

Acceptance Speech
Kimiwan Lake Naturalists
Lieutenant Governor's Greenwing Conservation Award

On behalf of the Kimiwan Lake Naturalists, I would like to thank you for such a special honour today. Today is a great day! Not just for the Naturalists, but for all Albertans. Today we can celebrate together all the efforts that Alberta volunteers contribute towards wetland conservation. For this, the first ever Lieutenant Governor's Greenwing Conservation Award the Kimiwan Lake Naturalists gratefully accept this recognition on behalf of the many members of the group who have laid such an important foundation for all of us.

It never took long for residents and visitors to Kimiwan Lake to accept its multiple values. The Cree named it "Kimiwan" which means place where it rains. They hunted, fished, watched the sunsets, prayed and lived at the lake. When settler's arrived they too hunted, fished, watched the sunsets, prayed and lived at the lake. Today, we still hunt, watch the sunsets, pray, and live at the lake. While we don't fish there today, we sure appreciate other values, like flood control that the lake offers. How interesting that despite the cultural and demographic changes that have occurred, so many generations of people value this place for the same things.

What took a little longer was to generate formal recognition for the conservation values of the lake. Today, this shallow, 10,000 acre maternal host, home to 206 species of birds, 800 interesting humans and seven very thankful black labs is designated as an Important Bird Area, a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site, an Environmentally Sensitive Area, candidate Natural Area, Waterfowl Sanctuary, ranks amongst the highest waterfowl production and staging areas in the nation and last fall was documented to have staged 68,000 swans! This place is a floating buffet for birds!

To recognize such a place certainly took time, but was really a no-brainer. In the Naturalists early years, forward thinking volunteers knew that the lake's sustainability would also be linked to the community's sustainability- both culturally and economically. Small rural community perseverance is a pressing issue in western Canada and each community has struggled with its own solutions- ours was already in place and it was free.

The advocacy generated over the years bore fruit in a big way with the opening of the Kimiwan Lake Birdwalk and Interpretive Centre in 1992. The wetland became accessible to people of all ages and abilities and the Interpretive Centre became the indoor classroom. Here we are fifteen years later, 45 summer students were hired and over 45,000 people from all over the world experienced wetland education at Kimiwan Lake. It is rewarding to be recognized for being able to deliver on the high public expectations that surround this publicly owned facility. We are most proud to have been able to touch so many people.

We have struggled at times, like every other small community, to generate enough volunteers to continue. During these times new models and new partnerships were a necessity if we were to continue our advocacy and program delivery. The Naturalists were established as an umbrella service organization under which the community groups of the Golden Coach and Museum Society, Tidy Town and the Winagami Conservation Area coordinated their volunteer manpower and funds. We think that we found a successful recipe for generating enthusiasm.

The Town of McLennan and Ducks Unlimited Canada have always been a part of our group's success. The fact that these organizations support our mission gives us strength every day. This award is a key motivator for our group. I can tell you that upon hearing that we had been nominated and then chosen for the award that the air was charged with excitement! Where could this award lead us? Could we work towards an expanded partnership with the province, the municipality, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the private sector. Could we be the next Oak Hammock Marsh?

Thank you to Andrew Wagner for nominating our group, and to the Coulmans, the Stephensons, the O'Mahonys, the MacMillans, the Perrys, the Faulkners, the Brassards, the Lessards, the Tanguays, and many, many others, thank you for your foresight in recognizing the link between community and wetland health. You have set the next generation on a good path. This award is for you.