

Leech Lake **Cottagers' Association** **NEWSLETTER**

Spring 2024

2024 Dues

Many thanks to everyone who has paid their 2024 dues! It really helps to ensure we can get through the expensive winter months of snow plowing and be better prepared for any unforeseen weather events Mother Nature may have in store.

As a friendly reminder to those who have not yet paid, please find the 2024 invoice attached for your reference. If you can't recall whether you've already remitted payment, please reach out to Shelley at leechlaketreasurer@gmail.com. If you are wondering about an easy security question for an e-transfer, please use: "what is the name of our lake" - answer: leech

Road Work Ahead

Lorne Rd - There will be general road maintenance to be completed as per the town's maintenance standards. There will also be a sweeping of the road for this spring as well.

Fraserburg Rd - waiting on the district for information



Leech Lake Roads

Pothole filling has started but it is a slow haul to complete as there is bumper crop this year. For those looking to grab some sun, if it's available, and a little exercise come and join us **Saturday April 6th @01:00pm** as a group of us will be out filling potholes.

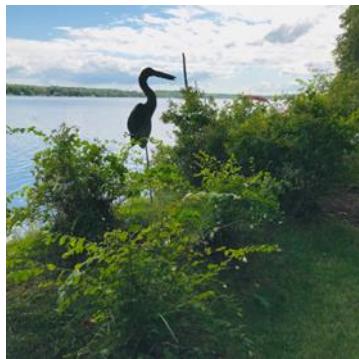
We will meet up at the gravel pile by the white signboard on Lorne Rd. Bring your ATV, an ATV trailer, or truck, car with trailer, gloves and a shovel.

Reach out to our roads team at leechlakeroads@gmail.com if you would like to lend a hand or two.

Robinson, our roadwork supplier, will be onsite April 8th to 12th to inspect our roads before they are graded. With the temperatures into the mid teens next week the roads could dry out very fast and grading could occur by month end.

Growing together as a community – Leech Lake Stewardship – by Valerie McCoy

As many of you are aware from ongoing communications, the most impactful thing each property owner can do for our lake's health is to encourage or restore a buffer between the dwelling and the water's edge. This naturalized buffer provides an area to filter runoff and support wildlife habitat.



The stewardship priority for 2024 will be the continuation of shoreline re-naturalization begun formally in 2023. Rob and Candace McGill were the first property owners to pledge to re-naturalize the shoreline. You may recall their article in the newsletter about the Natural Edge site visit. Approximately 10 more properties followed suit and in late fall were provided a planting plan such as the one attached. We are going to implement our plan in the spring, and we hope others will join us.

Native plants can be purchased for a very reasonable price from Muskoka Conservancy via this [link](#). Pick up is Saturday, May 4 from 9:00 - noon at locations listed in the link, including 1350 High Falls Road in Bracebridge. In the event you are not able to pick up your plants that day - please contact us at leech.lake.stewardship.committee@gmail.com and we'll try to arrange pick up.

The Signs of our Time

The winds and wet snow that graced the lake earlier this week proved too much for our remaining signpost tree. Many of the signs on that tree are now destroyed. Guy is working to salvage what he can and return them to the property owners.

We do have a spare hydro pole that we can put in its place, or maybe find a different place to install it. This pole was a leftover from the downburst that took down hundreds of trees and hydro poles back in 2016. We could use that pole as a replacement for the tree. We would need a post hole digger to make that a reality. Or, we come up with a different solution. If you have ideas on this or want to help, please contact Guy at leechlakeroads@gmail.com.

Leech Lake Needs You! to Help with the Lake Partner Program

We'd like to call for a volunteer to step in and collect Leech Lake water samples to be included in FOCA's Lake Partner Program (LPP). The LPP is a province-wide, volunteer-based, water-quality monitoring program – the largest of its kind in Canada! The goal of the program is to better understand and protect the quality of Ontario's inland lakes. Each year, hundreds of volunteers collect total water samples and make monthly water clarity observations on their lakes. These water samples are analyzed at a Ministry of Environment lab.

We had a member collecting for many years but it fell by the wayside, and we'd like to restart the program. This program is different from the Fleming study in that Fleming does much more extensive analysis over one weekend in the fall. LPP sampling allows us to see changes over the summer, year-over-year and relative to other lakes. The two-decades-long LPP dataset can assist in the early detection



of changes in the nutrient status and/or the water clarity of the lakes, due to the impacts of shoreline development, climate change and other stresses. The more information we have, the better we can protect our lake.

The volunteer would collect a water sample and take six water clarity observations over the summer. This [link](#) explains more and has a great video on sampling.

If YOU would like to participate in the LPP on behalf of The Leech, please reach out to Lake Stewardship chair Valerie McCoy at leech.lake.stewardship.committee@gmail.com

Website Volunteer Required!!

In an effort to continue to improve communication in our lake community and beyond, we are working towards building a simple website for Leech Lake. We need to find someone who can lead the way on this, as none of us has any experience. In the best case scenario someone will volunteer to help out. If we can't find a volunteer, we will earmark some LLCA funds to pay someone to work with us to pull it together.

If you could help, please reach out to our secretary Leslie at leechlakesecretary@yahoo.ca

Spring is Springing!

Despite the recent storm that spattered some wet snow, it's a safe bet that Spring is here to stay. The roads are soft and bumpy in spots, and other spots have ruts, but they are driveable. We are down to minimal snow on our roads and properties, and only a small portion of ice is left in the lake. Plus, we already have chipmunks and squirrels frolicking about.

Garbage Pickup



The last dates for lakeside garbage pickup (at the corner of Lorne and Fraserburg Rds.) are Sunday April 7 and 21, and Sunday May 5.

Curbside garbage pickup at Leech Lake will resume the week of May 6th. Our pick-up day has been confirmed as **Monday**, and will continue weekly through to the end of October.

If you go down to the woods today...

With the earlier warm-up the bears will be visiting Leech Lake. Take care, and be prepared if you venture off the beaten paths.

At this time of year, there is little natural food for bears, causing them to search for other food sources, including garbage and bird feed.

Taking these simple precautions can help prevent attracting bears to your home and neighbourhood, keeping bears in the wild where they belong:

- Storing garbage in waste containers with tight-fitting lids (indoors if possible)
- Waiting until pickup day to put out garbage
- Taking away bird feeders for the spring and summer (you can offer birds natural alternatives, such as flowers, nesting boxes and fresh water)
- Cleaning food residue and grease from outdoor barbecue grills – including grease traps – after each use
- Keeping pet food indoors



Additionally, it is important to always leash your dog because unleashed dogs can lead bears back to owners and cause defensive bear attacks on people.

Bears entering our community are not necessarily a threat, but it is important to know who to call if you encounter one. The province operates a non-emergency, toll-free Bear Wise reporting line (1-866-514-2327). Because of the unseasonably warm weather this year, the line is open early, from March 1 to November 30 and is available 24/7.

If a bear is posing an immediate threat by showing threatening or aggressive behaviour, remain calm and call 911 or your local police department.

Find more information about how to be Bear Wise [here](#).

Ticks a Growing Concern

After our mild winter, ticks are already being found across Ontario - and therefore potentially at Leech Lake. One of the biggest issues related to tick bites is the threat of Lyme disease. Prevention from tick bites – for humans and our four-legged friends – is the best strategy to avoid disease. A recent article [here](#) discusses ticks and humans; [this](#) article has some good info about ticks and dogs.

Spring Cleaning

The Birds and the Bees will soon be returning to Muskoka. Our first robin sighting at the lake was on March 05 which was 3 weeks earlier than in 2022 and 2023. After some time away the birds will be tending to new lives and spaces and that will require lots of energy. A dirty feeder can be problematic for our avian friends. This [article](#) contains tips on keeping birds healthy.

The Importance of the Loons on Leech Lake – by Larry

Jacobs

Our loons have a critical role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem on Leech Lake. The loon is a fascinating creature and we all love to watch them on the Lake in summer. You may not be aware of the important



role our loons play in the food web at Leech Lake.

The food web in any healthy body of water is a synergistic system where all parts must work in harmony. If any part of the food web becomes

compromised, the health of the lake becomes challenged. The level of cleanliness of the water in Leech Lake can be traced to two major contributors; the springs that feed the lake with clear and clean water, and the small invertebrates which are the foundation of the lake's food web. According to Dr. Norman Yan of York University, in a healthy body of water, these small creatures are capable of filtering all of the water every 10 days. This is an astounding fact, and one of the reasons our stewardship efforts include counting these small creatures each year (the Bug Count).

How does that relate to our loons? Because loons prefer a diet of small trout and yellow perch, the rock bass has become the dominant species in the lake. Rock bass forage the shoreline and feed on the small invertebrates, reducing their population and compromising their ability to filter water.

To try and deal with this, we began stocking the lake with larger trout (too big for the loons) which we hope has resulted in loons feeding on the rock bass; the intent is that the rock bass population will decline and the benthic invertebrate populations increase. This could also mean better trout fishing results.

Loons perform another critical role on Leech Lake by keeping geese away. It seems that loons and geese do not normally coexist on one small lake. Geese are undesirable because their population expands dramatically, and they poop every few minutes which introduces E coli bacteria into the lake. Leech has consistently scored well when E coli bacterial tests have been conducted. High E coli readings can result in lakes being closed for recreational uses such as swimming etc. Ironically, Loon Lake near Gravenhurst does not actually have any loons and geese have taken over. Geese need easy access to shore such as beaches and that makes natural shorelines all the more important. Please help the loons keep geese off Leech Lake.

Spring is a critical time of year for our loons. In 2023, the mating pair on the lake mated on May 8th. This is a fascinating event that can be

Interesting facts about loons

Loons can live up to 30 years and grow to a weight of 12 lbs.; 36" in length, with a 5 foot wingspan

Loons migrate to ocean waters along the mid-Atlantic coast in winter. They do not migrate to southern lakes or ponds.

Prior to flying south, loons molt and regrow all of their flight feathers. They need fresh and healthy flight feathers for migration because of their weight. They are flightless for a 2-3 week period in early fall and are highly vulnerable to predators during this period

The loon is actually the closest bird species to the penguin

Loons migrate at 3000' to 5000' altitude and can travel hundreds of miles per day at speeds between 80 to 90 miles per hour

Loons arrive at Leech Lake immediately after the ice goes out. They then take several exploratory flights north from the great lakes to keep on top of lake breakup.

Adolescents are left by their parents on the lake in the fall so they can feed without competition and build strength for the long migration. The adults fly to non-breeding lakes. Apparently, adolescents join their parents later for south migration.

Loons have typically nested on either of the two islands on The Leech. The incubation period for the two eggs is 27 to 30 days.

heard all over the lake. Few wildlife events are as joyous as this, at least judging by the racket created in this annual ritual. May 8th is relatively late in the spring for this. The expected arrival date for two eggs which are typically laid each year was the first few days of June in 2023. Both parents take turns incubating the eggs and do not stray very far from the nest. This is an extremely vulnerable time for our loons. Once the eggs have hatched the loons will spend the balance of the season on the water. Chicks are extremely vulnerable through the early part of August when they become more mature.

Two chicks were seen with the loon parents on the lake in late June. One of the chicks was lost early in July, likely to natural predators. We lost the adult male loon in late July after it was run over by a motor boat. That is highly unusual as loons are adept at avoiding boat traffic.

Anecdotes about the male loon's behaviour prior to this accident indicate that the male loon may have had lead poisoning. We have seen this before over the last couple of decades. Loons consume enormous amounts of fish each summer and they pick up small bits of gravel from lake or stream bottoms to help breakdown food in their gullets. The male may have picked up some lead shot or a fishing weight and because of their rapid metabolism, this could have resulted in lead poisoning which would cause the loon to become distressed. Please avoid using lead sinkers for fishing.

Having only one adult loon on the lake made the remaining young loon more vulnerable to predators. It appears that the one adolescent that survived this year was predated by a hawk or an otter. Remains believed to be a young loon were found on a raft in the western bay of the lake. Shortly after this, the adult female loon left the lake.

Males choose the lake for breeding. We have been fortunate that Leech Lake has continuously had loons for decades. So, let's hope another mating pair nests on Leech this year.

Let's all respect how vulnerable our loons are. Please stay well back from the nest on the east bay of the lake and refrain from trolling the area in the central east bay area.

When fishing or trolling, please stay well away from loons if they are present. They will take a lure by mistake.

If you catch a small fish and cannot extract the hook, don't clip the line and throw the fish back into the lake. Injured fish are easy prey for loons and they can ingest the hook and line resulting in death. This has happened a few times in the last 20 years on Leech.

Rock bass have a habit of swallowing hooks. As outlined earlier, rock bass are not beneficial to Leech Lake so if you hook one it would be a better course of action to bury the fish rather than return it to the lake. A small rock bass with an imbedded hook would be lethal to a loon.

Things to do in Muskoka this Spring – by Guy Pattison

[The solar eclipse from Muskoka:](#) Looking for something cool and fun to do? Check out the solar eclipse cruise on April 8 on Lake Muskoka [here](#). Seating is limited.

[The Muskoka Escape Room:](#) Put your problem-solving skills to the test at Muskoka's escape room. Where families work together to solve puzzles, uncover clues, and escape from themed Muskoka rooms within a set time limit. It's a fun and challenging activity that encourages teamwork and communication. Find more info [here](#).

Climb Muskoka: Bring the family to [Climb Muskoka](#) for some hours of fun and exercise. The 6,400 sq. ft indoor rock climbing facility is in Bracebridge. Take in a full range of bouldering terrain, 33' route walls with top rope, lead and auto belay stations. A second story mezzanine has space for stretching, free weights and cardio equipment.

Bits 'n Pieces

1. **FOCA Alert:** the most recent Federation of Cottage Associations newsletter is full of great [information](#).
2. **Ash Drive:** Your wood ash will be used to rehabilitate Muskoka forests to combat their calcium decline. Please drop off your wood stove, fireplace or pellet stove ash to the town dump site on Rosewarne Dr from: **9:30am to 1:00pm on April-20-2024**.
3. More info on Friends of the Muskoka Watershed (FOTMW) can be found here – <https://fotmw.org>. **For the kids, check out how you can become a Citizen Scientist with FOTMW.**
4. **Fires and Burning in Bracebridge:** With the mild winter we had, there is concern about a dry spring/summer and the increased possibility of fires. We all need to be careful about fires at the lake. Check out this [brochure](#) that describes the Bracebridge burn bylaw.

LLCA Contact Information

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Some gorgeous pictures courtesy of Guy Pattison. The first is early winter 2023, the last three are late winter 2024.

