

Coalition to Save Lake Winnipeg



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The Coalition to Save Lake Winnipeg Steering Committee is reaching out to our community of concerned citizens and south basin community associations to share increasing concerns for the future of Lake Winnipeg and ask for your help. The information in this newsletter includes a summary of contributing threats to Lake Winnipeg that have been persistent or have the potential to become ecosystem balance risks through development approval. Links to references for further reading will be included and available on the Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners website.

Advocacy for the continued focus on reduction of phosphorus concentration and emissions violations by the City of Winnipeg from the North End Water Pollution Control Center and the sewage overflow is imperative. Please visit [Lake Winnipeg Foundation](#) for information about the July 15, 2024 rejection by the Province of Manitoba to extend the requested deadline for NEWPCC upgrades deadline.

NEW CHAIR FOR EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE WATER, WASTE AND ENVIRONMENT

After serving 11 years on the EPC, Brian Mayes has been replaced by Councillor Evan Duncan on the chair of waste, water and environment. [Winnipeg Free Press July 24 2024](#) Councillor Duncan has served on City Council since 2022. Contact information for Councillor Duncan is eduncan@winnipeg.ca.

Councillor Mayes, after his many years focusing on water, waste and the environment and pushing forward on the NEWPCC upgrades, provided continuity in supporting and advocating for financial commitment during difficult discussions at the council level that would positively impact phosphorus emission reductions.

SEWAGE PLUMES AND E COLI COUNTS IN LAKE WINNIPEG

Late spring 2024 visible debris and higher e coli counts in Lake Winnipeg were reported. Weather conditions resulting in the failure of the City of Winnipeg's combined sewage overflow "fit" the timeline in terms of "news" events. However, the following summary encourages concerned citizens to consider additional sources of these sewage plumes and e coli counts.

Are the sewage plumes and e coli levels in Lake Winnipeg caused by the City of Winnipeg?

We know that the City of Winnipeg's North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC) needs massive upgrades, being the largest point source for phosphorous flowing into the lake, and about 7% of the problem. We also know that the City of Winnipeg has storm surge issues and infrastructure failures that routinely release untreated sewage into the waterway. But when we hear about raw sewage plumes floating on the lake reported by fishermen or boaters, or e coli spikes at our favorite beaches making swimmers sick, is the source of the problem really Winnipeg?

Let's do the math...

Lake Winnipeg is 425 km long (264 miles) and 109 km wide (68 miles) at the widest point.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Lake-Winnipeg>

It takes 3-5 years for water to flow through lake Winnipeg on average.

https://web.archive.org/web/20180311104704/http://www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/water_quality/lake_winnipeg/facts.html

It takes about a year for sewage to decompose.

<https://knowledgeburrow.com/how-long-does-it-take-for-human-feces-to-decompose/>

E coli can survive for months in the right environment.

https://www.medicinenet.com/how_long_does_it_take_for_ecoli_to_go_away/article.htm

The numbers come together fairly quickly at 425 km long and 3-5 years to flow through, with 365 days per year, on average water is moving between .39 and .24 km/day depending on a variety of factors. It is acknowledged that all water does not enter at the furthest point south and move to the furthest point north. But these are averages for a general discussion.

Sewage will decompose in about one year. In those 365 days, the distance a sewage plume would travel at the average flow rates would be between:

$365 \text{ days} \times .24 \text{ km/day} = 88 \text{ km}$

$365 \text{ days} \times .39 \text{ km/day} = 142 \text{ km}$

If a raw sewage plume is released into the water and flows downstream and into the Lake, it would decompose between 90 and 140 km along its' path north. Without considering wave action or the mechanical freeze/thaw effects breaking down or dispersing solids over the course of the year, gradual decomposition of the plume would make it unrecognizable as raw sewage in about half that distance.

None of this is to negate or downplay the harmful effects that the sewage has: oxygen depletion, high phosphorous eutrophication, local e-coli spikes, etc. The point being made here is that for sewage to remain in a contiguous plume and recognizable as RAW SEWAGE, the discharge point for that sewage would need to be closer than 60 km from where it was sighted.

Given that e coli can survive for several months but not a full year, when e coli spikes are recorded at a beach along the shores of the lake, the point source of the contamination would have to be even closer than 60 km.

In the event a raw sewage plume was encountered near Hecla Island for example, the notion that it could be attributed to Winnipeg, at the NEWPCC or a spill further upstream some 120 km away, fails the math test by a factor of 2-3 times. Many of the favorite beaches in the South Basin are well out of range of the Winnipeg blame game based on the math.

So what?

So, when evidence of raw sewage is sighted floating on the lake, or e coli levels spike at a specific location, we need to think twice before shrugging off the blame to a site that is a hundred km south along the lakeshore. The cause of the problem is likely much closer. A release from a local septic system finding its way into the waterway, or a boat that dumped bilge well within the visible horizon would be far more probable causes.

Sustained presence of large flocks of seagulls or waterfowl on the beach is another one of the known culprits, in addition to people with poor pet management, or simply doing things they know they shouldn't. (<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/es302306b>) Local measures to counter these occurrences take time and a level of dedicated persistence, but can produce positive results.

It takes diligence by all of us to make these improvements, locally or on a grander scale. Good beach management practices, information follow up for seasonal peaks, and at some point, reporting of violations and violators needs to be considered. We all have a role to play in managing our back yard.

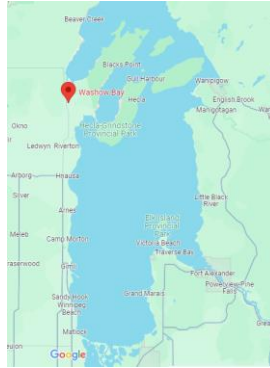
- The 5 municipalities immediately adjacent to the south basin of Lake Winnipeg are responsible for their waste water management. An Environmental Act Licence is required for construction, operation and alteration of wastewater treatment facilities/lagoon. **How does your community treat wastewater? Are practices for your community meeting the guidelines to protect the environment?** [Onsite Wastewater Management MB](#) [Lagoon Guidelines](#)
- Property owners are responsible for their personal wastewater management. Are your practices within the Provincial Guidelines? [Onsite Wastewater Management MB](#) Was your holding tank installed by a certified installer? [Manitoba certified repair and installation holding tanks](#)
- Marine holding tanks must follow the pleasure craft disposal guidelines [Pleasure Craft Sewage Gov Canada](#)
- Protecting wetlands on your property and in your municipality prioritizes the health of Lake Winnipeg as an integral component for advocacy. **Where are new developments happening in your municipality?** [Manitoba Wetlands Map](#)

Concerned citizens can support compliant practices and report observed violations.

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Springfield Wetland Project



Residents and cottage owners in the Washow Bay area along the east coast of Lake Winnipeg, have alerted the Coalition to Save Lake Winnipeg, to their concerns regarding peat mining in that area. The Save Lake Winnipeg Act initially imposed a moratorium on increasing peat mines along the east coast of the lake, but Sungro Peat Mine has applied for increased mining rights. [Save Lake Winnipeg Act](#) Sungro is submitting environmental act proposals to establish new peat mines, one of which falls within a wildlife management area. Applications for these mines were approved by the provincial government with stricter license conditions, although the conditions have proven to be inadequate to counter the harm to the area currently being experienced. We know that peat mines are a major source of carbon capture. The mines have caused huge buildups of peat along the shores of Lake Winnipeg and pollutants are entering the lake, which is no longer captured by the peat bogs. In 2020 a Sungro peat mine was responsible for a wildfire that destroyed several cottages in the Beaver Creek area. There are many significant concerns with regards to expanding peat mining along the shores of Lake Winnipeg. You can read more about the Winnipeg peat mining at <https://www.iisd.org/news/projects>

Please visit [Lake Winnipeg Peat Mining](#) for more information.

- ❖ **Share this information on your social media.**
- ❖ **Share with your community association members, visitors and friends.**
- ❖ **Join your community association and participate in an environmental awareness discussion.**
- ❖ **Visit [Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners](#) to review newsletter information since January 2020.**