

Save Our Lake- SOUL (Grindstone Cottager Owners' Association)

Our grassroots group SOUL is a sub-committee of a provincial park based cottage owners association, which has been working hard for the last 3½ years. Initiated at our AGM in 2005, SOUL was prompted by the desire to:

- a. show our firm financial support for the LWRC
- b. initiate a constructive method of educating our residents about what positive actions they could take to help the Lake to which we are so closely bound.

YEAR ONE

With a small core group of workers, we printed and carried through on a widespread dissemination of educational materials informing people about the work of the LWRC, developing and sourcing a list of phosphate-free cleaning products and asking for financial donations to be made directly to the LWRC. We established a distribution network and deliveries made by mail to known cottager groups and by car to all communities on the southwest side of the lake. Access through the Cottager Magazines' directory was made to all cottager groups on the southeast side. Posters were also placed in 80 locations. We were hopeful that this information would be widely shared.

YEAR TWO

We compiled packages of printed educational information obtained from Conservation, Water Stewardship, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada and hand delivered them to all RM and Community offices on both sides of the south basin of Lake Winnipeg, asking them to make this information available to their residents. A list of sources of these free materials was included and it was hoped that our contacts would further distribute or make the information available to their residents. The Winnipeg River communities were also included.

During these two first years we also wrote short articles for the Cottager Magazine and MACO's newsletter, were interviewed by CBC Noon Hour, Shaw TV, the Manitoba Co-operator and were contacted by a number of others who showed an interest in what we were trying to do. We must acknowledge too, the help of the LWRC Science and Education coordinators who were very patient in vetting our composed material.

YEAR THREE

We concentrated on our own cottage area at Grindstone Park. A Go Greener Grindstone plan was introduced and accepted at our AGM, which embodied an effort to make our community the best example of an informed cottager group dedicated to being good environmental stewards of the land and lake.

A Water Survey was compiled and distributed in the spring and funding obtained for this project from the Water Stewardship Fund. A handout was prepared with the cooperation of CPAWS and Water Stewardship and was handed out at our annual G Days. By the fall, the survey results were tabulated; recommendations made and requested information for cottagers' questions were obtained. These were published in our recent March Gazette. The survey had obtained a 38% return rate, which was very acceptable and it indicated that our community was becoming knowledgeable and aware of environmental issues and were eager to do more.

In late summer an opportunity arose to apply for a federal grant for Lake Winnipeg projects within the watershed. At this same time we had also heard via the grapevine that a new sewage lagoon was to be built. Discussions were started between SOUL, the GCOA board and Alex Salki, a cottager in our area, about the possibility of linking the new lagoon with a managed wetland for the purpose of reducing our P footprint further. With this project in mind and having had the need for over a year to ask questions about various issues, we finally managed to obtain a meeting with the deputy Minister of Conservation to forewarn him that we as a Cottage Association wanted to make an application. He immediately precipitated a meeting with all the appropriate persons, including Conservation, Water Stewardship staff and lagoon engineering firm, in order to answer the many questions that we had. At this meeting we also heard that a natural wetland was **already** being used as an exit to the Lake for our sewage effluent material, but that it had never ever been tested for suitability. This fact alone was enough to convince us that our project for a new lagoon connected with a managed wetland would be an ideal situation to set up a combined Educational and Scientific study area. It would enable us to continue the progress we had made with environmental actions and perhaps be emulated elsewhere.

In addition the SOUL group is offering two awards at the MSSS in April 2009 for projects which address remedial action steps towards the health of the Lake. Inherent in the award criteria, is also a requirement in which students are asked to orally present their findings to a group of their peers or others, in order to encourage them to spread the message further.

IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion we were hoping that by publicizing SOULs' actions to other cottage communities that they too would see what is possible if a common goal was defined. The privacy act has remained a block and deterrent for reaching out directly, so we do not have feedback on whether this has happened, but we remain positive.

Contact with our group can be made through saveourlake@mts.net