recommendations to the Alberta government on its water conservation plan.

Agriculture and water have always been intimately connected. Modern industrial agriculture raises new concerns about water quality downstream, and water consumption. **Beyond Factory Farming** in Manitoba has been particularly connected with its activities to limit hog farm expansion in Manitoba. As well, they have provided recommendations on biofuel production and its intensive use of water.

Government Initiatives

Water in Canada is constitutionally divided among federal and provincial concerns. While fisheries are a Federal obligation, water protection is primarily provincial. Drinking water is most often provided directly by municipalities. This report will cover some key initiatives in each of the Prairie provinces, as well as Federal and other national priorities.

Alberta Government Water Priorities

Alberta, with its Rocky Mountain skyline, provides the source water for much of the region. But much of the province has been experiencing dramatic drought through much of the decade. Extremely dry weather in 2009 prompted nine Alberta counties, including Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Rosetown and Swift Current, to declare states of emergency. Alberta's glaciers are rapidly disintegrating in response to global warming. Worse still, the development in the oil sands is diverting increasing quantities of water from other environmental, agricultural and domestic uses. There could well be conflict over the uses of water within Alberta – with urban, industrial and agricultural needs competing - as well as how it is shared among prairie provinces.

Water use and protection responsibilities in Alberta are divided between Environment and Sustainable Resource Development Ministries. The latter department is currently developing a Land Use Framework under the auspices of a recently passed Land Stewardship Act called Bill 36. This complex Bill alters dozens of previously existing pieces of legislation. Key aspects of the legislation involve creating market-based mechanisms to promote conservation and development, and the creation of a Land Use Secretariat -- outside departmental control -- to oversee land use.

The Framework divides the province into seven large sections, providing regional control over land use. Open houses on the Land Use Framework were held in 2009 and regional advisory boards are being developed in each of the regions. It is unclear at present what the impact of the Framework or of Bill 36 will be, as many of the details are still being worked out. There is considerable scope for public engagement, and participation in this process will set the priorities for organizations working on water issues in the immediate future.

At the same time, Alberta Environment is engaged in promoting conservation efforts through its Water for Life initiative. Priorities of the program include safe drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and sustainable economic development. Alberta Environment partners with several regional and local organizations to realize its goals. Especially significant in this has been the Alberta Stewardship Network, providing funding for ongoing and one-time grants to local stewardship organizations.

Saskatchewan Government Water Priorities

When John Palliser first surveyed Western Canada in 1863, he concluded that much of Saskatchewan would be too dry for agriculture. Since that time, water has received surprisingly little attention from

governments. Though much of the 20th century was relatively moist, notwithstanding the 1930s dustbowl, climate change is likely to produce irregular precipitation in the coming decades. Water conservation in Saskatchewan will become an urgent priority.

Water protection is the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and several agencies including the Saskatchewan Water Corporation, and Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. As elsewhere across Canada, drinking water has received heightened attention. The Province produces an annual report on the state of drinking water, infrastructure improvements, and source water protection. In 2006, the province also published its Saskatchewan Water Conservation Plan. Areas highlighted as priorities for funding have been water conservation and source water protection. Toilet replacement has probably been the largest effort, receiving \$11 million in funding. Non-profit groups have also been funded to help implement source water protection plans.

A Go Green Fund has been set up in Saskatchewan to fund environmental initiatives. Much of the funding at this stage is going to research, including work on the state of the province's water supply. Some funding through the Go Green Fund has gone to community groups working on water projects, especially related to water and energy. The province supports public education on conservation.

Manitoba Government Water Priorities

Manitoba's priorities on water issues crosscut several departments, including Agriculture and Conservation, but as the name suggests, Water Stewardship is the lead department on water issues. Its mandate is to ensure that the "social, economic and inherent environmental value of water is protected and realized." Several initiatives of Water Stewardship concern the management of the Lake Winnipeg Watershed. Two initiatives of this department provide an overarching direction for policy priorities: nutrient management and watershed planning. These priority directions strongly influence which groups and organizations have received funding recently.

Since 2003, Manitoba has funded the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board to identify and implement actions necessary to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus to pre-1970s levels. On the recommendations of the LWSB, last year Manitoba passed the Nutrient Management Regulation under the Water Protection Act. This regulation came after several years of record algal blooms in Lake Winnipeg, and heightened media attention across Canada on the issue of nutrient loading in lakes and rivers. Buffer zones limiting the use

of fertilizers were created along waterways. The regulation restricts the use of phosphorus in dish detergents. Also, it set new standards for municipal sewage treatment.

Wetland Restoration is a program that provides incentives to landowners to maintain wetlands on their land. Partnering with Ducks Unlimited and Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, the Wetland Restoration Program is a voluntary legal contract that pays farmers and other landowners an ecological goods and services payment for maintaining wetland resources, while allowing continuing economic activities such as haying, grazing or hunting and trapping. Although the program is primarily directed towards reducing greenhouse gases, the add-on benefits to water quality, habitat preservation and nutrient loading are essential aspects of the program.

Given the ongoing concerns with nutrient loading in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed, and the need for public outreach, education and social marketing of the basic ideas of nutrient reduction, there should be opportunities for funders to partner with the Province to help groups motivate public involvement in nutrient management.

The second area of focus identified by the Province as a priority is its Integrated Watershed Management Planning. Integrated Watershed Management Plans are documents created by stakeholders across each watershed, including residents, First Nations, farmers, industry and local governments. These plans entail visions for the sustainable management of water across their watershed. The 2006 Water Protection Act created the basis for this initiative. Plans are created through Conservation Districts, 18 regional bodies that loosely reflect watersheds across most of the southern half of the province. Given the need to mobilize diverse stakeholders for this process, the Province has provided funding for many organizations to participate, including the Manitoba Eco Network.

In particular, funding for organizations in Manitoba is provided through the Water Stewardship Fund, which provides grants of up to \$25,000 for work on its priority areas, including: watershed management planning, water-related scientific research, education and capacity building, water conservation, water stewardship and economic development. The Province has also provided funding to individuals for renovations to reduce water consumption, including a recent rebate on dual flush toilets.

Federal Government

The Federal government has also been involved in water protection on the Prairies in recent years. Most notable has been an \$18-million promise from Environment Canada in 2007 for projects to protect Lake Winnipeg. So far, only \$1.1 million has been allocated, including a significant funding grant (\$357,000) for Ducks Unlimited to study wetlands. Priorities include reducing blue-green algae blooms; ensuring fewer beach closings; keeping in place a sustainable fishery; providing a clean lake for recreation; and restoring the ecological integrity of the lake. Groups, communities and individuals may apply to access funds through the Lake Winnipeg Basin Stewardship Fund. Priorities for funding are:

- reducing nutrient inputs from rural and urban sources;
- controlling point and non-point sources of pollution;
- rehabilitating priority aquatic ecosystems that support nutrient reduction and sequestration; and
- enhancing research and monitoring capacity to assist in decision making.

Municipal Governments

The Canadian Federation of Municipalities provides funding for environmental projects for Canadian municipalities through its Green Municipal Fund. Up to \$250,000 is available for capital upgrades, feasibility studies and pilot projects. In the past five years, seven cities across the Prairies have made use of water grants from the GMF for projects ranging from lagoon reclamation, to wetland restoration to improved water treatment studies.

Major foundations involved in Water in the Prairie Region

With nearly 10,000 public and private foundations across Canada funding charitable work, it is impossible to assess all the work on water issues being granted. As environmental issues have increased in prominence in recent years, environmental groups have succeeded in attracting funding. Increasing scarcity, conflict and risk surrounding water has made it ever more important to fund initiatives that advance health and protection of Canada's waters and that educate Canadians about how our waters can be maintained for future generations. Some foundations, however, have made water funding a priority, and deserve special recognition for their work in this area.

The Thomas Sill Foundation

The Thomas Sill Foundation is a Manitoba-based foundation that seeks to advance the quality of life in the province. Among the most impressive work it has funded recently has been the Lake Winnipeg Project. The Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium, the recipient of this funding, researches problems ranging from

excess nutrients and toxic algae blooms to issues related to invasive species in the world's 10th largest lake. The Thomas Sill Foundation, the Winnipeg Foundation, and a consortium of smaller foundations have together provided \$165,000 in matching funds to help cover the administrative budget for Lake Winnipeg Consortium. Covering core budgets for non-profits is often especially important, since governments often find it difficult to cover these sometimes unglamorous, but essential aspects of charitable work.

Walter and Duncan Gordon

Funding water conservation has long been a central part of the mandate for the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation. Its Fresh Water Resources project has three priorities: sustainable watershed governance; groundwater conservation; and trans-boundary water security. It has provided assistance to many organizations working to protect water in the Lake Winnipeg watershed, including Manitoba Eco-Network, the Polis Project, and the Sierra Club of Canada. It has also funded a number of important reports on water in Canada. This foundation has differentiated itself by focusing on policy, including funding for non-partisan education that promotes essential policy changes, including a report on Water Policy in Alberta and providing funding for an advertisement in the parliamentary paper *The Hill Times*, promoting the main messages of its key recipients to government decision makers.

Royal Bank Foundation

The charitable arm of the RBC, the Royal Bank Foundation supports water conservation through a \$50-million dollar 10-year program called the Blue Water Project started in 2007. Its focus has been on the two key areas of "watershed protection" and "access to clean drinking water." The work it funds promotes community awareness about watershed issues and conservation. Its leadership grants range from \$25,000 to \$500,000. During the recent funding cycle, the International Institute for Sustainable Development and the Sierra Club of Canada received important assistance. Smaller grants to community organizations doing local education and conservation projects are also available. In Manitoba, the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District received \$5000 for education programs on water conservation in 11 schools in their district.

J. W. McConnell Family Foundation

The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation has been an important resource for organizations doing environmental work since 2001. More than \$4.5 million in grants were distributed, funding environmental education and protection, between 2001 and 2006. Major grants for water protection have included a program managed by Nature Canada, called The Living by Water Project. It focuses on

shorelines along all types of water-bodies – rivers, streams, creeks, canals, lakes, ponds, wetlands, reservoirs, estuaries, and marine shorelands. Also, Community Foundations of Canada has received multi-year funding to foster citizen engagement on the environment and to increase the capacity of its member foundations to engage in environmental work, including specifically in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed.

The Winnipeg Foundation

The Winnipeg Foundation has funded several projects directly related to work focused on restoring the health of Lake Winnipeg and its watershed. They provided funding to the Foundations in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed Initiative; the documentary *CHOKING LAKE WINNIPEG* being produced by Dr. Jim Byrne of the University of Lethbridge; the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium and the Lake Winnipeg Foundation. They have also funded several conferences bringing together community leaders and scientists working on watershed issues.

The Calgary Foundation

The Calgary Foundation initiated support of Dr. Jim Byrne’s *CHOKING LAKE WINNIPEG* documentary by making the lead grant and challenging several other foundations to contribute to the project. They have provided a number of grants to organizations working on watershed issues across the Prairies and are clearly supportive of environmental and water work.

Catherine Donnelly Foundation

The Catherine Donnelly Foundation funds environmental groups across Canada. \$20,000 was provided to the Safe Drinking Water Foundation in Saskatchewan in 2008. As well, other watershed-based projects have been funded across Canada.

Harbinger Foundation

Harbinger Foundation has concentrated on global issues around water. Ensuring clean drinking water in areas of extreme poverty is central to its mandate. Since 2007, they have also provided leadership and capacity building for Canadian NGOs focusing on water issues that are national in scope. Recipients have included the Sierra Club and the University of Victoria’s Polis Project.

Max Bell Foundation

The Max Bell Foundation has freshwater management as a priority in its environment program. Although it made no new grants in 2009 as a result of the recession, it has previously made grants in support of the Polis Project on Water to IISD for work on watershed management, to McGill University's Brace Water Resource Centre for work on assessing overall watershed health and implementing beneficial management practices. It has also supported the communications work of the Rosenberg forum.

The Alberta Eco Trust Foundation

The Alberta Eco Trust has focused on water as one of three main targets for its environmental grantmaking. Since 1992, the Alberta Eco Trust has invested \$1,250,000 in 163 different projects to help protect and conserve Alberta's water.

Other source of funding for environmental groups in the Prairie provinces looking for funding to help protect the environment have included disparate sources including the Mountain Equipment Coop, the Credit Unions, Manitoba Hydro, as well as various government sources. In Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Eco Network's Grassroots Activism Fund provides matching grants for small projects. Some of the issues with these funding sources are that they often are of a limited nature, making long-term planning or extensive projects difficult, or they do not provide essential core funding. Foundations have a critical role to play in ensuring the sustainability of environmental non-profits working in the region.

In particular, from this review of existing funding on water issues, community foundations could fill a valuable niche to organizations working at a regional or sub-regional level. Many of the larger national foundations give preference to organizations that have a national or interregional reach. Small volunteer-based organizations often have more limited funding needs for which community grants are sometimes sufficient. Between these poles, mid-sized organizations that work at a provincial or Prairie-wide level on environmental issues face special funding challenges. The protection of the Lake Winnipeg Watershed could be significantly enhanced by community-based foundations supporting environmental organizing around water issues.

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