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FURTHER STEPS TO CURB PHOSPHORUS, FACILITATE ENHANCED SCIENCE AMONG NEXT STEPS IN ACTION ON LAKE WINNIPEG

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Province has Started Action on 84 per cent of Recommendations, Lake Stewardship Board Report Provides Clear Blueprint for Action: Melnick

Water Stewardship Minister Christine Melnick today released the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board's final report and announced the next new steps in reducing nutrients in the lake.

"This report clearly shows Manitoba is on the right track in its plan to improve the condition of Lake Winnipeg, as we have already initiated action on 84 per cent of the recommendations," the minister said. "I would like to thank the board members for their hard work. This report provides governments, businesses and individuals with a clear blueprint that will help us further face our collective responsibility to fix a problem that was decades in the making."

The minister accepted in principle all 135 recommendations in the report, noting the province has already acted on or initiated action on 113 of the recommendations.

"The recommendations in this report are far-reaching, crossing every sector of society, and present a plan for action. Now is the time for all of us to accept our collective responsibility and to support the province's commitment to action for the benefit of Lake Winnipeg," said Bill Barlow, chair of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board.

Melnick announced immediate next steps on priority areas outlined by the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board. These include:

- A renewed, robust commitment to infrastructure investments. The province will negotiate predictable funding agreements with municipal and federal governments on waste-water infrastructure, building on the \$100 million the province already invested in water-quality projects around the province since 1999 with a focus on support for the costs of meeting stronger environmental standards.
- An expanded mandate for the board. The Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board's mandate has been expanded to advising government on matters such as water pollution and fisheries issues. As well, the board will periodically report to the minister on the state of the lake.
- New investments in research and shared science. The Manitoba government will make new investments in scientific research on Lake Winnipeg and its watershed including funding for the ship Namao as a research and education platform. In addition, a committee of scientists will be formed to share information and improve co-ordination of research on the lake.
- Restrictions on phosphorus. This spring, the province will be introducing limits on fertilizer and municipal sludge application on agricultural lands and golf courses as part of its nutrient management regulation and will prohibit all nutrient applications in buffers zones along water bodies. Currently these restrictions only apply to manure

application. These restrictions will apply immediately for new developments. For existing properties in sensitive areas, they will come into effect in 2009. For remaining parts of the province, they will be in effect in 2011.

- A cross-government action team. A new team of government representatives will be assembled to spearhead action and co-operation on improving lake quality.
- Initiation of public education, consultations on cosmetic fertilizers and other household products. Manitoba Water Stewardship will engage the public and stakeholders about the harmful impact on Lake Winnipeg of products that contain phosphorus and will seek public advice on ways to find alternatives to their use.

Melnick said actions announced today build on the Manitoba government's ongoing efforts since 1999 to improve water quality and protect this valuable resource.

"This government has worked very hard and diligently to ensure that Lake Winnipeg and all of the waterways in our province are protected. Some of our many initiatives include creating the very first department of water stewardship in Canada, passing the first-of-its kind Water Protection Act and investing more than \$100 million toward water-quality projects in Manitoba. We have also committed to public education on the harmful effects on water quality that result from cosmetic fertilizers and other household products containing phosphorus," said Melnick.

The Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board was formed in 2003 as part of the Lake Winnipeg Action Plan. The board comprises 17 members with representatives from a variety of interests and sectors including municipalities, First Nations, commercial fishing, science and agriculture.

"Again, I would like to thank the board for their efforts in producing this very technical and complex report which will help us bring Lake Winnipeg's nutrient status to its pre-1970's conditions. We in Manitoba know that clean water is the gold of this century and by respectfully handling this resource, the 21st century will belong to us. It is imperative that everyone in the province take part in protecting and preserving our tremendous resource for future generations," concluded Melnick.

A list of Manitoba water projects can be found at:

http://www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/water_quality/lake_winnipeg/interim_rpt.html.

Background

WATER PROTECTION MEASURES

The acceptance of the report of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board and actions to follow are among numerous steps taken by the province to improve water protection and management in Manitoba since 1999:

- A provincewide water strategy and Lake Winnipeg Action Plan were developed, Manitoba Water Stewardship was created and the first-of-its-kind Water Protection Act was passed.
- The Drinking Water Safety Act was introduced, a subsidy for well water tests was reinstated and the Office of Drinking Water was opened.

- Through the International Joint Commission, Minnesota and North Dakota agreed to join Manitoba to reduce nutrients flowing into the Red River and into Lake Winnipeg by 10 per cent.
- Provincial efforts helped secure the installation of a temporary filter at the Devils Lake diversion in North Dakota to reduce the artificial flow of foreign biota into Lake Winnipeg. The U.S. has committed to a permanent filter.
- The Water Protection Act was passed, water quality management zones were introduced, areas that easily transfer pollutants from soil to water will be identified.
- Phase Three of the Water Protection Plan introduced some of the strongest regulations in North America for restricting phosphorus.
- Nutrient limits are being incorporated into new municipal sewage treatment licences and a manure and mortalities regulation was passed to place limitations on manure spreading and the location of spread fields. Both of these initiatives result in less nutrients ending up in Manitoba's lakes and rivers.
- A Riparian Area Tax Credit was created and expanded to encourage the protection of vegetative cover along rivers and streams.
- Dike construction on the west side of Lake Winnipeg has saved millions of dollars in potential flooded property and damage due to three major storms since the construction.
- The province provided \$349,600 towards the purchase of the Amphibex ice-breaking machine to help with spring ice jams.
- The province has committed \$150,000 annually in funding for Lake Winnipeg scientific research and the Namao research vessel.
- The Clean Beaches Program was introduced with public awareness campaigns for beach goers and cottagers.
- Over \$100 million has been invested in drinking water and sewer infrastructure in over 100 communities across Manitoba.
- The province has made available \$750,000 to farmers for the purpose of the Beneficial Management Practices that are targeted to improving water quality.
- The province is promoting and supporting integrated watershed planning and doubled the number of conservation districts to 18 from nine with focused activity on watershed planning.
- Water rights amendments are in place to provide better licensing and enforcement of drainage activities.
- An on-site Sewage Disposal Regulation was passed to set stricter limitations on the location of holding tanks and septic fields.
- The first phosphorus regulation in Western Canada which is among the toughest in North America was implemented.