



Healthy Waters Lac La Biche Year-End Review 2020

This was a year of change for the Lac La Biche Region Watershed Society. One of the most obvious changes was the change to using “Healthy Waters Lac La Biche” as our new “common usage” name – however our official name hasn’t changed. Many other changes occurred due to the unexpected rise of the Covid-19 virus and its associated impacts.

Due to the uncertainty of the pandemic, and the shutdown of meeting venues, the board suspended meetings during March, but these have continued since April using Zoom. Unfortunately, we were unable to go ahead with our major project for the year. This was to be a series of open houses to provide opportunities for people around Lac La Biche to learn more about local watersheds and waterbodies, funded by a grant by the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation.

However, all was not lost! We were still able to hold an excellent webinar series using the Ecotrust grant funds via Zoom. They were held every first and third Thursday from July 16 to October 1, and featured the following topics and speakers: How Weather Affects Lakes (Dörte Köster, Associated Environmental Consultants), Wetland and Shoreline Restoration (Kristen Andersen, Associated Environmental Consultants), All Hands on Deck! How You Can Help Maintain the Health of Alberta Lakes (Janine Higgins, Alberta Environment and Parks), Lac La Biche: An Overview of Scientific Studies and What This Tells Us About Managing Water Quality (Nathan Ballard, Alberta Environment and Parks), Planning for Healthy Lakes (Jane Dauphinee, Municipal Planning Services and Arin MacFarlane-Dyer, Alberta Environment and Parks), and finally What’s a Wetland? (Michael Schulz, Portage College). Several of these are already available online on our Healthy Waters Youtube page (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLJxys9IYkh34YGSSvrBVzQ>), and others will be put up as time permits.

Another important milestone was the holding of our 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) – our second AGM, but our first as an official registered Society. Due to Covid-19, it was postponed until June 24, and had to be held online, but it was a great success. We had an amazing guest talk by Jay White of Aquality Environmental Consultants entitled “Killer algae plagues Alberta Lakes: Is Lac La Biche next?”, and were able to take care of the needed business. Our elected board continues with myself as President, Brian Deheer as Vice President, Don Bollinger as Treasurer, and our new members include Randi Dupras as Secretary, and Jaime Davies, Chelsey St. Louis, and Julie Hink. Colin Cote also continues as our official Lac La Biche County representative on the board.

At the AGM, we also decided to begin having a small membership fee for adults and organizations, but continue to be free for youth. While it would have been nice to continue having free membership for all, we found it difficult to operate without some cash available for printing, applications, and other costs. We hope that this low cost will not be a barrier to anyone becoming involved.

Another exciting development was the logo contest that we held toward the end of 2020. Congratulations goes to Siobhan Stromquist for the winning logo, which is featured at the top of this letter. It features a Western Grebe (a Species at Risk that nests on Lac La Biche), a walleye, and cattail

plants. We have now placed this logo on our updated brochures, and will be moving forward with plans to purchase promotional items for the society. Member organizations will also now receive an official certificate that they can proudly display at their places of business.

We are also pleased to see the progress that has been made in the update to the Lac La Biche Watershed Management Plan (WMP), being spearheaded by Lac La Biche County. From Healthy Waters LLB, myself, Brian Deheer, Randi Dupras, and Colin Cote all sit on the advisory committee. The Summary of the Science document has been completed, and a Draft WMP is currently being reviewed and revised by the committee. We look forward to seeing the final product and the corresponding work that will occur!

The society has also been involved in items of community concern this year. Foremost was a proposed campground development on Poplar Point on the north side of Lac La Biche. We were contacted by concerned residents who live nearby, and were able to assist with expertise, a letter supporting their concerns, and an interview featured on a video that they developed (see the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-73fVJSG4Hk&t=3s>). Despite the concerns, the campground was approved by the county in January 2021, though an appeal is in the works.

The society has also been able to distribute educational material to several locations within Lac La Biche county, such as the Visitor Information Center, Bold Center, real estate offices, and Portage College. These materials include our own brochures and several other resources relating to lake and watershed health. Thanks especially goes to Julie Hinks for spearheading this effort, and Jaime Davies for developing our new brochure.

Looking forward to 2021, we have much that we hope to be able to do this year, though this will depend on Covid-19 restrictions. We plan on moving forward with the open houses that we were unable to do last year, doing a combination of in-person participation (that meets Covid-19 guidelines) and online participation. Our plans are to hold open houses in the following locations: Lac La Biche Bold Center (June 2), Plamondon Festival Place (July 7), Owl River Community Hall (Aug. 4), Hylo Community Hall (Sept. 1), and Craigend Community Hall (Oct. 6). We have also applied for additional grants for a wetland mapping and conservation project for priority areas around Lac La Biche, and for conservation work on the Western Grebe population on Lac La Biche lake.

Our Facebook page continues to be an important means of communication to our membership and other interested people. We encourage anyone who would like to keep up to speed on our society, relevant issues, or contribute information to subscribe at <https://www.facebook.com/lbbrwss>. We also encourage anyone who is interested in learning more about the society, or becoming a member, to contact myself or another board member, or use our E-mail at healthywaterslacbiche@gmail.com. Thank you!

Sincerely Yours,

Michael J. Schulz, M.Sc., P.Biol., E.P.

President, Lac La Biche Region Watershed Stewardship Society (Healthy Waters Lac La Biche)