

## **January 12, 2021, email from The Minaki Conservancy**

Dear Mr. Bouchier:

I am writing on behalf of The Minaki Conservancy, a non-profit association of year-round and seasonal residents in Minaki, Ontario. The Conservancy is dedicated to conserving and enhancing Minaki's extraordinary natural environment and special community heritage.

Pete Hettinga at MNRF in Kenora has passed along your email messages of December 8 and December 20 regarding your petition for a biocontrol agent for flowering rush. We are very pleased to see attention paid to that devastating invasive plant. We will in this message respond to your request in the December 8 message for information regarding "estimates of costs for monitoring, eradication efforts, dredging work, impacts on waterbodies and wetlands, native species etc." We will start with some background.

### Background

Minaki is a small unincorporated community on the Winnipeg River in unorganized territory in far Northwestern Ontario. The Winnipeg River drains Lake of the Woods, flowing north and west into Manitoba and then into Lake Winnipeg. The provincial boundary is approximately 50 kilometres downstream.

Minaki is sparsely settled. There are approx. 100 year-round residents in town, and approx. 275 seasonal cottages spread over 20 miles of river flowage, with the town and the CN railroad crossing in the middle. The Winnipeg River in the Minaki area is not a typical river -- it looks like a set of connected lakes, sometimes 8 miles wide and 200 feet deep, full of islands and channels.

In this wilderness setting, Minaki's local economy is tourism-based, relying on fishing in the Winnipeg River.

### The Infestation

There is a sense in the email messages that the flowering rush invasion is in its early stages in Ontario. That is not the case in the Winnipeg River in Minaki. Flowering rush was identified there 15 years ago, began to take hold 10 years ago, and over the past 5 years has exploded. The infestation downstream from town for approx. 10 miles is now complete. Flowering rush monopolizes all places in the river with a soft bottom and water depth of less than 3 metres. That means that all along the shallower shorelines, in every nook and inlet along deeper shorelines, and all through large bays, flats, and channels, the plant grows densely. Given the irregular shoreline and many islands, there are miles and miles of flowering rush infested shoreline and hundreds and hundreds of acres of larger area coverage. Every year the plant marches farther downstream, on its way to the Wabaseemoong First Nation and then to Manitoba.

Given that the fishing tourist operations are concentrated in town, it's possible that the concentration of the terrible infestation downstream from town originated with a tourist's boat. Flowering rush is more and more evident upstream as well, however, and has been found in Lake of the Woods itself. It seems clear that it is only a matter of a short time until the infestation is established on the north end of Lake of the Woods and all down the Winnipeg River to Manitoba.

### Response So Far

Pete has described to us MNR's policy on invasive species in Ontario: the Province through MNR provides education and informational resources, but the job of species control and eradication is left to municipalities, other local government entities, and local community groups. We have discussed with Pete the mismatch of that policy with the flowering rush infestation in the Winnipeg River around Minaki. In unorganized territory there is no municipality. In unorganized territory there are no other governmental entities below the Province. There is in Minaki only a tiny town and a relatively small number of seasonal residents, faced with the overwhelming infestation of a plant for which there is no easy treatment.

As a result, the response to the flowering rush in Minaki so far has been (1) a focus by the Conservancy on information spreading and consciousness-raising, in cooperation with the much larger Lake of the Woods District Stewardship Association, and (2) individual property owner efforts to clear the plant from their own docks and related shorelines to allow boats to get through and to allow some swimming and other water-based recreation.

### Costs

We can now try to respond to your question regarding costs. As you can tell from the preceding paragraph, the out-of-pocket costs of response have been minimal -- some property owners buying cutting tools and rakes of various kinds.

Those costs aren't the issue. It's hard to describe how densely flowering rush grows, and how completely it displaces everything that was there before. In the Winnipeg River, running through the harsh granite of the Canadian Shield, that displacement happens exactly in a critical zone -- the shallower and softer-bottomed parts of a sharp and deep river system. That zone holds the life of the river; it's where the plants, the fish, the waterfowl, the wading and diving birds, the eagles, the amphibians, and the river mammals all grow, live, reproduce or feed. The issue, then, is the cost of the loss of the natural ecosystem of an entire river system, and the loss of the tourism economy that depends on it.

Of course, we don't have any numbers for that cost. If cost documentation is required as part of the needed governmental response, we expect that a scientific study of

flowering rush in the Winnipeg River and the infestation's costs of all kinds will be commissioned, and the Conservancy would be glad to contribute to that project.

Again, Mr. Bouchier, we are pleased to hear of your work on flowering rush. We have taken the opportunity of your question to let you and your colleagues know in a bit of detail what is happening on the Winnipeg River. The Conservancy, working with the Lake of the Woods District Stewardship Association, will be an active participant in all efforts to get the plant out of the Winnipeg River. What's clear, though, is that a major effort at the Provincial level or above will be required to reach that end.

Sincerely,

Caroline Josephson  
President, The Minaki Conservancy