

Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board (LMSB)
Report on Public Meetings

March 3, 2009 - Ashern

March 4, 2009 - Eddystone

March 10, 2009 – St. Laurent

March 18, 2009 – Portage la Prairie

Executive Summary

During March 2009 the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board (LMSB) consulted with the public through a series of public open houses and requested comments and presentations on any topic of concern to the public in the Lake Manitoba watershed. Concerns were put forward on many topics. Fisheries, Infrastructure Requirements including the Portage Diversion and the Fairford River Water Control Structure (FRWSC), Water Quality, Water Quantity and Habitat Protection were all recurring themes throughout the four open houses. The commercial fishery on Lake Manitoba has seen a steady decline over the past few years and many fishers are concerned about the impacts of the Fairford Dam and the Portage Diversion on the fishery. The water quality of Lake Manitoba has declined over the years however many are concerned with future impacts and do not want to see Lake Manitoba in a similar situation as Lake Winnipeg. Habitat Protection was mentioned, usually in regards to the many marshlands that surround Lake Manitoba. The health of the marshlands have declined substantially along with the abundance of wildlife that call them home; and many people are concerned about the future and would like them to rebound to a healthy state.

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Introduction

It is within the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board's (LMSB) terms of reference “to establish and maintain an on-going dialogue with local interests....regarding the management of Lake Manitoba, Pineimuta Lake, Lake St. Martin and the Fairford and Dauphin Rivers, to solicit as required, public input related to these concerns and to communicate with the public on a regular basis.” To achieve this, the LMSB has held four public open houses surrounding Lake Manitoba.

Appendix A includes the story boards used at the open houses. Participants were given the opportunity to view the storyboards and ask the Board members any questions regarding their content at the beginning of each open house.

Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board Public Open House Approach and Results

The Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board (LMSB) held 4 Public Open Houses between March 3 and March 18, 2009. The open houses were held from 2PM – 5PM and 6:30PM – 9PM. The public was invited to address the Board with a presentation; however written submissions were encouraged. Before the presentations began community members were invited to view the story board display, familiarize themselves with the Board and ask questions. After each presentation Board members asked questions regarding the issues and concerns that were raised by the presenter.

Table 1. Dates and locations of public open houses.

Date	Community	Location
March 3, 2009	Ashern	Elks Hall
March 4, 2009	Eddystone	Community Hall
March 10, 2009	St. Laurent	Recreation Centre
March 18, 2009	Portage la Prairie	Portage Industrial Exhibition Association Office

All four meetings were attended by 25 – 30 individuals from the public. The meetings were opened by the Chair of the LMSB, Gordon Goldsborough, and began with an introduction of the Board and each member. The format and expectations of the day were outlined by Gordon Goldsborough. Each community member had an opportunity to address the Board about issues of concern.

Concept and Underlying Principle

In general Manitobans were very supportive of the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board. The public was happy to see members of the general public playing a role in the future management of Lake Manitoba.

Fisheries

A number of participants are commercial fishers and are concerned about the decline of the Lake Manitoba commercial fishery. The Fairford Dam is generally perceived as the main issue facing the fishery, along with carp destroying valuable fish habitat and nutrient loading from cottages and cultivated fields.

A proposal from the Lake Manitoba Commercial Fishermen's Association (LMCFA) for a fall fishery on Lake Manitoba was brought to the Board's attention. There is divided support for the proposal, and it appears fishers on the south basin of Lake Manitoba are in general support of the proposal if it is carried out in conjunction with additional hatcheries and rearing ponds around the lake; while fishers on the north basin are not in general support of the proposal. The Board was informed the reason for this proposal is since the commercial fishery on the lake is a winter fishery and the freeze up of the lake is later each year, fishers are experiencing a shorter season and are losing income. This was a recurring theme at all open house locations. However many fishers are worried about the loss of nets if an open water fishery becomes a reality and many indicated the quality of fish would be compromised. Another concern is an open water fishery may deplete the resource and provide many opportunities to "black market" fish sales. It was suggested the buyers of these fish should be punished as harshly as the sellers.

We were told The LMCFA has not met as a body for a long period of time and it has not published financial statements, though fishers continue to be assessed on their contributions to it. This issue should be addressed.

Some fishers perceived the use of 3 inch nets as detrimental to the Lake Manitoba fishery. Overall fishers on the lake are against the use of the small nets and in some cases the collapse of the fishery was blamed on use of these nets.

Commercial fishers surrounding Lake Manitoba are largely in favor of the use of rearing ponds and hatcheries around the lake. Rearing ponds provide walleye fry with refuge from predators thus improving the rate of survival to fingerling stage. Fishers believe fingerlings from the rearing ponds are now being caught in the St. Laurent area (3 year old fish). Many fishers would like to see an increase in the numbers of rearing ponds and hatcheries.

We heard markets for by-catch and rough fish should be developed, and The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corp. (FFMC) should work with fishers to develop markets for by-catch and rough fish.

Safety was a recurring theme related to the Lake Manitoba commercial fishery. One suggestion was to implement a "no fishing zone" 2 miles north and south of the Narrows. This was suggested because there is a very strong current in this area and ice does not always completely freeze.

There are a number of new fish species being caught in Lake Manitoba; these include sunfish, bullheads, channel catfish and rock bass. Whitefish are being caught again this year due to open bays in the Fairford River Water Control Structure (FRWCS).

We heard at Eddystone that the Lonely Lake project of Ducks Unlimited should be reversed to enable the reestablishment of a commercial fishery on the lake.

Infrastructure Requirements

Participants at all four public open houses expressed concern about infrastructure requirements, these include leaky lagoons, septic tanks, garbage pickup, dust control and the Fairford Dam.

A recurring concern was one pertaining to leaky lagoons; a few RMs surrounding Lake Manitoba have had to delay further development due to a lack of lagoon capacity. Development in many areas is expected to be delayed until lagoons are repaired or new ones are constructed.

The importance of enforcing the proper use and pumping out of septic tanks for cottages around Lake Manitoba was stressed. The Provincial Government should review and update legislation regarding septic tanks for cottages. This would ensure septic tanks are pumped out regularly and would help prevent illegal dumping of sewage.

Cottage developments surrounding Lake Manitoba would like to see improvements in some services. Garbage pick-up, dust control, street lights and hydro were a few amenities desirable by cottagers who do not yet have them.

A Federal Dock at The Narrows would improve emergency services on the lake in both South and North Basins. A few participants pointed out there is no provincial boat launch for emergencies on the South basin of Lake Manitoba. Increased lighting of landmarks/harbours would improve navigation and safety.

Portage Diversion

The Portage Diversion spillway seems to be eroded and in need of some repair. If repaired, can the structure be modified to reduce the amount of debris which enters the lake? If so, can a filter be installed? The province should do beach clean-ups every time the Portage Diversion is operated. The use of the Portage Diversion, in conjunction with the Shellmouth Dam and the Red River Floodway, provides valuable flood protection to the City of Winnipeg. One participant suggested since the Portage Diversion does provide flood protection to the city and since agricultural lake is used to hold excess water compensation to farmland owners should be considered. The cost of cleaning the beaches after operation of the Portage Diversion needs to be recognized by the province. Various agency roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined. This should include the regulators that need to be involved in a well-coordinated approach to resolve the ongoing problem. A clear protocol for maintaining the Diversion channel should be included.

Water Quality and Nutrient Loading from the Watershed

Most participants who attended the open houses are concerned about deteriorating water quality in Lake Manitoba and do not want to see Lake Manitoba end up like Lake Winnipeg.

Overall there was a general opposition to the Shoal Lakes Drainage Proposal. Concern was expressed regarding negative impacts it would have on water quality.

Many participants are involved in agriculture. There was support for farmers' to be recognized for the "ecological service" they provide as good stewards of their land (similar to ALUS program). Another incentive mentioned was that minimal use of applied fertilizers and crop rotation should be a condition for receiving crop insurance and should be supported by MAFRI and Conservation Districts (CDs). A clean lake is important to all producers. Support for crop rotation was expressed as a way to minimize the amount of fertilizer that is used on crops and runs off the fields into Lake Manitoba and the Portage Diversion.

Water Quality Management (WQM) Zone boundaries should be revisited due to soil (clay) conditions in a number of RMs. Some RMs are concerned their questions to government about WQM Zones have gone unanswered.

A general concern was expressed regarding carp and their detrimental effects on marshlands. The protection and restoration of marshlands surrounding Lake Manitoba is a priority to many cottagers and permanent residents.

There was a general consensus that more intensive water quality monitoring is needed on Lake Manitoba and it should include sampling points in the Portage Diversion and several locations in both basins of the lake.

Water Quantity/Lake Manitoba Water Levels

Opinions about the level of Lake Manitoba varied between participants throughout the four open houses. The Board was told the lake should be kept between 810.00 and 812.5; between 810.5 and 812.5; that the lake should fluctuate naturally but at a lower range; and nutrients from runoff spike in the lake when water levels are above 812.5.

The current regulation of lake levels was favored as opposed to the regulation prior to the Province accepting the Lake Manitoba Regulation Review Advisory Committees (LMRRAC) recommendation in 2003.

Concerns were expressed regarding high water levels due to wind on the lake that has caused severe damage to shorelines, cottages and boat houses, especially during fall storm conditions along the southeast end of the south basin. It was suggested lake levels be drawn down to 811.5 prior to fall. With any manipulation of water levels there is a long lag time before the change is seen on the lake. This must be considered when levels are to be managed.

Habitat Protection, Enhancement and Restoration

Concern was expressed for marshes surrounding Lake Manitoba, Lake Pineimuta and Lake St. Martin. Marshes like those on East Meadows Ranch, located southwest of Lunder and northwest of Oak Point, can be managed and restored by manipulating water levels, controlling cattail growth and waterfowl production can be enhanced by controlling predators. In Delta Marsh, the invasion of hybrid cattail, loss of islands and open water areas, loss and changes in submerged vegetation, low frog and muskrat numbers, and the

general deterioration of the marsh are due to: 1) the sustained period of static water levels, 2) increased nutrient loading, and 3) common carp invasion. The Delta Marsh Carp Exclusion Project was described and 3 – 5 years of monitoring is planned. Landowners surrounding the three lakes should be rewarded for maintaining healthy riparian areas.

Many permanent and seasonal residents are concerned about shoreline erosion. Several open house participants would like to see shoreline erosion tracked and monitored. A common concern was loss of shorelines and beaches; many cottagers had to move their cottages back, away from the shore due to extensive shoreline erosion.

Additional Matters

Many participants made general comments about Lake Manitoba, Lake Pineimuta and Lake St. Martin. These comments are relevant to more than one area of concern.

A common recurring comment was the North Basin of Lake Manitoba is much “cleaner” than the South Basin.

A common concern was downstream flooding on the Dauphin River; some participants have been stuck on the Dauphin River Road when flooding has occurred; cost of the road getting washed out time and time again was a concern for many as well.

Some cottagers expressed an interest in learning ways to help maintain healthy lake conditions. They would like to see tips on what they can do as well as links to informative websites on the LMSB website once it is fully functional.

One participant expressed concern that regulations which are developed for Lake Winnipeg will be forced upon Lake Manitoba without considering the differences between the lakes. A number of participants felt scientists are not interested in the local or traditional knowledge fishers and long term residents have with respect to Lake Manitoba fish populations, water levels and changes in water quality.

In regards to the expansion of the use of walleye rearing ponds around the lake, participants suggested heavy equipment training courses could be used to build them. This would cut costs and educate people about the use of rearing ponds.

The Fairford River Water Control Structure (FRWCS) was blamed for many negative issues on Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin and the Dauphin River related to fisheries, water levels, water quality, shoreline erosion and marshland health. Many participants would like to see a full impact study of the FRWCS.

General Comments on the Public Open Houses

A number of comments were received by the Board regarding the format of the open houses. Many participants enjoyed the somewhat informal atmosphere of the open houses; and took advantage of the opportunity to formally address the Board with their concerns. Many appreciated the educational information provided on the story boards and the expertise of a number of the Board members in various areas. Clearly, there is a need to

provide information in various formats to ensure all Manitobans have access and an opportunity to ask questions.

Next Steps

The Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board will consider the feedback received from the public and interested stakeholder groups as it moves forward on its work plan for the 2009/2010 fiscal year.