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Lake Windermere meets Lake Winnipeg in Mexico

Lake Winnipeg and B.C.'s Lake Windermere form a national water stewardship network

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Water contamination, loss of biodiversity, and the need for adequate water management were common themes at the 13th International Living Lakes Conference at Lake Chapala, Mexico.

Heather Leschied, of Wildsight's Lake Windermere Project in B.C., and Bruce Smith, President of the Lake Winnipeg Foundation, were in Mexico this past March to learn why Chapala, Mexico's largest freshwater lake, is one of the best studied lakes in Latin America, and also one of the most polluted.

"Lake Chapala is highly threatened," Leschied said, "and the Santiago River, the only outflow from the lake, is so polluted from untreated agricultural and industrial runoff that it is impossible to stand next to the river for more than a few minutes before your eyes start to burn".

Lake Chapala was declared a Ramsar site of international importance in 2009, and is a source of drinking water for six million people, as well as resting place for over two million water fowl on their annual migration including the White Pelican who make Lake Winnipeg their summer home.

No water strategy in Canada, either

The Living Lakes International conference was hosted by the Amigos del Lago de Chapala—the Friends of Lake Chapala—a local community water stewardship group. Smith was in Mexico to formalize the Lake Winnipeg Foundation's inclusion in the International Living Lakes Network, which has 64 wetlands and lakes represented worldwide.

Both Leschied and Smith were not surprised to learn that Mexico has very little regulation when it comes to protecting its water resources.

"What's surprising, though, is that *Canada* doesn't have a national water strategy to protect its freshwater resources, either," Leschied said. "Water experts in Canada are urging our nation to develop one."

Even lakes as polluted as Chapala can be brought back to life, she said—but only with extremely costly restoration efforts.

Creating a special network for Canada

The Lake Winnipeg Foundation Inc. is partnering with Wildsight's Lake Windermere Project to create a Living Lakes Network for Canada.

Smith, who is very enthusiastic about the new network, believes that “the Living Lakes Network Canada will help bring a higher profile to the health of lakes across the nation by allowing current and future generations of grassroots water stewards to share information and resources to help protect our freshwater lakes and wetlands”.

“Wildsight is thrilled to be working with the Lake Winnipeg Foundation”, Leschied said. “We have already been approached by other water groups from across Canada who would like to be part of this network”.

Let this be a lesson

As for Lake Chapala, both Leschied and Smith agree that its current state illustrates exactly why stewardship groups in Canada shouldn’t give up.

“Both our lakes, Windermere in B.C. and Winnipeg in Manitoba, have their troubles,” Smith said, “but there is still an opportunity for us to prevent a Lake Chapala-scenario from occurring. And of course,” Smith adds, “the magnificent White Pelican migrating back from Lake Chapala to Lake Winnipeg for the summer is a great source of inspiration”.

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Attached Photo

Living Lakes Network Canada Coordinators (left to right): Heather Leschied, Wildsight; Catherine Salki, Lake Winnipeg Foundation; Alex Salki, Lake Winnipeg Foundation; Kat Hartwig, Wildsight; Bruce Smith, Lake Winnipeg Foundation.

About Wildsight (Lake Windermere Project)

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America. • www.Wildsight.ca

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About the Lake Winnipeg Foundation

The Lake Winnipeg Foundation Inc. is a grassroots charitable organization with the mission of restoring and maintaining the health of Lake Winnipeg and its Watershed. Established in 2005, the Foundation now has over 400 members and has supported several research projects, provided various education and public awareness programs, and advocated on issues related to the lake and its watershed. •

www.LakeWinnipegFoundation.org

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About International Living Lakes Network: Global Nature Fund

International Foundation for Environment and Nature

www.GlobalNature.org