

## AGRICULTURE

# How to reduce the wrinkles in our aging lady Vincent Lake

By the Vincent Lake Working Group

Like humans, lakes and their surrounding watershed go through an aging process.

Natural processes like drought and wet years can influence the amount and quality of products a lake and its watershed can deliver to the community.

Recreation and farming, and other land / water use decisions we make, may also affect the products a lake and its watershed can deliver.

Some of the products of "rapid aging and lake sickness" include poorer water quality (more algae blooms and turbid water), less fish and wildlife, increased conflicts, additional costs to remedy problems, and more regulations and enforcement to correct the problem.

Since the turn of the century, our lady Vincent Lake and her surrounding watershed, has been providing a variety of benefits and values to our local com-

munity. For example, a source of water for human use, logging, trapping, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, relaxation, entertainment, family activities, livestock, forage, crop production, and more!

**What changes have you seen in the lake since you first used it?** Looking at old photographs, reviewing historical records, and talking to seniors, you learn that Vincent Lake is different today than in past years. Mother nature has created changes to the lake's water levels. Some say today we may have the lowest water levels on record. Others say that they have seen the lake water levels a lot lower.

Some of our farmers recall haying the exposed bed and shore of the lake. Some recall sand spits. How far out in the lake are those boat docks now? Today, many acres of once upland forest cover has been cleared for crops, forage, and pasture.

The riparian area, that green and wet strip

of land between the water's edge and the upland trees (includes the bulrushes, cattails, tall grasses and grasslikes, and willows) has undergone a number of changes.

Some riparian areas remain in their natural state, while others have been "domesticated". For example, riparian areas changed to sandy beaches and lawns. In some cases, a mixture of natural riparian and domesticated riparian areas occur.

Many of us know about the great fishing history of Vincent Lake. In the early days, she produced perch and jack. Today, she produces an additional fish species, walleye.

Some say the fish were a lot bigger and there were more fish in Vincent Lake in days gone by. Some of the drought and human changes has reduced the number of fish spawning areas at Vincent Lake and associated drainage areas (creeks and sloughs in the Vincent Lake watershed).

Many people used to drink from the lake. Today, only a few do. We used to cut ice in the lake for refrigerating our foods.

Vincent Lake is a naturally aging lake, however, has had her aging process sped up by increased nutrients that move from the upland and riparian area into the waters and lake sediments. Where the natural riparian area cover has been removed, the natural riparian filter cannot help trap and break down these added nutrients that go into the lake.

The amount and type of nutrients that enter a lake has a high correlation with the aging process of a lake, called eutrophication.

Some of the results of a highly eutrophic lake can be increased algae blooms, turbid vs clearer water, less fish, poorer recreation enjoyment, and poorer water quality. Removing the natural cover from a riparian area may also create conditions for bank erosion and further loss of the riparian area.

We all want Vincent Lake and her surrounding watershed to continue providing our community recreation, agriculture, economic, and other benefits.

**How can we as a collective group of concerned citizens and users of the Vincent Lake watershed, con-**

**tinue to enjoy our benefits and values like recreation and agriculture? How can we reduce the "human caused" wrinkles to her natural aging? How can we work together to ensure that Vincent Lake and her watershed continues to function in a healthy manner?**

One opportunity to help our lady Vincent Lake is the Vincent Lake Working Group. This group has been established to work with the Vincent Lake community (cottagers and farmers in the Vincent Lake watershed, and other concerned citizens) to discuss the awareness and education aspects of a healthy lake and watershed.

Additionally, the group wants to work with the community, to assess the health of Vincent Lake's riparian area. To better understand where we need to go, in terms of the future use and management of the lake, we need to know where we are now.

Is Vincent Lake or parts of her healthy, healthy at risk, or not functioning properly? We need to develop tools that can help us proactively help slow down the aging process. The working group and the community have the collective ability to create conditions for positive change. Much more than any individual effort.

The Vincent Lake Working Group mem-

bers the County of St. Paul, Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay, Alberta Environment, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development, Riparian and Wetlands Research Program, Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Program, P.F.R.A., Alberta Conservation Association, and the Cows and Fish Program. More groups and individuals may join.

The working group plans to put awareness and education information in the local newspapers. The articles will discuss topics such as the importance of a healthy and properly functioning riparian area, how to help care for a healthy watershed, and more.

In March 2000, we plan to meet with you, the community to further discuss, "how to reduce the wrinkles of our aging lady Vincent Lake."

An important step to our future is a better understanding of our past history. Do you have any old photos of Vincent Lake in the 1930s to 1950s? These photos would be helpful to the working group to better understand the present look of our lady Vincent Lake, and build upon our present historical information.

**For more information, on how you can become involved, please contact Gerry Ehlert at 645-6336.**