

THE WEST ARM

ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND NORTHWEST CULTURE

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Experimental Lakes Area: 40 years of aquaculture

By Sarah Madussi

With restricted road access and limited public knowledge about what goes on at the Experimental Lakes Area, one might consider the ELA the Area 51 of Northwestern Ontario, all secrecy and myth. Set far off of Hwy 17 and out of the public eye, gossip and misconceptions have grown over the years.

In reality, fresh water lakes and fish preservation are the ultimate goals. Since the late 1960s, the ELA has been working with the 58 lakes in the area to determine man's effect on nature and how to preserve aquatic wildlife, from Zooplankton to Lake Trout.

In efforts to stem any rumours, the ELA has been giving public tours to give people a sense of the importance of the ELA and a comprehensive guide to the experiments.

Residents of Dryden and Vermilion Bay were given such a tour on Oct. 3 to get a look inside the operation. This year marks the 40th year of the ELA and a recovery

year for many of the lakes in the area.

Lori Tate, a fisheries biologist and Ray Hesslein, a retired research scientist, showed the group a fish farm experiment, now in the recovery stage, and explaining how it worked as well as the impact their findings could have on wild fisheries.

"This experiment on fish farming gives us a better understanding of the impact of a farm on the ecosystem. We have to do these experiments because if we want to continue eating fish, we will have to farm them. The wild fisheries can't keep up, they can't withstand it," says Hesslein.

Though this is just one of many experiments, they don't use all 58 lakes at once. Most lakes are what the locals call reference lakes, undisturbed bodies of water that are monitored so when the experimental lakes are in recovery, they have a reference point.

To help facilitate these experiments, Greg Rickford, on behalf of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, announced \$850,000 in



Experimental Lakes Area visitor Jason Wall helps demonstrate a titration experiment done to determine how much oxygen is in the water in both the reference lakes as well as lakes being used for experiments. Photos by Sarah Madussi

funding to modernize a new laboratory, as part of the Economic Action Plan.

Mark Lyng, Operations Manager at the ELA, says there isn't enough space

to accommodate everyone in the current building, the only original building left on site.

"The new building will be about three times the original size with six work stations and will be hooked up with phone lines and Internet connections. Everyone is scattered around right now and they are limited to what they can do inside the old building."

All construction will be done locally, either through Dryden or Kenora to help create jobs in the area.

Alex Wall fisheries technician (no relation to person in upper photo), shows the group how to weigh, measure and tag a sucker caught in one of the reference lakes so they can track their movements and growth over the years.



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