

THE VINCENT LAKE WORKING MODEL

A STORY ABOUT RIPARIAN HEALTH EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND ACTION

APPROXIMATION # 1 August 24, 2001



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BACKGROUND

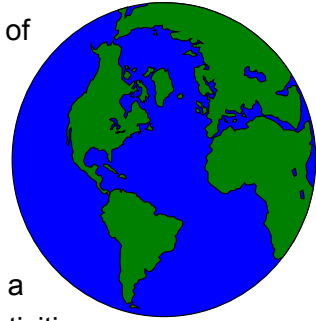
In September, 1999 a group of concerned agencies met to discuss the importance of riparian areas (areas of green found alongside lakes, sloughs and potholes). In particular, what awareness, education and tool building steps can be taken to help empower lakeshore property owners and farmers to carry out environmental friendly recreation and farming practices in the watershed? Practices that help riparian areas perform several critical watershed functions and benefits:

- store and slowly release water
- trap sediments and filter nutrients and pollutants
- provide fish and wildlife habitat
- aide in erosion control
- provide forage and hay production
- aide in water quality

Information from Cows and Fish, 1999 indicates that riparian areas in northern Alberta are at risk and some may not be functioning properly (See their web site at www.cowsandfish.org). What actions can be taken to work with communities to achieve economic, social and environmental benefits in riparian areas? In December, 2000 representatives from non-government and government agencies started to form a working group to develop a plan that would help answer these questions and empower communities to take action. The working group became the Vincent Lake Working Group and the plan developed is called the Vincent Lake Working Model. The following information “tells a story” about riparian health education, awareness and action in the Vincent Lake watershed. Please note that the information presented here today is an approximation. Consider these draft results only as guidelines for your consideration to develop your own tailor-made action plan. Our intent is to finalize these and other results by March 31, 2003. We plan to make the final results available via publications, web-site, and presentations.

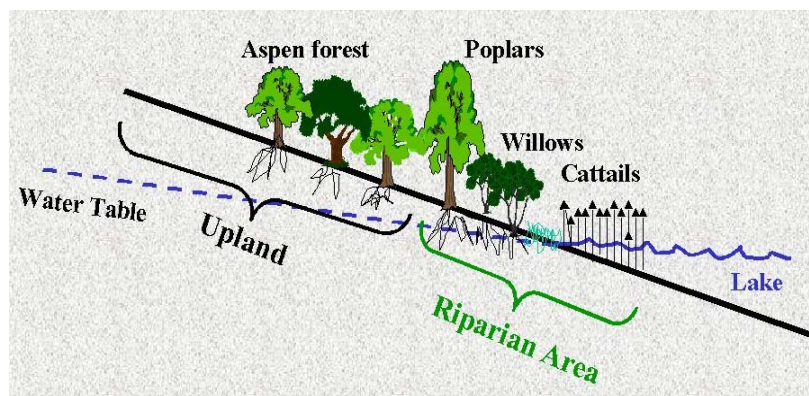
INTRODUCTION

How many of us have considered in our recent past that fresh water in Alberta is of unlimited quality and supply? Today, we know that fresh water is a limited natural resource that is affected by climate, communities and people. Of the world's water supply, about 97% is salty and only 3% is fresh. Of that 3%, 2/3 is tied up in glaciers. This leaves about 1% of the world's fresh water (about 1/4 of that 1% is in Canada) to meet all our economic and social needs (Riparian Wetlands Research Program, University of Montana, 2000). It has been predicted that a warming climate, population growth, industrial development and other human activities will turn water into the most important economic and environmental issue of the 21st Century (Dr. Schindler, University of Alberta, 2001). In Canada, agriculture, recreation, industrial, and commercial land use practices are having impacts on water quantity and quality, fish and wildlife populations, and are raising resource sustainability issues (MarQ de Villiers, 1999). Alberta's watersheds contain a variety and mixture of creeks, rivers, sloughs, potholes, and lakes. These watersheds provide urban and rural communities with a diversity of economic, social, and environmental benefits, values, and opportunities. On a global, country, and provincial basis, we need to become aware of the importance of wisely managing our watersheds, for our present and children's benefits (Clive Dobson, 1999).



What Are Lentic Riparian Areas and Why are They Important?

Linked to water and watersheds are riparian areas. Riparian areas are strips of land with vegetation that are commonly found alongside standing and moving water bodies. Lentic riparian areas are found along standing water bodies such as lakes, sloughs, and potholes. These riparian areas include the bulrush, cattail, sedge and willow plant communities. These plants are dependent on the water provided by the



water body. When riparian areas are healthy and properly functioning they provided many desirable functions in the watershed. These include storing and releasing water, maintaining water quality and quantity, preventing bank and shoreline erosion and filtering nutrients and pollutants so they don't enter the waterbody.

Lakeside property owners, seasonal cabin owners, outdoor recreationists, farmers and ranchers are common users of lentic riparian areas. On a northern Alberta scale, these users likely number in the tens of thousands of people who live, work and play in riparian areas. Balancing these uses with the needs of the environment is a very important consideration to a healthy and functioning watershed!

Residential and seasonal lakeside property owners (collectively called "cottagers") may choose to remove the natural vegetation and rocks in riparian areas and replace them with sand and lawn grass. Farmers may

overgraze and create winter feeding sites and manure handling situations where nutrients can directly flow into lakes and creeks. When these changes occur, a number of undesirable outcomes can result, such as increased algae blooms, sedimentation and pollution which reduces water quality and quantity. These kinds of changes can result in increased individual and society costs such as finding alternative water sources, increased feed costs, and reduced recreation and agriculture economic benefits. In short, these kinds of land use practices are not sustainable!

Riparian areas in Alberta only make up about 4% of the province's total area but approximately 80% of our fish and wildlife species depend on these riparian areas for some or all of their needs like reproduction, food, and escape cover. When riparian areas are reduced and/or damaged the impact on fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and birds can be significant (Cows and Fish, 1999).

Healthy riparian areas (see note below) are critical to our collective society needs, including fish and wildlife. Information from the United States and southern Alberta indicate that a significant number of their riparian areas may be at risk of becoming unhealthy or are presently unhealthy and not functioning properly (Cows & Fish Program, 1999). In northern Alberta, we know we have some of these problems too. Critical to reducing and preventing riparian related problems is increased awareness, education, and community planning and action. In southern Alberta, several non-government and government partnerships like Cows and Fish are helping communities achieve a successful balance between land use and environmental protection such as along streams and rivers. What series of steps and actions would help achieve a similar balance in northern Alberta? How do we achieve the needed balance between protecting environmental values and providing benefits to cottagers and farmers who live in and use lentic riparian areas?

Note: Healthy means the riparian area is performing all the ecological functions (e.g., store and slowly release water, trap sediments and filter nutrients and pollutants, etc. See page 1.). Healthy with problems means that one or two of the ecological functions may not be working up to their potential. Unhealthy means that several of the ecological functions are not working properly.

Human-caused changes to a single riparian area (e.g., shoreline in front of a cottage lot or pasture) that result in that riparian area becoming at risk, or unhealthy and not functioning properly may appear to have an "individual or isolated effect." This result may or may not be noticed or regarded as a problem. However, it is important to realize that these individual and isolated effects may be building upon each other and causing what scientists call, "cumulative" effects. When cumulative effects occur in the watershed, the impact to the overall health and function of the watershed can be significant. For example, the results of kilometers of exposed lake shoreline (e.g., from removal of riparian vegetation) or naked river banks from overgrazing can result in the loss of tonnes of soil and sediment. The addition of natural factors like strong winds and floods can compound these problems. Healthy and functioning riparian areas help reduce erosion and help buffer the potentially erosive forces of nature.

Sometimes, climate can add to or be largely responsible for the unhealthy changes to riparian areas, for example low lake levels resulting from times of low snow and rainfall. We can do little to change what climate has in store for us. However, we can make a difference to human-caused problems. Individuals and communities can become aware and take necessary action to nip "at risk" situations in the bud, before they start to become cumulative and pose problems to the overall health and function of the watershed. An unhealthy and non-functioning watershed often requires significant people power and money to correct, often requiring expensive "engineered" solutions. These situations are often preventable.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?



...considering the large number of communities, land uses, stakeholders, and concerns in northern Alberta, what can we do as individuals? Within a reasonable period of time, how do we become riparian-watershed literate and apply ecologically balanced land use practices in riparian areas and the watershed? How do we do this on a cost-effective basis? To the individual, the task at hand may seem insurmountable. Alternatively, if communities, government and non-government agencies work together the challenge is achievable. The Vincent Lake Working Model is a story about a group's experience working with a northern Alberta community to find effective ways to promote awareness and develop tools to help deliver that needed balance between livelihoods, recreation, and healthy and functioning riparian areas and watersheds.

VINCENT LAKE WORKING MODEL STORY

In the fall of 1999 representatives from various conservation agencies and local and provincial government departments met in St. Paul, Alberta. This group came to discuss concerns, opportunities, and potential for working together and with communities to bring about environmentally friendly land use practices in riparian areas and the overall watershed. From that fall meeting a "Core" group of people and agencies "teamed up" to determine just how they wanted to approach this challenge. The Core group accepted that they would be required to provide the day-to-day leadership of this initiative as well as have the primary role in its development and implementation. Also, the Core group recognized that to tackle this challenge they needed a lot of help in a wide range of interests and knowledge. As a result the Core group (i.e., **large "C" core partners**) established two additional levels of partnering for this initiative. The **small "c" core partner** would have major supporting roles in the development and implementation of the initiative, however, no day to day responsibilities. **Consultative partners** would provide specialized or support services for specific needs, i.e., contracted out services. Several small "c" and consultative partners were recruited right away, while others joined as opportunities allowed. The combined team membership named the group the **Vincent Lake Working Group (VLWG)**. The current VLWG membership is shown in Appendix 1.

The VLWG began as a group of well-intentioned "individuals." How did we start?

DEVELOPING A MISSION

To work towards the riparian health challenge the VLWG required a mission (goal statement) to develop and focus a community action plan. Without a mission any steps taken may not have the desired outcome or be cost effective.

The group needed to define what they thought the results of the Vincent Lake Working Model should look like, feel like, taste like and sound like. Before they actually started "doing" things they needed to believe the desired outcome. You know, part of the believe-do-have system (First, you have to believe in what you are doing. Second, you have to do what you believe in. Third, if you accomplish



your first and second step you will have what you want.). Through the combined interests of this group the following mission was crafted, we need **“Healthy and functioning riparian areas and watersheds in Northern Alberta that provide communities with sustainable recreation and agriculture benefits”**.

What is our desired outcome? Do we have a theory and/or what are we testing?

How is this mission achieved?

CHOICES TO IMPLEMENT THE MISSION

When the VLWG started to talk about how to make the mission work many questions came up; some of the biggest issues were:

- Should we deliver awareness and education to individual riparian users or to communities?
- Should our role be educators and/or enforcers?
- Should the Core membership steer this initiative and/or should the "community?"
- Who is the community?
- Should the VLWG use a reactive or proactive approach?
- Should the VLWG allow for experimentation? We did not have many of the solutions needed to achieve the mission; the solutions had to be experienced and developed.
- The mission covers a large area, have we “bitten off more than we can chew?”
- Individual members have individual objectives. We need a team approach, how do we do this?
- Where do we find the monies to carry out this initiative?
- A lot of work, who is going to do it all? What and where should we start? The number of concerns and consequences is huge!

The VLWG began by developing a plan that could achieve the mission through a community based approach that included the following strategies:

- The VLWG would serve as a catalyst to work with the community (e.g., local government, recreation and agriculture stakeholders) on a lake and watershed basis with the ultimate goal being that the community would be empowered with knowledge, tools, and resources. With this knowledge and these tools the community could take the necessary actions to balance land use with the needs of a healthy and functioning riparian areas.
- The community would be used to assist in the development of the tools and action steps.
- The VLWG would select one recreationally and agriculturally important watershed as the basis for carrying out the mission.
- The mission would be achieved using an experimental or model approach to finding out answers and the development of tools.
- The VLWG would concentrate on lentic riparian areas, such as lakes, sloughs, and potholes found in the northern Parklands and Boreal forest in Alberta.
- The knowledge gained from the working model (experiences, processes, tools developed, lessons learned, etc.) would be developed into results that could be shared with other interested northern Alberta communities.
- The combined results of the model along with other initiatives and programs (e.g., Cows and Fish, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture (AESAs), would in time help create an opportunity for northern Alberta communities to lead and create a “network effect” to achieve the mission*.

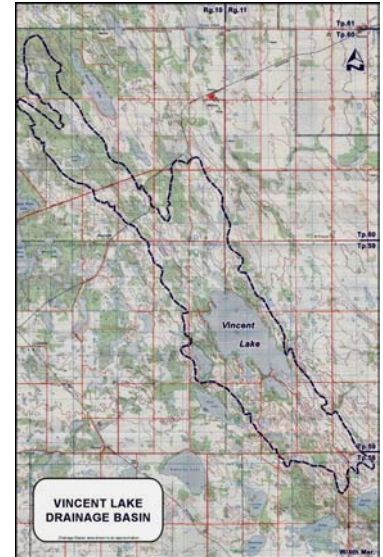
* As the model is an operational experiment, it was necessary for government and non-government agencies to initially lead and carry out strategies to achieve the mission. However, a critical goal of the model is to empower the community to become responsible for their own land use choices. Government and non-government would continue to provide assistance to the community to help them achieve the mission.

Vincent Lake and its watershed was chosen by core partners because the recreation and agricultural uses were typical of many northeastern Alberta lakes, as were its associated riparian health problems. Preliminary observations suggested that the Vincent Lake watershed had healthy, at risk, and unhealthy riparian areas. Many of the Core working group members were based in/near St. Paul and were very familiar with the area and its associated riparian health problems. The lake also had some recent riparian awareness and conservation activities, for example, at the Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay an environmental reserve signage program, mail-outs of the "Caring for Shoreline Properties" booklet to lakeside property owners by the County of St. Paul and riparian awareness presentations to the local municipal government.

Tell me a little bit about Vincent Lake?

Vincent Lake is located in the County of St. Paul and is about 5,460 ha (13,492 acres) in size and has about 13.5 km (8.4 miles) of shoreline. The lake supports approximately 580 cottagers and about 130 farmers operate in its watershed (ACA, 2000).

A significant percentage of the cottagers live outside the watershed, many in the Edmonton area. The Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay is located at the north end of the Lake (about 150 cottagers). This Village has carried out riparian conservation efforts in the past, including environmental reserve signage and conservation projects. The lake itself is used for a variety of recreation purposes including boating, fishing, canoeing, walking, bird watching, ATV, and relaxing. Farmers carry out a number of agriculture operations in the watershed including the production of forage, crops, and livestock.

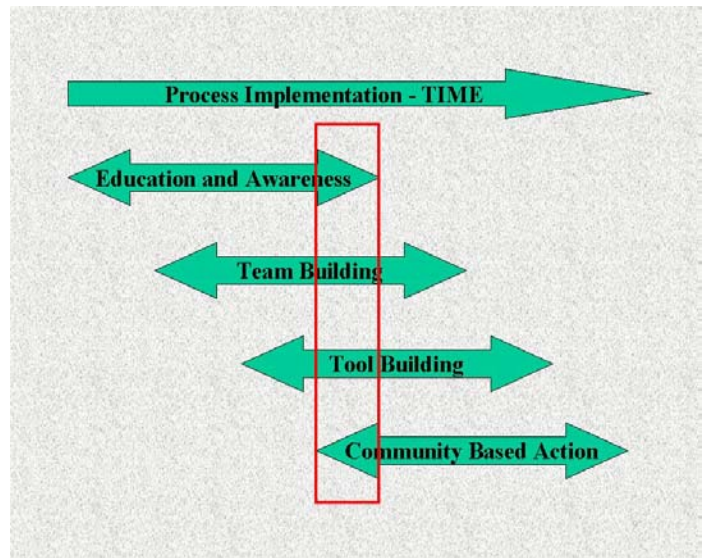


The group targeted the mission towards the recreation and agriculture users, however it did not have a method to start building the strategy. This problem was quickly remedied when the Cows and Fish partners offered their four step implementation “process” as an option for the VLWG to direct its effort. This process has been

used successfully in addressing riparian and watershed issues in southern and central Alberta. Those four steps are **Education and Awareness**, **Team Building**, **Tool Building** and **Community Based Action**. The steps are designed to overlap.

Arrows on the adjoining graphic point in both directions to indicate the "reiterative" approach that is used during implementation. A reiterative approach involves developing an idea, testing it, assessing the success, modifying as needed and testing it again.

This process is repeated until satisfied. Through the use of this approach, as something is learned in one step it can cause something to change not only within that step but in some or all of the other steps too.



These steps helped the group focus on addressing the riparian health challenge, and continue working well together.

Let's look at these four steps and how they worked for the Vincent Lake Working Group and how the community received these steps.

Education and Awareness

When individuals and groups first come together on a common cause, in this case riparian health, they first have to understand what each individual and group's values and issues are and what each can bring to the process. They also have to determine what each of them wants to achieve from the process and what their role within that process will be. As an initiative evolves and relationships mature these fundamental understandings will provide the glue that binds the "team." These understandings and glue are very important as changes occur during the process. We want to stay on track with the mission!

In regards to the people the team most wants to reach, (in this case riparian area landowners and users) this step is all about delivering information and assistance to enhance riparian health literacy. The desired result will be a shift in attitude and understanding that causes a change in action, hopefully to a more riparian-friendly way of acting.

Where and How does "Law Enforcement" fit.



As the group explored the Education and Awareness step the question came up about whether they should be educators, enforcers or both. Answering this question proved difficult as some of the membership included enforcement mandates to protect riparian and watershed areas. However, after several open and honest discussions, the group felt it should address ecological literacy, "passive enforcement," and community actions. In addition the group recognized the need and role of active enforcement, however, the group would not be directly involved in this action step.

The group defined "passive enforcement" as the delivery of sufficient and satisfactory information to riparian landowners and users that would allow them to understand their legal rights and responsibilities pertaining to all Acts and By-laws describing riparian and littoral areas. The group's objective was that through this knowledge a shift in attitude would occur that would result in the maintenance of or recovery to, healthy riparian areas and compliance with the laws. It was important that the ecological literacy be delivered to the target audience first, then the regulatory information. In this way, the VLWG hoped the audience would understand why the regulations are important to protect and conserve riparian areas. If this would result in increased compliance with the regulations, it would then follow that the need for "active enforcement" would be reduced.

It was recognized that the delivery of the "less expensive" ecological literacy and passive enforcement strategy may reduce the need for the application of the "more costly" laying of fines, penalties, and reclamation charges in the active enforcement process. The group also recognized that it would be difficult to communicate with the public and achieve the mission if the VLWG acted as "enforcement officers".

Team Building

To deliver community based results, a group of individuals must evolve into “we” and carry out the “role of we.” The VLWG needed to know its function, be present and persistent, be flexible and not easily broken. Much like “willows in riparian areas.”



As with most teams, they do not start overnight. Team building requires patience, and effective communication (e.g., listening and understanding). Setbacks can happen, however, and the group needs to resolve any problems and forge ahead. In the case of the VLWG, a mission was in place and strategy methods were developed. However, “we” began as individuals and representatives of our “employer” and needed to develop into a non-partisan “we.” At the same time it was important for the individual not to compromise their representative responsibilities. To be effective the members of the VLWG had to understand each other in order that the group as a whole could be understood. Understanding each other’s position and knowledge is particularly important when dealing with big picture issues like riparian health, values, community livelihoods, and the future. Team building is a learning experience that may never be perfected, however, it is critical that team building and teamwork be developed.

A prerequisite to team building is that the individuals work together to fully understand the culture and history of the lake watershed. This exercise is very important before the group goes out to work with the community. The finding and exchanging of knowledge brings together a more unified purpose and provides a key need - the development of trust within the group and between the group and the community. The community should be shown that the group is not just a “flavor of the month club” and genuinely wants to assist the community with its concerns. Another positive off shoot of having a well integrated team approach is that the resulting trust amongst the team members allows individual members to carry out specific tasks, versus “everybody” having to do it individually because they lack trust in each other.

The VLWG followed Cows and Fish advice regarding the four step process and was rewarded by community participation and action, a major outcome of the mission. (See Appendix Two, Lessons Learned)

So we had a team. Did it have the tools in its toolbox to do the work?

Tool Building



The combined resources of the working group generated many documents, strategies, ideas and methods. These would assist the group in achieving its goal of helping others help themselves in addition to working towards the delivery of their mission. To help organize existing information and coordinate the development of more tools, the work group set up three basic “tools” categories:

1. Tools that already exist (no sense re-inventing the wheel). See Appendix Three.
2. Tools that the Vincent Lake Working Group has built to date. See Appendix Four.
3. Tools that will be required to be built in the near future. See Appendix Five.

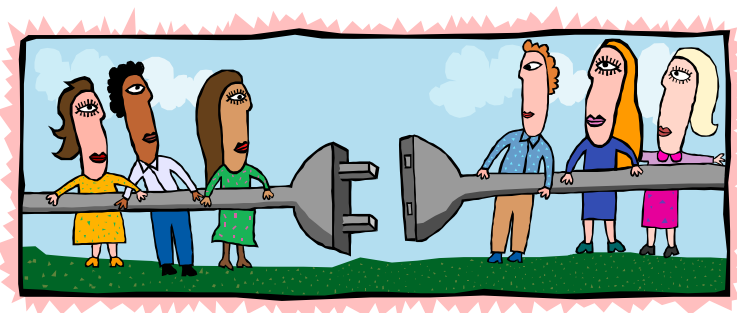
These combined tools will help communities with present and future needs of achieving the mission.

With tools in hand or in development (a never-ending process!) the work group could then start to address step number four, Community Based Action.

Community Based Action

The VLWG is just entering the area of community based action. This is what we have learned to date.

Watershed conservation messages have been around for years. However, problems associated with riparian health appear to be increasing. Why is this? Three major areas are likely involved;



1. Riparian and watershed health is linked to the whole. Individual efforts may not create the desired riparian-watershed effect on their own. It requires group effort.
2. It has been recently determined that many stakeholders (individual, community, and provincial levels) are not aware of the importance of riparian areas. **In short, they do not know "why" riparian areas are important.** Past recommendations to protect and conserve riparian areas were well meaning, however, those recommendations were likely not well understood or accepted. Without sufficient awareness, individuals and communities may believe these conservation messages are "values" being forced on them by others, restricting their freedoms, perhaps taking away pleasures, and reducing their ability to carry out a livelihood;
3. We now know that effective, long lasting conservation action begins with an empowered community. A community needs to become empowered with awareness, education, tools, and resources to help move forward to the riparian health mission. A "grass roots" community based action plan is seen as one of today's cost effective tools for achieving a balanced and sustainable land use approach. In this way stewardship, environmental health, economic prosperity, and multi-use benefits are achievable; and
4. Ultimately the community will decide whether or not to incorporate this ideology. There will be some community members who embrace these ideas and others who ignore them. 100% compliance may not be realistic in the short term, however, success should be measured over the long term.

Some of the community based actions that the VLWG has been involved with to date include:

- Cows and Fish working with 6 cottagers to evaluate the health of their lake shoreline;
- County of St. Paul and Alberta Conservation Association implementing an environmental reserve signage program. Cottagers need to know where their property ends and where the environmental protection reserve begins;
- VLWG working with the County of St. Paul to consider the development of environmental reserve land use by-laws. Cottagers need to know that to carry out any alteration in an environmental reserve requires the approval of the County. In addition know what are the do's and don'ts in an environmental reserve.
- Cottagers working with the Alberta Lake Management Society to collect water samples which can be compared to past results (monitoring);
- VLWG working with individual cottagers to establish demonstration sites that can show the progression from healthy at risk or unhealthy riparian area back to a healthy and functioning riparian area;
- Development of low level videography along with on the ground assessments (i.e., inventory of riparian health);
- Vincent Lake riparian areas were used as part of the research to better understand riparian plant communities and to help develop tools to assess the health of lentic riparian areas;
- Fisheries surveys (monitoring fish populations, is there a positive response in fish population from increased riparian health?);
- The establishment of a lake association if interest is expressed by the community (not yet achieved); and
- See results in Appendix 4 and 5.

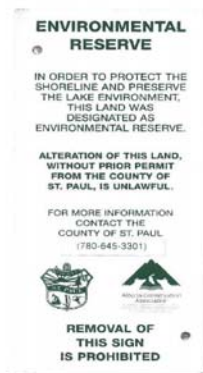
County of St. Paul

Signage Program for Environmental Reserves

In co-operation with the *Vincent Lake Working Group* the County of St. Paul will be placing signs (as shown on the right) that will help adjoining lot owners locate the **Environmental Reserve (E.R.)** adjacent to their property.

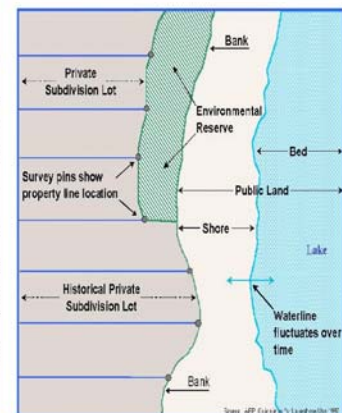
Where property pins were easily located, the E.R. signs are placed near the pins. In some cases, where the property pins were not easily located, the signs are located within the E.R.

It is the responsibility of the adjoining property owner to know the location of the Environmental Reserve. You must have approval from the County of St. Paul at (780) 645-3301 prior to undertaking any developments or alterations in the Environmental Reserve.



What is an Environmental Reserve

- An Environmental Reserve is:
 - a strip of land owned and administered by a municipal government,
 - usually not less than 6 metres in width,
 - found between subdivided land and the bed and shore (i.e., public land) of any lake, river, stream or other body of water,
- The purpose of an Environmental Reserve is to:
 - prevent pollution (such as silt, sewage or fertilizers) from entering the waterbody,
 - provide public access to, and beside, the waterbody's bed and shore,
 - According to Alberta's *Municipal Government Act*, any proposed subdivision must provide an Environmental Reserve alongside a waterbody,
 - Historically, Environmental Reserves were not required when early subdivisions were developed.



What are the VLWG 's results to date (as of August 15, 2001)?

The following is a summary of the draft results found in the Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Appendix 1 and 2 are found in detail within this story. Appendices 3 and 4 are provided in a highlight form. If you would like paper and electronic copies of these results, please contact the Core representatives found on page 12. Appendix 5 is presently not available.

Appendix One. Vincent Lake Working Group

Membership include the following core and consultative members:

- Individual cottagers. (lakeshore residents and seasonal cabin owners)
- Individual farmers. (producers who are involved with livestock grazing, manure handling, winter feeding sites, cropping and grazing)
- County of St. Paul.
- Alberta Conservation Association. (Not-for-profit wildlife and fish, species and habitat conservation society).
- Cows and Fish Program. (conservation organization)
- Public Lands Division, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. (Crown land managers)
- Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. (Fisheries and Wildlife biologists, and Conservation Officers)
- AESA. (Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture)
- Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. (Conservation, Forage, Beef, Water Quality Specialists)

- Education Branch, Alberta Environment.
- FEESA. (Not-for-profit educational organization, partners with Education Branch)
- Ducks Unlimited Canada. (conservation organization)
- Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay. (village incorporated under the Municipal Government Act)
- Alberta Lake Management Society. (lake awareness and education organization)
- Canada Alberta Beef Industry Development Fund. (research funding organization)
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans. (federal government department dealing with the Fisheries Act)
- Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Agriculture. (P.F.R.A., a federal organization who works with agriculture producers to help develop, protect, and manage water supplies)
- Riparian and Wetland Research Program, University of Montana. (A riparian research group that has helped develop a riparian plant community classification system and riparian health assessment protocol and score sheet for rivers and streams in southern Alberta and is now hired to help us with similar results in slough, pothole, and lake riparian areas in Northern Alberta)
- EQUUS Consulting Group. (Hired to gather knowledge about cottagers, their viewpoints and values. Equus has experience working with watershed groups and cottagers)

[Appendix Two. Vincent Lake Working Model - Some Lessons Learned.](#)

The following are gleanings from our experiences to date. They are divided into lessons learned prior to the first community meeting, and lessons learned between the first community meeting and today. Hopefully they provide some guidance in developing your team and building your own lake story. No doubt we will have more to add between now and completion date. These lessons learned are not in any order of priority.

Lessons Learned Prior to the First Community Meeting March 28, 2000 (Between September, 1999 and March 28, 2000)

- Share your thoughts with other interested individuals/organizations. We are smarter together. Recommend the consideration of a community grass roots action plan vs. individual self-interest agendas. Riparian health is a big picture item that involves many stakeholders.
- How does an individual or organizations work with other individuals and organizations? You need to listen and understand other points of view and knowledge, and develop a mission that all representatives are willing to support and carry out.
- The interest level of individuals and organizations to work towards a common mission is variable. Their support is variable from core to consultative, and this support may or may not come with \$ dollar signs. It may come in other ways like lending their expertise, time, and tools. All this help is needed. However, at the end of the day you need a core group who will actively participate day to day and is committed to completing the mission. Riparian areas are a big picture item, and many levels of society are interested in helping. Develop the mission and create the interest. Resources including dollars are out there. People and agencies want to help!
- In preparation for community meetings, the presentation topics are very important to produce the desired effect. In particular, assume that the audience knows little about the information you are presenting. Therefore, it is important to define your terms and build a step by step awareness and education process.
- To reduce the behavior pattern of finger pointing, presentations need to be holistic in scope so that the ecological functions of riparian areas are fully explained and described in such a manner that the audience group becomes quickly aware that we are all part of the problem and solution.
- Key riparian stakeholders in northern Alberta are the lakeshore residents and cabin owners who live by riparian areas on a permanent and seasonal basis. They have a major interest in the use of riparian areas and also can have a major impact on the health and function of riparian areas and the watershed. What are their values and viewpoints? To achieve the mission, the Group needs to understand cottagers before

cottagers can understand “you.” It is very important to customize the awareness and education information to meet the needs of the target audience, i.e., cottagers and farmers of the lake and watershed.

- A key component of awareness and education about riparian areas is the learning and passing on of ecological information. For example, what ecological roles do slough, pothole, and lake riparian areas play in the watershed and why are they important to the stakeholders? It is important that the audience know that you do not have all the answers, that knowledge gaps exist, and that the community can help fill those gaps. There is existing information out there from a variety of sources, which can be easily obtained.
- We presently have knowledge gaps dealing with the different kinds of lentic riparian plant communities and standard tools to evaluate their health. Part of the VLWG's mission was to partner with research groups and others to collect and produce this information. The development of these tools (see Appendix Four and Five) will allow stakeholders to use a common language, and evaluate in a standard and objective way the health of "my" riparian areas? Are they healthy, at risk, or unhealthy and not functioning?
- What is the culture and history of the Vincent Lake community? This information helps us see where we have come from, the factors involved in the present situation, and helps develop where we want to go and how to we can get there. Communities want to know that the Group is aware of their interests and are including them in the development of cost effective and practical solutions. The VLWG did this by reading, learning from each other, visiting with the community and asking questions. A summary of this information was published in the local newspapers and presented at community meetings.
- Transparency (open and honest policy) builds trust. Following awareness, be open with your concerns and ask for community council. You will find similar and new concerns that will help build your story.
- Before you go to the community consider having local, provincial, and federal government and non-government agency support for this project. No sense in building up expectations then find out no one is interested in the groups mission.

Lessons Learned Between the first Community Meeting and Today (March 28, 2000 and March 31, 2001)

- If possible, decide up-front if your community watershed and riparian areas are healthy or have problems (i.e., at risk or unhealthy and not functioning). If healthy, you may only want to provide awareness and education. If you think you may have problems, you should first define what the problems may be and then, for example, conduct a riparian health assessment inventory to determine if there is indeed a problem. Regardless, it remains important to first work with the community to become aware and informed prior to presenting the problems. Communities and stakeholders need a reference point so they can become part of the solution rather than feel that they are a problem only. In the latter situation, your community will likely require additional action steps, resources, methods, and tools to achieve the desired

results. With so many things to do, you may want to prioritize which communities to work at first.

- Community meetings were coordinated by a group of non-government and government organizations and were community supported versus a one interest group dictatorship. This helps dilute the fear of self interests. These meetings are a grass roots approach to achieving the mission.
- It was felt that a mixture of guarded, positive, and concerned interests were present at the meetings. A common process individuals go through is “storm, norm, and perform”. It is the “perform part” that we are interested in achieving. This can only happen when the individuals are adequately informed. If the meeting stays at a finger pointing stage, it is likely the purpose or content of the meeting has not been adequately understood, therefore the meeting might remain in the storm stage. It is essential that the meeting move from the storm stage to at least the normalizing stage of awareness and understanding. Performance may come at the meeting and/or at a later date.
- The majority of stakeholders did not want to see, as the first course of action, more regulations and enforcement to try to resolve problems. Awareness and education using grass roots approach garnered more acceptance as a means of achieving this community need.
- The Vincent Lake Working Group explained the purpose of the public meeting and guarded against getting into a finger pointing exercise. For example, when we finger point three fingers are looking back at us! We are all part of the problem and solution, so let's work together. Also, the group did not tell the community what to do, it simply provided information for the community to consider. The "what to do" to improve the situation would come after the community was informed as to why riparian areas are important. The "what to do" would be developed together by the group and community.
- The cottager and farmer derive their livelihood and recreation from the land and their cattle. These stakeholders, once adequately informed and shown alternatives, are the people who will have a significant voice in the accomplishment of the mission.
- We tend to look past ourselves as to why the problems exist. For example, some of the community felt that climate was responsible for the at risk and unhealthy riparian problems. Solutions such as, “why don't we fill up Vincent and other lakes with water from the North Saskatchewan River? “ were raised. We humans are part of the problem and solution.
- Having two diverse stakeholder groups (i.e., cottagers and farmers) at a public information meeting presented the desired opportunity for having them "walk a mile in the other persons shoes." A major result of this approach was to provide awareness of the ecological relationships of all the riparian areas in the watershed and show that both user groups can create a decline in the health and function of riparian areas and the watershed. For example, this "connective" process helped dissolve the perception that "its the

other person's fault." Although future action steps may not involve these stakeholders meeting as a group, the initial seed is planted.

- It is important that the individual cottager see the values and thoughts of the collective group of cottagers. The individual cottager can then see the cumulative effects they can have on the health and function of riparian areas.
- It is critical for farmers to be aware of the importance of riparian areas for sustainable forage and crop production, and as a source of water. Farmers may then become aware that overuse is not beneficial to their self interests, the environment, and to the overall community.
- It was important that farmers and cottagers have sufficient awareness to consider practice changes versus imposed values from the group. Awareness can lead to self change.
- Hall meetings are important tools to provide awareness and education. However, consideration should be given to having a follow-up outdoor meeting at the lake, watershed, or riparian area. Demonstrating the awareness and education in a "live setting" can help re-enforce the information presented at the hall, relate any missed information, and result in an overall enhanced awareness. Consider a "healthy lake/watershed festival" and at this festival set up a variety of "learning stations" to present to the community why riparian areas are important (See Appendix Four).
- Consider the ecological awareness and education meetings first, then the regulatory meetings second. This helps stakeholders understand the importance of the regulations. Many cottagers or farmers did not know many of the laws referring to riparian habitat or the lake, or the severity of the penalties which could be bestowed upon them by breaking those laws.
- Stakeholders often listen, understand, and apply information in different ways. It is important that hall and live community meetings present awareness and education using a variety of written and visual ways. For example, use presentations, pictures, graphs, information fact sheets, posters, demonstrations, and videos.
- You may want to consider repeating the ecological awareness and education community meetings to attract a wider target audience or specific group. For example, at Vincent Lake we held a weekday, March 28, 2000 hall meeting that attracted mostly local lakeshore residents and seasonal cabin owners, and farmers (130 people of which about 100 were cottagers, 20 farmers, and 10 others). We held a Saturday, July 29, 2000 meeting that attracted 56 people of whom the majority were from outside the watershed area, (35 outside the area, mostly from Edmonton, 18 repeats from March 28, 2000, and 3 new locals). This process, although requiring more time, effort, and resources can better reach a desirable critical mass.
- Regardless of the initial hall community meeting, at all subsequent meetings we again went over the

importance of riparian areas. This is important to give repeat attendees the opportunity to remember what they already heard, to provide awareness for first timers, and it reinforces the mission. This was done at the January 27, 2001 Saturday afternoon regulation meeting which attracted 75 people (35 people who live outside the watershed, 18 repeats, and 22 local).

- Our group was faced with presenting a lot of information to a diverse group (local, outside the watershed, and other). It is important to consider that these riparian community meetings may be best served if they are organized as "stepping stone" meetings versus meetings planned to inform, answer the questions and achieve the mission all at once.
- Expect a lag effect in the response of the awareness and education action steps. It takes time for stakeholders to consider the information and see how it applies to their situation. Be aware that success stories may come in small packages and you may or may not get the "big bang" result. However, following a period of time, its very important to measure the effectiveness of the action steps, i.e., have the action steps made a difference at the lake, landscape, and watershed?
- It is very important that the Community end up taking a leadership role in delivering the action steps to achieve the mission. There should be a progression from agency driven to community driven. This does not mean that the Community tries to do it all alone. It means that the Community drives the processes as needed to achieve the desired mission, with help from a variety of sources including government and non-government organizations.
- It is critical that all stakeholders realize the connectiveness of the balance required between using riparian areas and the watershed and ensuring that their ecological functions are operating well. This includes cottagers and farmers and agencies, and others. This can be done at the initial community awareness and education community meeting. However, for future meetings it may be cost effective to consider customizing to their individual stakeholder needs, for example holding farmer meetings and holding cottager meetings. This consideration may provide you and that stakeholder an opportunity to discuss and develop specific awareness, education, tools, and needs. Although we are not there yet, we think at the end of the plan one needs to consider bringing all stakeholders back together again to discuss the results.
- Regulatory information meetings can be quite dry. Try to provide a variety of local, provincial, and federal regulations. Also keep this kind of meeting as short as possible. The presenters need to bring into their presentations the relationship between the importance of riparian areas and the specific regulation they are presenting.
- We have received several requests from other interested communities to help develop a riparian community action plan in their watershed. Some of these requests involve small lake watersheds with few stakeholders and concerns but some involve large lake watersheds with many stakeholders and concerns.

There is no one set method for “how to do this” and “how to achieve the mission.” The best we can do is provide council, resources and opportunities to your community to consider developing your own story. Each one will be similar, different, and unique.

Here are a few quotes that may provide some counsel to present and build your story:

- "Problems can become opportunities when the right people come together." (Robert Redford)
- "We are all part of the problem and the solution, let's not finger point. When we do, three fingers are pointing back at us." (Cows and Fish Program)
- "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." (H. Ford)
- "Success is more a function of consistent common sense than it is of genius." (An Wang)
- "You have to believe in what you are doing and you have to do what you believe in. If you achieve this, you will have what you want." (Anonymous)
- "Have fun doing it, if not what is the point." (Anonymous)

[Appendix 3 Tools that Already Exist \(no sense re-inventing the wheel\)](#)

Riparian Information Library- This library offers a comprehensive list of ecological, watershed, water quality, recreation, and agriculture information sources the VLWG used to work with the community to provide awareness and education. Also includes regulatory information pertaining to the various federal, provincial, and local governments. The library provides the source so you can make the necessary contacts and obtain your own copies.

To obtain a paper or electronic copy of this information library (Excel Spreadsheet) please contact :

- Gerry Ehlert with the Public Lands Division in St. Paul, Alberta at (780) 645-6336 or gerry.ehlert@gov.ab.ca.
- Blake Mills with the Alberta Conservation Association in St. Paul, Alberta at (780) 645-6372 or blake.mills@gov.ab.ca.
- Wayne Nelson with Alberta Fish and Wildlife in St. Paul, Alberta at (780) 645-6335 or rwayne.nelson@gov.ab.ca.

[Appendix 4 Tools that the Vincent Lake Working Group Built So Far](#)

The following information is a summary of the tools developed so far by the VLWG. Please note these information fact sheets and videos are presently in a draft form and are subject to change. These draft tools will be finalized by March 31, 2003. Please consider these tools as guidelines to consider in the development of your community action plan. They are not intended to be used as a cook book recipe. **You will need to tailor your community action plan based on the combination of your own unique community issues, stakeholders, mission and watershed.**

- [Riparian awareness community meeting March 28, 2000](#). This meeting provided about 130 cottagers and farmers with riparian ecological literacy information (about 80% were cottagers and 20% were farmers). This meeting was taped and a video with agenda is available.
- [Healthy Vincent Lake Festival, July 29 and 30, 2000](#). This festival combined a hall community meeting for those cottagers that did not make the March 28, 2000 meeting or wanted a refresher, and a lake festival at Vincent Lake the next day. At the July 29th evening meeting, about 56 people attended. The majority were cottagers from the Edmonton area. At the lake we provided a number of learning stations that cottagers and farmers (children too) could participate in, for example learning about riparian plants, and what is an environmental reserve and where is it located. At the lake we had about 130 people attend of which about 35 were children.
- [Regulation community meeting, Jan. 27, 2001](#). This meeting combined riparian ecological literacy and knowledge of the local, provincial, and federal regulations that apply to the management and use of lake watersheds like Vincent Lake. This meeting was taped and a video plus agenda of this meeting is available. About 80 people attended this meeting, many of the people were first timers.
- The Alberta Conservation Association c/o Pat Valastin and the VLWG developed a [How to Form a Lake Association](#) information package. The purpose of this information is to provide steps to cottagers and other stakeholders to become organized and carry out cost effective action plans. Available in electronic and pamphlet format.
- [Perceptions and Expectations of Lakeshore Property Owners in Northeastern Alberta](#). This report completed by Equus Consulting Group details information about lakeshore property owners (5 lakes in the County of St. Paul) that was very useful in better understanding cottagers viewpoints and values.
- [Let's Breakdown Those Shoreline Myths](#). This information fact sheet discusses some major myths about the shoreline that can lead to at risk and unhealthy situations.
- [Natural Healing of an Unhealthy Shoreline](#). This information fact sheet discusses the use of letting a damaged shoreline heal back to a healthy state by itself with minimal cost.

- [Environmental Reserve Land Use By-Laws](#). This information fact sheet provides concepts that watershed groups and local governments can consider in developing by-laws that protect riparian areas. In addition, this fact sheet includes an example of what a by-law could look like.
- [Towards Riparian Health – Which Enforcement Model?](#) This information fact sheet discussed when should enforcement be considered in a community? Should it come before, during or after awareness and education? Are there different kinds of enforcement?
- [Riparian Plants – Investments to Building a Healthy Future](#) A poster in electronic form (Jpeg) that can be used at meetings and advertisements to inform about the importance of native riparian plants. Visuals are worth a “thousand words”!
- [Riparian Newspaper Articles](#). Newspaper articles are an effective method of getting your awareness and education. This fact sheet provides some tips on what you should consider putting in your newspaper articles.

Help Your Community Build its Story?

If you want to obtain the detail of any of these tools please contact:

- Gerry Ehlert with Alberta Public Lands in St. Paul, Alberta at (780) 645-6336 or gerry.ehlerta@gov.ab.ca
- Blake Mills with the Alberta Conservation Association in St. Paul, Alberta at (780) 645-6372 or blake.mills@gov.ab.ca
- Wayne Nelson with Alberta Fish and Wildlife in St. Paul, Alberta at (780) 645-6335 or rwayne.nelson@gov.ab.ca

[Appendix Five - Tools That We Plan to Build in the Near Future \(2002 and 2003 Results\)](#)

These tools have not been built yet. However, we thought you may be interested in what will be available shortly. After all we don't want you spending time and monies on re-inventing the wheel!

- **"Lentic Riparian Plant Community System."** This guide developed by Cows and Fish and the VLWG will allow users to compare their present riparian area with its "potential." It is important to know what kind of lentic riparian plant community you are dealing with so your health assessment is objectively determined. Completion/availability date Spring, 2003.
- **"Lentic Riparian Health Assessment Field Workbook."** This guide developed by Cows and Fish, University of Montana, VLWG, and others will allow users to objectively determine the health of their riparian areas. Are they healthy, at risk, or unhealthy and not functioning properly? Completion/availability date Spring, 2003.
- **"Riparian Health Assessment using Aerial Videography."** This tool in development by the Alberta Conservation Association and the VLWG will hopefully enable groups to complete a quick overview of the lake's riparian health and determine if a problem may exist. We hope this tool will also be useful in evaluating changes. For example, are our riparian areas healthier than in past history? Part of this tool will include a GIS Database to house or link all this information. Completion/availability date Spring, 2002.
- **"Fish and the Littoral Zone."** Alberta Fish and Wildlife and the VLWG are developing this tool. This information sheet will highlight the importance of the littoral zone (zone located between the riparian area and deeper waters). The plants, animals, food, cover, and structures in this area are critical to fishery production and lake survival. Completion/availability date Spring, 2002.