



For Immediate Release
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Two Windermere united: Mayor Taft, others, sign sister lake partnership

Combining expertise to care for lakes with more similarities than just their names

Invermere, B.C. — Lake Windermere, Canada and Windermere, U.K. have united through a Sister Lake Partnership agreement. Invermere Mayor Gerry Taft signed the agreement in Windermere, Cumbria, U.K., on May 18, 2009, during the International Living Lakes Conference.

“This is the first step of sharing our experience and expertise,” said Heather Leschied, of Wildsight’s Lake Windermere Project (LWP). “It will help to protect both lakes and their catchments for future generations.”

Mayor Taft delivered a keynote speech on “Our Lakes: A Community Asset.” His speech focused on the successful working partnership between the LWP and the District of Invermere.

Of the two Windermere, Leschied said, “The similarities go much further than the name. Both lakes face pressures from visitor populations, loss of native fish populations, lack of public access, sewage inputs, water quality, invasive species and climate change.”

Leschied noted in her conference speech that Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, a Scottish-born Canadian businessman, named B.C.’s Lake Windermere in 1883, after Windermere in Cumbria. “If he only knew that one day the threats and opportunities of our two distant Windermere were being shared for their common good, and that his re-naming of the lake had been the catalyst.”

Wildsight and the U.K. Environment Agency were the driving forces behind the sister lake agreement, which came about through their involvement in the International Living Lakes Network.

“Because of Wildsight’s role in the International Living Lakes Network, and the success of the LWP, we were able to connect with individuals working to protect Windermere in the U.K.,” Leschied said.

Wildsight became Canada’s partner in the Living Lakes network in 2000, and in 2004 hosted the 9th Annual Living Lakes conference in Invermere. In 2005, Wildsight created the Lake Windermere Project, which has successfully re-introduced science-based water stewardship to the much-loved, much-used lake. In 2008, Leschied attended the Living Lakes conference in Italy, where she met John Pinder, Lakes Manager with the U.K. Environment Agency.

“We immediately noticed the similarities between the issues we were dealing with as managers of water quality monitoring programs on our respective Windermere,” Leschied said. “That’s when we decided it would help both our lakes to join together and share our experiences.”

Pinder said, “This was the start of long and potentially exciting relationship between our Lake Windermere and their custodians . . . The event was not only marked by all the key players on both sides of the Atlantic signing up to this common agenda, but the depth of sincerity evoked by our key speakers. Our two mayors, Gerry Taft and Bill Smith, but also our own Lord Clark of Windermere who so eloquently expressed the importance of the lakes to our societies and why the partnership approach to mutual help and learning was the only way.”

Mayor Taft and Leschied signed the partnership agreement, as did Wendy Booth, Regional District Area F director, and Wayne Stetski, Regional Manager of Environmental Stewardship with B.C.’s Ministry of Environment.

“Seeing Lake Windermere in the U.K. was an opportunity to see a future scenario for our Lake Windermere in Canada,” Taft said. “Lake Windermere in the U.K. has been able to manage their lake through the combination of the stakeholder involvement, strong policy and enforcement from government, and having historical water quality data. Even with almost no new foreshore development and a 10-mile-per-hour speed limit, the pressures on Lake Windermere in the U.K. have not disappeared—but they can be managed.”

All the Canadian signees of the agreement are hopeful that the increasing pressures on Lake Windermere, B.C., can be managed effectively. With help from stewards of a similar lake across the world, the LWP, its supporters and its partners stand an even better chance of seeing that happen.

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About Wildsight

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. For more information, please visit www.wildsight.ca.

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Photo:

The official signing took place May 18, 2009. Present signing partners included (back row, left to right) **John Pinder**, Windermere Catchment Restoration Programme Manager; **John Collins**, Area Manager, Environment Agency; The Right Honourable **Lord Clark** of Windermere; **Heather Leschied**, Program Manager, Wildsight; **Bill Jefferson**, Chairman, Lake District National Park Authority; (front row, left to right) **Marion Hammerl**, President, Global Nature Fund; **Gerry Taft**, Mayor, Invermere; and **Bill Smith**, Mayor, Windermere Town Council.

Historical background—Heather Leschied’s speech at Living Lakes, 2009:

“The story of two Windermeres began here in the English Lake District. But..across the Atlantic Ocean and almost clean across North America to the Rocky Mountains of southeastern British Columbia, there is another Lake Windermere, with its own story.

Our Lake Windermere is a little different. Located at the headwaters of the Columbia River, the largest river flowing to the Pacific Ocean in North America, Lake Windermere was formerly named Kootenae Lake by David Thompson, who was the first European to navigate the full length of the mighty Columbia River, and who mapped much of Western Canada.

But in 1883, when Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, a Scottish-born Canadian businessman, stumbled upon the lake, he immediately noticed their similarities. At a length of 17 km, or 11 miles, and width of 1.5 km, or 1 mile, Windermere covers approximately the same area, and has its own island and neighbouring cottage community of Windermere, complete with its own White House. Many of the area's early settlers came from England and today, the region still has a strong European population.

Your Windermere is so naturally charming, it is no wonder Sproat's intent to link the two lakes through their names. If he only knew that one day the threats and opportunities of our two distant Windermeres were being shared for their common good, and his re-naming of the lake had been the catalyst."