

## Lake Winnipeg... A Prairie Ocean

Lake Winnipeg is the world's 10th largest freshwater lake, covering almost 24,000 square kilometres in surface area. The lake plays an important role in the lives of many Manitobans and is an important symbol for the province. Not only does this enormous and exceptional body of water provide us with countless recreational and economic benefits, its beautiful beaches are also a feature attraction for visitors to our province.

This prairie ocean provides a livelihood for about 850 licensed commercial fishers and numerous anglers; it provides transportation links to remote and northern communities, and serves many other important functions. The primary function is to provide unique habitat for fish and other organisms.

Lake Winnipeg receives drainage from nearly 1,000,000 square kilometres extending to the Rocky Mountains in Alberta in the west, and includes large portions of North Dakota and Minnesota in the south, and northwestern Ontario in the east. Consequently, activities within both Manitoba and neighbouring jurisdictions can affect the health of Lake Winnipeg.

Recent studies conducted by Manitoba Conservation, as well as research carried out by other government agencies, and work done through the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium (LWRC), have found that the lake is slowly changing. It is believed that excess nutrients from various sources throughout the basin are causing

the lake to become enriched, allowing for more frequent growth of abundant algae, affecting fish habitat, recreation, other important water uses, and clogging commercial fishers' nets.

It is believed that changes observed in the lake due to the influx of excess nutrients are reversible. Although Lake Winnipeg commercial fishers continue to harvest record numbers of walleye and sauger, ignoring the problem of nutrient loading is not an option due to the importance of Lake Winnipeg to all of us. The Manitoba government has announced an action plan to begin to achieve the goal of reducing nutrients in the lake to pre-1970 levels. The plan includes enhanced riparian protection, better programs for soil testing, tightened regulations for sewage and septic systems and additional requirements for larger treatment systems. Clean Environment Commission hearings on Lake Winnipeg will be held and a new Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board will work to implement actions to meet the pre-1970 goal. To

be successful, this action plan will require significant effort from all of us and from our neighbours, but we are committed to ensuring the long-term health of this important and unique body of water.



## Manitoba's Water - Working Together

It goes without saying that our water resources are vital to the future of all Manitobans. Therefore, any strategy dealing with water must include a co-operative approach that involves all citizens who depend on, as well as benefit from, our water resources.

For example, the opportunities from renewable hydroelectric power and a diverse agricultural sector are among the most significant benefits we derive from our dependable flow of water. Hydroelectricity is a reliably priced, clean form of energy that enables our provincial utility, Manitoba Hydro, to be a major player in provincial and international energy sectors. Manitoba is committed to the promotion of low-impact hydroelectricity, along with wind and geothermal power, as clean energy sources for the future, and as a means of achieving our climate change commitments under the Kyoto Accord. However, we know that things must be done differently now. By working co-operatively with First Nations communities, and through proper planning and a thorough environmental assessment process, new hydro developments in Manitoba will be low-impact, with little or no flooding. Northern communities will be partners in these new developments and residents will directly benefit from the construction, operation and power generation for the life of the project. By proceeding in a sustainable manner, we can ensure hydro-electric developments benefit all Manitobans.

Manitoba has committed to improving the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Manitobans based on principles of mutual recognition, respect, resource sharing and responsibility. The government recognizes the rights and interests of Aboriginal people established through treaties and the *Canada Constitution Act of 1982*. These principles will form the basis for the consultation process to be undertaken by the province in the further development and implementation of the water strategy.

Agricultural diversification and intensification, including value-added food processing, has made Manitoba a leader in food production throughout the world. At the same time new challenges such as a changing climate causing droughts as well as recent studies showing excess nutrients in our waterways mean we must look carefully at water management. Our goal must be to protect both our water resources and our highly valued agricultural sector. We must give producers the tools they need to successfully meet new challenges and enhance sustainable practices on the land.

Over time, the use of water has changed and will continue to change, as will the pressures placed upon the resource. An increasing population and accompanying development, increased industrial demands, technological changes, increased pollution, and climatic changes have all had an effect on the resource. Pressures will continually increase and change, therefore we must take a long-sighted and flexible approach to water management and ensure that we approach decision making in the context of the whole watershed.

Watershed planning requires both a comprehensive and co-operative approach to managing water issues and, as such, has already had a long history in Manitoba through our many Conservation Districts. Conservation Districts work at the local