

# Multi-jurisdictional plan needed to protect lake;

## wastewater removed from watershed could become future problem

by Steve Dills  
Sylvan Lake News

Calling for a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional plan, members of Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society said current land use plans don't effectively protect values such as lake water quality and quantity, safety and recreational experiences and biodiversity.

Protection, they contend, should be a logical requirement of all living around the lake because of the investments those people have in their land, investments which could rapidly diminish if the much vaunted mesotrophic water quality is harmed.

"Right now the assessment in the watershed is about \$2 billion," said vice president Graeme Strathdee. "With growth we're talking about \$5-\$8 billion. We think a case can be made for maintaining a clean lake."

President Kim Schmitt and Strathdee told the annual meeting of the Alberta Stewardship Network, communities around the lake need to work together to create a development and conservation plan. The idea "came to us from on high, from the Alberta Legislature," said Strathdee. "We're getting feedback in our correspondence this is what you should do."

That's one of several proposals they're advocating in their game plan to maintain Sylvan Lake's pristine health and recreational opportunities now and into the future.

Schmitt highlighted the lake's past as a popular summer beach from the early 1900s, cottage development through to the mid 1960s and then a moratorium on new lake subdivisions imposed by the province about 1968, which remained in force until 1995.

Now there's steady population growth and more pressure for water access. As a result the lake faces many uncertainties in the future, both on development around it and on its water.



Winners of the unique Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society's design a stamp contest were presented with a page of real Canada Post stamps featuring their design and souvenir certificates at the Enviro Expo June 4. The winners included Allison Kondor (C. P. Blakely School), Taylor Pangracs (Our Lady of the Rosary School), Erin Bryenton (École Steffie Woima Elementary School) and Jade Tweten (Fox Run School). Graeme Strathdee made the presentations. The program was created to involve youth in forming public opinion. STEVE DILLS

One reason there's so much uncertainty is because there's no goal to protect water quality or quantity and no plan to manage high density boating traffic because there's been "no open debate on the capacity of the lake and limits to development". Schmitt said, "We're not talking about limits to how we might keep what we have."

He called the lake a 'natural bathtub' with a 50 to 100 year water retention time. What goes in the lake, stays in the lake. While actions are underway to reduce pollution, tributary monitoring reveals significant nutrient pollution during spring runoff and storm flow events and tributaries that regularly exceed provincial guidelines necessary for the protection of aquatic ecosystems.

Society members are active in developing scientific information on the lake. Besides monitoring water quality and lake risk they're also advocating for lake protection, intervening at public hearings on developments and promoting best practices

for land and lake use.

A recent addition was involvement of youth in forming public opinion by running a stamp design contest. The society worked with teachers to have students draw pictures of what they think about the lake. Strathdee said this fit into the school curriculum on wetlands.

Winners were announced during the town's Enviro Expo, June 4. Their designs were incorporated on Canada Post stamps and each of the four were presented with a sheet of stamps with their designs.

The winners included Allison Kondor (C. P. Blakely School), Taylor Pangracs (Our Lady of the Rosary School), Erin Bryenton (École Steffie Woima Elementary School) and Jade Tweten (Fox Run School).

About 175 Sylvan Lake students entered the competition, Strathdee said.

Explaining more completely their science based work, Strathdee showed a chart compiled from the 2005 AXYS report, "probably the Bible on Sylvan Lake" which

detailed the water and nutrient balance of the lake and provided key indicators to be monitored.

The lake is maintained primarily by precipitation, accompanied by surface runoff. Evaporation is roughly in balance.

"We can see the points of origin in surface runoff. These are our targets for part of the attack." Earlier he'd said, "one of the key things we can do is promote best practices. It's a pretty important, practical thing that can be done." They're hoping to work with the Cows and Fish program of Alberta Habitat Management Society on riparian areas in the land surrounding the lake.

Then Strathdee pointed to changes which will occur under a new regional servicing plan which will export wastewater so it doesn't pollute the lake. He warned it could become a problem if it continues over time.

"The water is originating as groundwater, he said. Since a certain percentage of groundwater is used to replenish the lake, the removal of that water from the watershed "is probably not a good idea, particularly over time". Continuous pumping of wells around the lake to supply a population of 50,000 people in 2030 could reduce groundwater flow into the lake and cause the lake level to slowly drop over time.

Besides calling for an all encompassing plan, the society also plans to define and monitor the level of risk to the watershed as a result of things like the water balance disruption by wastewater export; use of science-based cumulative impact analysis to determine the sensitivity to land development; balance watershed economics and development by making an economic case for a clean lake and asset preservation; deliver an annual report card on the state of the watershed; focus public attention on watershed health indicators; and engage watershed society members to convey their opinions to decision makers.

### Note:

Layout not exactly as what appeared in the newspaper.  
Ad, picture removed to fit story on one page and reduce file size.