

Lakescape

newsletter of the



WABAMUN WATERSHED
MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Box 1005, Wabamun, Alberta, T0E 2K0

www.wwmc.ca

info@wwmc.ca

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Good News for Lakefront Property Owners!

Money is available to help cottage owners naturalize their shorelines. The WWMC encourages property owners to restore the riparian area to a more natural state. We can help you plan your project, including information on where to acquire native plants and how to access grant funding.



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Natural riparian areas help maintain a healthy lake.

The riparian zone is that critical band of lakefront from the water's edge upland for typically four to five metres, where the vegetation transitions from wet to relatively dry conditions. It is essential to the health of the lake in that it acts as a natural bio-filter for water entering the lake, protects against erosion and provides critical habitat for fish and wildlife.

Last year more than 600 "Love Your Lake" property assessments were done from the water for Parkland County properties around the lake. If you have had one of these assessments you should have received a letter in April explaining how to access your personalized property report. If you haven't already done so, we encourage you to visit www.loveyourlake.ca to view your report. If your property is in the Village of Wabamun or one of the summer villages, your shoreline property will be assessed this summer. Watch for us in a boat in front of your cottage!

In July, members of the WWMC will again be attempting to visit all lake front property owners. The focus for this year's "walkabout" will be the importance of the riparian zone to the overall health of the lake. Together, we can repair the riparian zone and work to "Keep Lake Wabamun Clean and Clear."

Please feel free to contact us at info@wwmc.ca or join our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Wabamun/>) for answers to questions about shoreline restoration or other stewardship projects on your property.



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Natural riparian vegetation can be well integrated into cottage landscapes.

...2

Fishery Management Update

In March of 2017 Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) issued a long-awaited Wabamun Lake Fisheries Management Update (PDF, <http://bit.ly/2qgr7vX>). The document lists the fisheries management objectives for the lake and the current status of the fish populations. Numbers were estimated based on a 2015 Fall Index Netting (FIN) survey (PDF, <http://bit.ly/2qguZ02>), and the population status was determined based on the Provincial Fish Sustainability Index. The risks to the sustainability of the fish populations in Wabamun Lake are rated as either High or Very High Risk. The following are highlights from the update.



Wabamun Lake is becoming known for its trophy-size Northern Pike.

Walleye: The Walleye restoration that began in 2011 continues. Although it was predicted back in 2012 that a harvestable population of Walleye might be possible within three to five years (about now), the government now predicts a sustainable harvest will not be available until five to seven years from now. Then it is hoped the Walleye now being produced in the lake will reach maturity in sufficient numbers to provide a sustainable fishery. For these reasons and a low FIN catch rate, Walleye are classified as Very High Risk, and the no-harvest regulation continues.

Northern Pike: AEP confirms that Wabamun is now a Trophy Status lake for Northern Pike. The status is based on the large Northern Pike being caught and a 2013 survey of anglers coming off the lake, in which more than 80% supported having opportunities to catch trophy pike. However, a low FIN catch rate places the Northern Pike at High Risk, and all pike caught must be released.

Lake Whitefish: Perhaps the biggest disappointment with this update is the status of the Lake Whitefish population. For much of the 20th century, Wabamun was one of the biggest commercial producers of Lake Whitefish in the province. In some years, commercial fishers caught from 200,000 to near 500,000 kg (440,000 to 1.1 million lbs.) of Lake Whitefish. It was also a popular sport fish, especially in winter. However, since the oil spill of 2005, the FIN catch rate for Lake Whitefish has been on steady decline. Thus, the population remains in recovery and the no harvest regulation continues.

There was no mention of **Yellow Perch** in the update, but the FIN summary reports only one Yellow Perch caught. So, the lake remains catch-and-release-only for all species for the next few years.

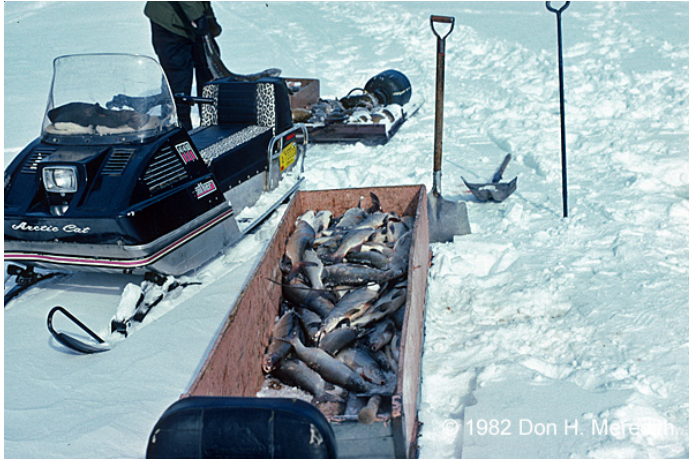
Meeting with Fisheries Biologists

Meanwhile, anglers are reporting to the WWMC that while they are catching many healthy Walleye they must release, they are also catching some thin and seemingly unhealthy Northern Pike, and very few Lake Whitefish and Yellow Perch. As a result, many of these anglers believe the Walleye are negatively affecting the other fish populations.

To address this issue members of the executive committee of the Wabamun Watershed Management Council met with government fisheries biologists Stephen Spencer and John Tchir this last April. Spencer and Tchir stated that the low numbers and poor quality Northern Pike, Lake Whitefish and Yellow Perch being reported are natural fluctuations of populations as a result of an additional top predator (Walleye) being introduced to the lake. Once the populations adjust to the new situation, numbers should improve. The biologists noted that these species coexist in other lakes.



After more than 100 years, the government closed Wabamun Lake to commercial fishing in 2003 to conserve fish stocks.



For much of the 20th century Wabamun was known for its large commercial catches of Lake Whitefish.

Tchir also mentioned that foul hooking or rough handling by anglers—damaging gills and internal organs—could cause the thin pike being observed. He stated there is a large “recycling” of fish in a catch-and-release fishery close to a city. The chances of a fish surviving several handlings by anglers are reduced each time the fish is caught.

This led to discussions about perhaps more strenuous rules regarding catch-and-release fishing, such as banning the use of bait and treble hooks. Fish tend to swallow baited hooks more readily than non-baited ones, and treble hooks are harder to dislodge from a fish’s mouth, increasing the chance of injury while handling. It was also mentioned that several factors are undoubtedly affecting fish populations, such as: consequences of the oil spill, loss of habitat to development, increases in pollution, and climate change. No conclusions were reached at this meeting but there was a good exchange of information and concerns.

The status of the fishery will not be revisited until 2020 when another FIN study will be undertaken. In the meantime, the government intends to consult with a wider range of anglers about what they would like to see on the lake, including those anglers who no longer fish the lake because they cannot harvest fish to eat. The WWMC will let you know when this consultation begins and how you can provide feedback on fisheries management in Wabamun Lake.

Watershed Management Plan Update

We are pleased to advise that the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance has agreed to lead the development of a comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (WMP) for Wabamun Lake. This will be a collaborative undertaking involving a broad group of stakeholders including Alberta Environment and Parks, the WWMC and the watershed municipalities. The draft Terms of Reference for the WMP is available at www.wwmc.ca; click on Calendar of Events and then the 2017 March Meeting Minutes (PDF) where the draft is attached. We encourage everyone to read the draft Terms of Reference and provide any comments and feedback directly to Board members or through info@wwmc.ca.

Whirling Disease and Invasive Species

As you might have heard on the news, Whirling Disease has come to Alberta. Currently it is found in the Bow River and Oldman River watersheds in southwest Alberta, but its potential to spread to other watersheds is high as it can be transported on boats, other watercraft and fishing gear, including boots and waders.

What is Whirling Disease? Whirling disease is an illness found in members of the salmon family (Salmonidae). It is caused by a microscopic parasite (*Myxobolus cerebralis*) that infects salmon, trout and mountain whitefish through a complicated life cycle. Infected fish will swim in swirling patterns and exhibit skeletal deformities. The disease can be up to 90% fatal in fry and fingerlings. More details are found at: <http://bit.ly/2pw6rkc>

Could it occur in Wabamun Lake? Wabamun Lake has only one member of the salmon family, Lake Whitefish. Whirling disease is not known for infecting Lake Whitefish. However, one should always clean boats and other equipment used in water when moving from one lake to the next. Other **invasive species**, such as quagga and zebra mussels, and flowering rush, can also be spread from water body to water body and cause a lot of problems for a lake.

Go to <http://www.wwmc.ca/index.php/what-s-new?id=377-invasive-species> for information about invasive species and how you can help prevent them entering Wabamun Lake.

WWMC Meetings

The Wabamun Watershed Management Council (WWMC) regularly meets on the third Wednesday of each month at Alberta Environment and Parks Office, 250 Diamond Avenue in Spruce Grove, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. However, meeting dates and locations may vary. For example, in the summer we might meet somewhere around the lake, and in the winter meetings might be postponed as some directors take winter holidays and quorums are not possible.

Guests are welcome, but please go to www.wwmc.ca and click on What's New to confirm the meeting date and location or contact us via email: info@wwmc.ca

**Have you seen an abuse of public land?
Call Report-A-Poacher
1-800-642-3800**

Anyone who witnesses serious public lands abuse can phone the 24-hour Report A Poacher line. A Fish and Wildlife Officer will record your complaint and direct it to the appropriate authority for action.

Corporate Members

The WWMC thanks the following businesses, governments and organizations for partnering with the WWMC as corporate members and helping the council achieve its goals.



**Camp Oselia Society, Dairy Queen, Falher Drugs, Seba Beach Ice Cream Stop
Summer Village of Betula Beach, Summer Village of Point Allison, Wabamun & District Lions Club**

If you own or represent a business or organization that is concerned about Wabamun Lake and would be willing to help maintain its health, become a corporate member of the WWMC for just \$100 a year. Corporate members will be acknowledged at WWMC functions, in each newsletter and on the website. For more information contact Neil Fleming by e-mail, fleming.neil@outlook.com or telephone, 780-953-6345.

If you are already a corporate member and would like to see your logo here and on the WWMC website, please send a digital copy to Don Meredith at wwmc@donmeredith.ca