



RAINY-LAKE OF THE WOODS WATERSHED

2026 FORUM

March 11 – 12, 2026

23rd Annual Forum

Proceedings Report

Forum Partners – Sponsors

The organizing committee thanks our 2026 sponsors for assisting with the 23rd annual International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Forum. This event would not be possible without them:



- Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation
- Grand Council Treaty #3
- Consulate General of Canada in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Global Affairs Canada
- Minnesota North College - Rainy River campus
- St. Cloud State University
- International Joint Commission
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- Jefferson National Parks Association in cooperation with Voyageurs National Park
- Lake of the Woods District Stewardship Association
- Rainy Lake Conservancy
- Rainy Lake Property Owners Association
- Voyageurs Conservancy

Program At A Glance

DAY 1 – MARCH 11

8:30	Forum Opening: Traditional Welcome, Greetings & Opening Remarks	
Session 1: Water Governance & Planning		
9:20	0:20	One Basin, Six Plans: Unifying Watershed Management Across the Rainy River Basin Moriya Rufer
9:40	0:20	Canada Water Agency Lake of the Woods Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative Update Kelly-Anne Fagan
10:00	0:20	Developing a phosphorus management plan for the Canadian portion of the Rainy-Lake of the Woods basin: Update Meghan Mills
10:20	0:30	BREAK (Optional Virtual Breakout Rooms or Offline)
Session 2: Education & the Experimental Lakes Area		
10:50	0:20	How science and youth education complement each other at IISD Experimental Lakes Area Cassidy Mazur
11:10	0:20	Monitoring changes in biodiversity and ecosystem health following cattail management and reintroduction of wild rice using environmental DNA Lisa Peters
11:30	0:20	Effects of Water and Competition Stress on the Growth of Two Varieties of Wild Rice (Manoomin) Vince Palace
11:50	1:00	LUNCH (Optional: remain on the livestream as a lunch hour plenary conversation space, or lunch on your own offline)
Session 3: Feature: Watershed Management		
12:50	1:00	Balancing Tradeoffs – Lessons from a systems-level approach to watershed management Dr. John Strauser, Green Lake Association, Green Lake, WI Followed by moderated discussion with Teika Newton and audience Q&A
Session 4: Nutrients & Algae		
13:50	0:40	Rainy River phosphorus – past legacy and present dynamics and their implications for management of Lake of the Woods algal blooms (Parts 1 & 2) Anna Baker and Adam Heathcote
14:30	0:20	Got Rock Snot? What We've Learned from Lake Superior Tributaries to Protect Minnesota's Trout Streams Kui Hu
14:50	0:30	BREAK (Optional Virtual Breakout Rooms or Offline)
15:20	0:20	Our Lake of the Woods TMDL: Current sediment P inventories and internal loading rates Mark Edlund

15:40	0:20	Spatial Variation in Community Composition and Toxin Distribution Within a Cyanobacterial Blob, Lost Bay, Kabetogama Lake, Voyageurs National Park Aliesha Krall
16:00	End of Day 1	If there is desire from the audience to remain online for further conversation, this space can be held open for a while.
DAY 2 – MARCH 12		
		
8:20 Day 2 Welcome and Introductions		
Session 5: Lake of the Woods & Rainy River Studies		
8:40	0:20	The Walleye Lakes Project: Uncovering the Past to Protect Minnesota's Walleye Fisheries Erin Mittag
9:00	0:20	How Can We Use Zooplankton to Reconstruct the Impact of Multiple Stressors on Walleye (<i>Sander vitreus</i>) Fisheries? Grace Hemmelgarn
9:20	0:20	Examining the Relationship Between Zooplankton Structures and Total Length for Paleolimnological Reconstructions Evelyn Yang
9:40	0:20	Identifying fish habitat restoration priorities in the Rainy River - Lake of the Woods Watershed Neil Fisher
10:00	0:20	A Sharper View of the lakes and river: Improved Digital Elevation and Hydrodynamic Models for the Rainy Lake, Namakan Reservoir and the Rainy River Gabriel Poirier
10:20	0:30	BREAK (Optional Virtual Breakout Rooms or Offline)
Session 6: Rainy & Namakan Studies		
10:50	0:20	A Multi-Survey Approach to Understanding Long-Term Walleye Population Trends in Rainy Lake Eric Randall
11:10	0:20	Improving Walleye and Lake Whitefish Performance Indicators for Lake Water Level Management on Rainy – Namakan System Benjamin Erb
11:30	0:20	A Next-Generation 2D Predictive Model for Mapping Submerged Aquatic Vegetation in the Rainy Lake and Namakan System Marianne Bachand
11:50	1:00	LUNCH: Presentation of annual Kallemyn & Wilson Stewardship Awards
Session 7: Modelling		
12:50	0:20	Lake of the Woods - Southern Shore Barrier Island Erosion Investigation –Phase II Update Erv Kraft, Zac Morris and Craig Taylor

13:10	0:20	Using Satellite-Derived Water Quality and Temperature Data from an Automated High-Performance Computing Environment to Identify and Model Cyanobacteria Blooms in the Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Leif Olmanson
13:30	0:20	Modeling fate and transport of oil-particle aggregates from a potential oil spill in the Rainy River Faith Fitzpatrick
13:50	0:20	Phase II of Assessing the Vulnerability of Waters to Mining in the Rainy—Lake of the Woods Watershed Aliesha Krall
14:10	0:30	BREAK (Optional Virtual Breakout Rooms or Offline)
Session 8: Monitoring, AIS & Ecological Change		
14:40	0:20	Vulnerability of lakes in Voyageurs to spiny water flea and zebra mussels James Smith
15:00	0:20	‘Clean Drain Dry’ compliance and travel patterns for watercraft crossing between Ontario and Manitoba along the TransCanada Highway Kaitlyn Brougham
15:20	0:20	Historical abundance and extent of wild rice: environmental drivers leading to its decline in Lake of the Woods and Red Lake Lienne Sethna, Michelle Anderson and Joshua Jones
15:40	0:20	2025 Environment and Climate Change Canada Lake of the Woods Annual Survey Diana Fred
16:00	0:20	Grand Council Treaty #3: 2025 Environmental Monitoring Updates Laine Fyke, Michaela Novak and Benjamin Finlan
16:20	Closing remarks and end of 2026 Forum	

2026 Forum Breakout Rooms

As a new addition to the virtual program in 2026, we offered four optional conversational gathering spaces during scheduled breaks in the program. These followed currently popular themes in watershed resources discussions and were moderated by volunteers associated with groups working on themes discussed in each session. Questions suggested below were only provided as initial conversational prompts for Forum participants who were interested in pursuing more detailed conversation on the topic.

A: Watershed Monitoring (March 11 - 10:20 – 10:50)

Many across the watershed have been contributing toward designing a proposal for a long-term watershed monitoring program that would both inform annual water quality reporting obligations to the International Joint Commission and help us to better track water quality and aquatic ecosystem trends, emerging concerns, or vulnerabilities.

What should we be considering as we create this proposal? Parameters / issues, locations, timing, resources, capacity, techniques etc.

B: Nutrients, Algae & Cyanotoxins (March 11 – 14:50 – 15:20)

Over the past 10-1-5 years, we have definitely developed a better understanding of algae dynamics and how to manage harmful and toxic blooms (HABs), but where do we still have big questions or knowledge gaps? What hurdles stand in the way of our ability to reduce HABs in future?

C: Watershed Vulnerabilities (March 12 - 10:20 – 10:50)

There are some big environmental concerns on many people's minds at present, from the specter of copper-nickel mining in the Boundary Waters and associated risks of sulfide contamination of the Rainy Headwaters, to a proposed deep geological repository for Canada's nuclear waste at a location just north of the Rainy-Lake of the Woods watershed. Here's a space for asking questions, seeking answers, and connecting with like-minded folks who want to take action for watershed protection.

D: AIS & Public Engagement (March 12 – 14:10 – 14:40)

Lots of groups work on tracking aquatic (and terrestrial) invasive species in the watershed, educating the public, and taking action to prevent the spread of AIS.

What's working?

What's not working?

Where are there knowledge gaps or resource needs?

How can we do a better job of coordinating an international / transboundary approach to AIS management?

2026 Organizing Committee

Teika Newton

Executive Director

Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation
P.O. Box 112, Kenora, ON P9N 3X1
teikanewton@lowwsf.com

Meghan Mills

International Watershed Coordinator

Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation
P.O. Box 112, Kenora, ON P9N 3X1
meganmills@lowwsf.com

Andrew Paterson

Research Scientist

Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks
PO Box 39, Dorset, ON POA 1EO
andrew.paterson@ontario.ca

Jesse Anderson

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
525 Lake Avenue South Suite 400
Duluth, MN 55802
jesse.anderson@state.mn.us

Mike Kennedy

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
525 Lake Avenue South Suite 400
Duluth, MN 55802
mike.kennedy@state.mn.us

Kayla Bowe

Water Resources Program

Red Lake Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 279, Red Lake, MN 56671
kayla.bowe@redlakenation.org

Diana Fred

Environmental Scientist

Environment and Climate Change Canada
150 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4W2
diana.fred@ec.gc.ca

Reuben Wagenius

St. Cloud State University

ITV/Video Conferencing
MC 220-15 St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498
reuben@stcloudstate.edu

Kelly Sjerven

Biology Instructor

Minnesota North College – Rainy River
1501 Hwy 71, International Falls, MN
kelly.sjerven@minnesotanorth.edu

Chris Herc

Territorial Planning Unit,
Grand Council Treaty 3
Chris.herc@treaty3.ca