



## Living by Water Project: Lesser Slave Lake 2009

### BACKGROUND

The Living by Water project is delivered in Alberta through the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN). They have been running this program for eight years in central Alberta. The Alberta Conservation Team (ACT) works in partnership with FAN to increase the reach of their program to other areas in Alberta. The philosophy of the Living by Water project is to encourage home owners to make small changes in their properties to help improve the health of their lake. This



goal is like minded ACT's goals, and thus this has become a natural partnership.

During July and August of 2009, with the support of the Lesser Slave Watershed Council, ACT successfully delivered 20 homesite consultations in Shaw's Point, Jousard, Canyon Creek, Widewater/Wagner and Marten Beach. Depending on the interest from the homeowner the consultations took anywhere from 30 minutes to one and half hours.

### CONSULTATION PROCESS

A homesite consultation is a one on one process with each landowner that focuses on the positive actions they are currently doing on their property. By maintaining a solution based tone throughout the consultation, relevant individually tailored suggestions for improvement can be made to the home owners. If all home owners make small changes to their properties, the collective impact is beneficial for the lake.

Each consultation begins with providing the homeowner with an overview of the program and process. Throughout the consultation, it is emphasized that the information gathered is confidential and will not be used against them unless there is practices found that are dangerous to human health. Permission is also requested to take photos. These photos are used for training and educational purposes and provide important information that is used to compile the reports. Any personal information is not attached to the pictures.

The main purpose of the homesite visit is to make observations and gather information about what is important to the homeowner and how they are currently using their property. Questions regarding home activities, waterfront recreation, septic systems, and shoreline

vegetation are asked during the consultation. The information gathered from the homeowner and any observations gathered from a walk around the property provide enough data to build a customized report for each landowner.

### SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS' FINDINGS

There were many similarities observed in the 20 consultations carried out along Lesser Slave Lake. Firstly, many landowners did not know that having a lakefront property requires special attention, and had little knowledge of their impact on the lake. Secondly, around the lake there was evidence of ATV use as seen through quad tire tracks and frequently used trails with dwindling vegetation along the shore and throughout the riparian areas. Finally, many landowners were unaware of what a healthy shoreline looks like. There was very little knowledge about the noxious and restricted weeds present on shoreline properties and also what vegetation shows a healthy shoreline. Consultation participants demonstrated their interest in learning about healthy vegetation such as reeds, weeds, shrubs and grasses as almost each consultation turned into a mini botany lesson! Landowners showed great interest in learning more about the lake ecosystem and many asked questions about how to restore their properties to a more natural state.

Within the communities of Widewater and Wagner, there were specific concerns that were observed. The current sewer disposal systems seen were commonly outdated and underserved. When discussing this with landowners, they were hesitant to spend the money on pumping, inspecting and maintaining current septic fields. This is because sewer and water hook up will become available to them in the next one to two years. In some instances septic holding tanks had not been pumped or inspected in up to ten years.

### CONSULTATIONS' SPECIFIC FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS MADE
Six of the 20 homes visited had limited vegetation or turf grass extending to the water's edge.	Plant deep rooting native trees and shrubs within the riparian area. If it was feasible, up to 30 meters was suggested. For those concerned about larger vegetation obstructing views of the lake, it was recommended to simply prune or top trees to keep them at a desired height rather than removing them altogether.
Seven of the 20 homes visited had large clusters of noxious or restricted weeds present.	Pull invasive plant species before they spread and take over the property. It was advised that bare soil be covered as it is especially susceptible to weed growth. A list of the noxious and restricted weeds in the area was provided along with a resource book list.
Six of the 20 landowners consulted used herbicides or pesticides.	Herbicides and pesticides are discouraged as they are persistent in the environment after their use. Recipes for more environmentally friendly herbicides were provided in addition to encouraging pulling or cutting the weeds.

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Onsite sewage disposal systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven of the 20 propertis visited had holding tanks</li> <li>• Seven of the 20 propertis visited had septic fields / mounds</li> <li>• Six of the 20 propertis visited had municipal water and sewer hook ups</li> </ul>	
<p>Four of the seven septic field systems hadn't been serviced in five or more years.</p>	<p>Checking the septic system for leaks should be done once every few years. It is suggested that leak tests and distribution box inspections occur also.</p>
<p>Six landowners used septic enzyme additives.</p>	<p>Resist using any additives such as Septobac to the septic system. Septic enzyme additives harms the natural bacteria already present in the system, and isn't necessary to maintain the health and proper operation of your system.</p>
<p>Four of the 20 homeowners use phosphate free cleaners.</p>	<p>Phosphate free cleaners reduce the potential for increased algal growth in the water body. Phosphorous is found in many laundry detergents, dish soaps, and other cleaning products. If household grey water does come into contact with the environment, toxic algal growth may result. A list of phosphate free or eco-friendly cleaners and retailers in the Slave Lake area was provided to the landowners.</p>
<p>Four of the 20 homeowners use hot tubs.</p>	<p>It is recommended that hot tub grey water is contained in a holding tank. Both chlorine and bromine are halogens, and when released into the natural environment they are very reactive. They can form toxic substances which can accumulate in living tissues, and are possibly carcinogenic or can disrupt liver and kidney functions. Aquatic life can be particularly sensitive, so if possible, keep this grey water contained.</p>
<p>Ten of the 14 pet owners allowed their animals to walk off leash.</p>	<p>It is important to be mindful of off-leash pets visiting the waterfront. Lesser Slave Lake is fortunate to be home to such a wide variety of species of birds, mammals and fish, however; excited pets can sometimes damage animal habitat and nesting sites near the water. It was advised to keep pets in a fenced area or on a leash and properly dispose of their waste.</p>
<p>Five of the 11 boat owners have boats that meet EPA 2006 guidelines.</p>	<p>Proper boating habits are suggested including safe fueling practices and annual engine maintenance.</p>



water quality. The cumulative impact of making positive changes to not only properties but recreation activities can improve the water quality on the lake.

### **Strengthen Partnerships**

In order to offer homesite consultations, it is important to have strong support from the local stewardship groups and lake dwellers to ensure the process of booking consultations is successful. From this network of people, lake champions who promote the consultations are identified. These people know the lake and they have unique and meaningful relationships with the community. Thus, they are equipped to promote the Living By Water program by setting up consultations with their neighbors. This process is integral to the success of the Living by Water program. These partnerships and community connections need to be strengthened for future involvement of the Living by Water program in Lesser Slave Lake.



There are some possibilities for future partnerships to be formed. These could lead to the identification of lake champions. These opportunities are include:

- Canyon Creek Harbor Authority
- Wagner/Wide Water Athletic Association
- Shaw's Point Resort
- Citizens of Nine Mile