

The Avocet



*Kimiwan Birdwalk and Interpretive Centre
Town of McLennan—Bird Capital of Canada*

Kimiwan Lake Quick Facts

- Globally Significant Important Bird Area
- Candidate Provincial Natural Area
- Nominated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Site
- Provincial Migratory Bird Sanctuary
- Known throughout North American as a premier destination for waterfowl hunting in the fall
- Located on the south shore of the lake, McLennan is one of the prettiest communities in the Peace Country

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Kimiwan Lake Naturalists Join Forces with Winagami Conservation Area and Winagami Lake Provincial Park

Established in 1990, the Winagami Conservation Area (WCA) has become one of the best local natural settings for children and adults to get back to nature. Comprising a total of 870 acres, the Conservation Area was the brainchild of local McLennan resident John O'Mahony. Working closely with the Public Lands Division and the Fish and Wildlife Division, Mr. O'Mahony developed a self-guided low-impact trail system throughout the parcel of vacant crown land bordering Winagami Lake. The WCA was well used in the 1990s, particularly by school groups and weekend recreationalists.

In 2000, as part of the Alberta Special Places initiative, the WCA was formally added into Winagami Lake Provincial Park.

Following the expansion of the provincial park and much to the relief of Alberta Parks staff Mr. O'Mahony agreed to maintain an active role in the maintenance and development of the WCA..

Always looking for new ways to deliver outdoor learning opportunities for people, Mr. O'Mahony approached the KLN in the fall of 2003 in the hopes of forming a new partnership. Naturally, the KLN jumped at the idea. "We're very pleased to help contribute to the local community and outdoor education opportunities by helping to raise funds and provide volunteer support for such a great spot" says KLN President Mark Heckbert. Indeed, the excitement over the new partnership is also shared by Park Ranger Dave Crooks. "Having the KLN involved with the Winagami Conservation Area and the provincial park will only increase the quality of opportunity for visitors to the site. It's sure great news!"

Anticipated benefits to the new partnership include: increased promotion of Winagami Lake Provincial Park, additional fundraising opportunities, potential for linking a walking trail in McLennan to the WCA, establishment of groomed cross-country ski trails, a new area for research and monitoring, habitat enhancement and stewardship.

According to Mr. O'Mahony, the additional help from the KLN will be important.. "We're so lucky to have an area like this so close to McLennan and High Prairie. But it takes a lot of effort and money to provide these opportunities. Hopefully there are many others out there who will be happy to help maintain our natural areas."

WHSRN Nomination for Kimiwan Lake Moving Ahead

Efforts to have Kimiwan Lake designated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site received a big boost when local residents and municipal officials voiced their support for the designation. At a public information session in McLennan on April 1, hosted by the Kimiwan Lake Naturalists, saw about 35 people listen attentively to Canadian Wildlife Service wildlife biologist Gerry Beyersbergen as he presented the results of several years of shorebird surveys at the lake and explained the purpose of the WHSRN program.

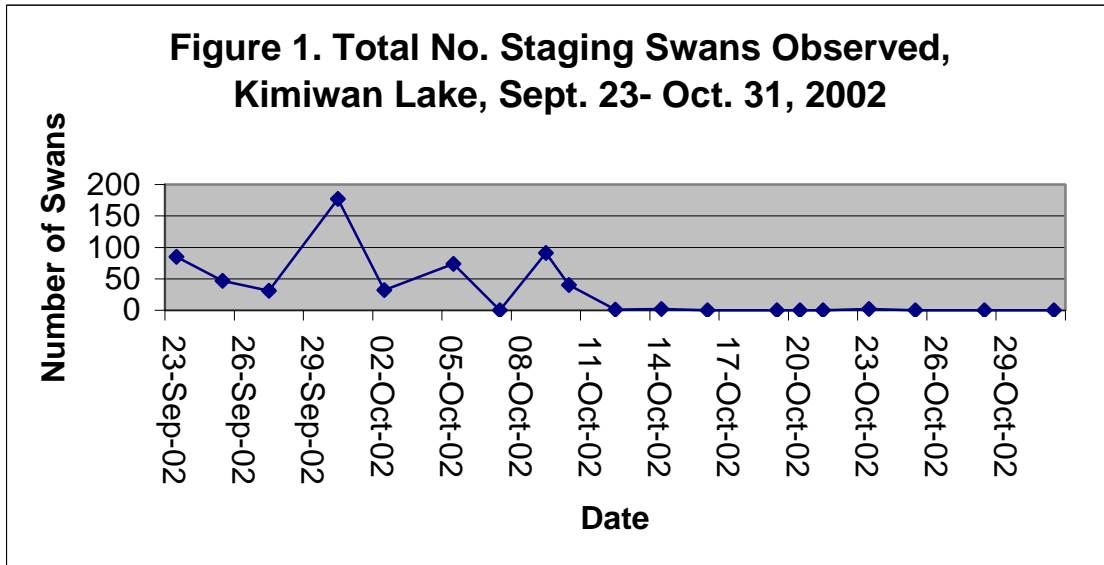
Shorebirds, weighing only a few ounces, fly up to 20,000 miles round trip between the summer nesting grounds and their winter habitats. Traveling for up to 70 hours without a stop, these transcontinental travelers are dependant upon secure staging stops along their migration route. While not all wetlands are suitable for shorebirds, Kimiwan Lake with its mudflats and waters rich with aquatic food, provides an ideal resting and refueling stop for shorebirds.

The WHSRN program includes sites in North and South American of hemispheric (min. 500,000 shorebirds/year), international (min. 100,000 shorebirds/year) and regional (min. 20,000 shorebirds/year) importance. Currently there is only one other site in Alberta designated under the WHSRN program.

Fall Staging Swan Survey 2002

The second annual fall staging swan survey was completed by the Kimiwan Lake Naturalists between Sept. 23 and Oct. 31. The minimum number of swans observed was 0 and the maximum count was 177. In striking contrast to the high numbers of swans observed in 2001, very low numbers of swans were recorded in 2002.

A total of 582 swans were observed during the surveys, averaging 30.6 swans/survey. A total of 1193 swan-days were utilized at Kimiwan Lake during the 2002 fall staging period. As swans are long-necked birds, they require a minimum of 1.0 m of water to forage for aquatic plants. Water levels at Kimiwan Lake were much lower than in previous years and the lake remained frozen following the second week in October. These factors are likely to be the principal reasons for the observed low numbers of staging swans.



New Natural Area For Kimiwan Lake?

During the Special Places 2000 program, by which the Alberta government launched a new system of parks and protected areas, the Provincial Coordinating Committee recommended that Kimiwan Lake and some crown land along the south shore be designated as a Special Place without going through a local committee process. This recommendation was based on the past history of conservation effort at the lake and the high level of local support from area communities. Dating back to 1986, the Alberta government outlined plans to formally protect the unique natural ecosystem at Kimiwan Lake. However, to date, no designation has occurred.

The Kimiwan Lake Naturalists plan to move forward with discussions with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas to formally designate the lake and remaining vacant crown land on the shoreline as a Natural Area. It is estimated that there is only 131 acres of crown land left along the lakeshore which is not under an agricultural disposition.

Experience the Outdoors- Smoky River Style

We all agree that the birding at Kimiwan Lake is super and the Interpretive Centre is grand! But what if you're a little more adventurous? There are a number of other interesting services offered to outdoor enthusiasts looking for a unique experience when visiting the region.

Birding Tours- Bob Simpson of Snoshoe Enterprises offers guided birding and photography tours throughout the year. He can be reached at (780) 925-3759 or snoshoe2@telus.net.

Canoe Trips- Outdoors Magnified of McLennan offers guided canoe trips on local waterways. Contact John o'Mahony at (780) 324-3062 or outmag@telusplanet.net.

Tipi Camping- Rent a tipi from Tipi Discovery and discover a unique way to camp. They deliver and set up your tipi. All seasons. Call Mark or Pam Heckbert at (780) 324-2570 or tipirent@telus.net.

Archaeological Digs- Prime Expeditions offers guided explorations for fossils and human history. May-September. Call Richard Primeau at (780) 837-3452 or primexp@telus.net.

Wilderness Retreat- Bearhead Creek Wilderness Retreat north of Kimiwan Lake offers a secluded setting, lodge and guided natural history experiences. Call Barry Himer at (780) 524-5026.

Birdhouse Trail Opened

The Kimiwan Lake Naturalists unveiled the 50 km long Birdhouse Trail in May. Located on highway # 2 between McLennan and High Prairie, the first phase is comprised of 148 nest boxes mounted on fence posts. Designed as a project that benefits wildlife, students and tourism, the Junior Forest Wardens from High Prairie saw the values of the project. The youth, along with parent helpers, placed the nest boxes on posts and recorded the locations with handheld GPS units. The Junior Forest Wardens are interested in starting a long-term monitoring study where they record the type of birds using the boxes over time.

Signs along the highway are planned which will encourage travellers to "Follow the Birdhouse Trail to McLennan".

Thank you to all the volunteers who made the project a success.



The stewards today work for the stewards of tomorrow



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Friends and Sponsors

We thank the following people and organizations for their contributions in 2003-2004.*

Life (+\$5000)

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Platinum (\$1000-\$5000)

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Gold (\$500-\$1000)

IBA Canada

Silver (\$100-\$500)

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Tolko

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Bronze (up to \$100)

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**Current to September 2003*

