

## Local Interests &amp; History

## Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation – diamond in the rough

### Media Release

Not many in our community have heard of the Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation (RLEF). RLEF is a non-profit foundation working in concert with Big Rideau Lake Association since its creation in 1991. Upper Rideau Lake Association was added to the Foundation in 2001.

RLEF (<https://www.rlef.ca/>) is a registered Canadian charitable foundation supporting on-the-ground environmental projects on Upper, Lower, and Big Rideau Lakes. RLEF provides modest grants to support activities that further their mission and engage the help of Big Rideau Lake Association and Upper Rideau Lake Association to implement the projects. RLEF also monitors the regulatory environment and provides input where necessary. Although comprised of only 6 directors (4 from Big Rideau and 2 from Upper Rideau), the Foundation has had a significant impact on our community.

In 2024, “monitoring the regulatory environment” included lobbying the Westport Town Council in conjunction with many local lake associations to oppose dumping treated effluent into Upper Rideau Lake. The Westport Council heeded the message and removed dumping treated effluent into any body of water from consideration in their planning.

Similarly, in conjunction with local associations, RLEF worked with Rideau Lakes Township to develop comprehensive new by-laws to manage campground growth in 2024 that are on the forefront of campground legislation across the province.

As part of its environmental mandate, RLEF has been funding scientific research into water quality and other lake issues since 2017.

RLEF sponsored 3 projects by researchers from Queen’s University and Carleton University in 2020 and 3 further projects in 2021, including work on

algae growth and the impact on fish populations from bass tournament fishing and pre-season fishing.

Dr. David Philipp, Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois and summertime resident on Lake Opinicon and Dr. Steven Cooke, Professor Carleton University have spearheaded many of those projects. Those two are now the key members of the Fisheries Conservation Foundation (FCF; <https://fishconserve.org/>) which is leading two new RLEF projects in 2025.

The first project is Bass Spawning Sanctuaries (BaSS) that is focused on helping regenerate the bass population in our lakes. FCF baseline data indicates that if 1990 is taken as the base year, then in the years SINCE COVID, the bass surviving beyond year 1 of their life are now about 5% of the 1990 baseline and hook wounds on male bass are 4 times greater than the 1990 baseline. DURING the COVID years when there was virtually no pre-season fishing, the results are the exact opposite – bass surviving beyond year 1 are 125% of the 1990 baseline and hook wounds are 20% of the 1990 baseline. BaSS will protect nesting male bass for 2 weeks beyond the current bass season opening date by preventing ALL fishing within the sanctuary and then opening to ALL fishing within the sanctuary at that point. This will prevent pre-season catch and release prior to bass season opening on 10-20% of the shoreline of our lakes where bass spawn. Pre-season catch and release is the culprit in removing male bass protecting their nests and allowing other predators to eat the eggs. Review is underway with the Ministry of Natural Resources to obtain agreement to implement this in Big, Lower and Upper Rideau Lakes in 2026 along with 12 other lakes in Eastern Ontario. A \$12,000 grant from RLEF initiated this project and encouraged

the other 15 lakes to join. Those funds will be leveraged in partnership with Watersheds Canada and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada to support additional research.

The background data for the BaSS project was provided by Bass Telemetry research conducted by Carleton University in 2020/2021 in Big Rideau Lake. RLEF is funding a similar study for Lake Trout Telemetry in 2025 and hopefully, it will provide similar information to help increase the lake trout population in Big Rideau Lake in years to come. Those funds will also be leveraged as above.

The Rideau Waterways Land Trust recently announced the creation of a new 33-acre nature reserve on Big Rideau Lake in the Long Island Cluster of Islands. RLEF contributed \$10,000 to that project to assist with ongoing management of the new property.

To ensure that RLEF obtain input from all our constituents, a Lake Planning Questionnaire will be released shortly to help RLEF understand your environmental priorities around the lake. RLEF will use that feedback to help prioritize funding opportunities beyond 2025.

RLEF is funded by generous contributions from the residents around our lakes. If you are interested in donating to support the work of RLEF, the easiest way is to donate online, using Canada Helps at <https://www.rlef.ca/give>. The tax receipt is provided promptly and there is a record kept that you could rely on at tax time.

Please help support the Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation to assist with the environmental protection of our lakes and surrounding areas.

## RCMP Musical Ride at the Spencerville Fair



RCMP Musical Ride at the Spencerville Fair. Photo Credit: Colette Kenny

## Maple View Cruise



By Sally Smid

Some of the residents of Maple View Lodge recently took their annual boat cruise on the St. Lawrence. The funds for the trip came from the Lodge’s Auxiliary and the group was thanked once again for

making our boat cruise outing possible once again! The Auxiliary has been a long-time supporter in providing special things for those in the home. The smiling faces of the residents were a testament of their enjoyment in being able to explore the Thousand Islands!