



Save My Lake

Breakout Educational Network's Social Impact Evaluation

Can media affect social change?

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Save My Lake is a one-hour television documentary that set off alarm bells by revealing the science behind the ecological time bomb of algae that is infesting Lake Winnipeg, the world's 10th largest freshwater lake that sits at the heart of North America. Narrated by David Suzuki, it premiered on CBC's *The Nature of Things*.

When the film aired, it sent a shock-wave of concern through the province of Manitoba. It raised wide-spread public awareness and shone a light on the deep-seated fear that was lurking in the back of many people's minds about the deteriorating health of the lake and it's surrounding ecology.

"We had been talking about the issues on the lake for a number of years, and the scientists too, but Save My Lake was truly the messenger that finally got the message across."

-Karin Boyd, President for the Lake Winnipeg Foundation and MP for Victoria Beach

Breakout Educational Network is dedicated to using media to influence "policy you can see", and hence have undertaken to evaluate and understand the social impact *Save My Lake* has made since it's CBC television debut in Spring 2011.

Breakout is dedicated to understanding the underlying conditions for social change so that we can develop and implement best practices and become more effective change makers. We believe that media is the most effective tool for raising awareness, and want to continue to build our understanding of the elements and conditions that fuel public engagement, and build strong social movements.¹ One of our current focus areas is to increase awareness and education around the importance of watershed management which is why we chose this CBC licensed film, produced by one of our media partners, Stornaway Productions, for our case study.

This evaluation, was commissioned 18 months after *Save My Lake* was originally aired on CBC. We believe that our research provides an insightful overview of how media can influence social change, and provides evidence that funding media projects can have an effective return on investment.

We believe that this evaluation provides a good measurement for success, and provides a clear example of ***policy you can see***.

¹ The inspiration for this report and it's structure was taken from Brit Doc's [social impact evaluation](#) on the documentary film, *End of the Line*, directed by Rupert Murdoch, which investigates the potentially devastating impact overfishing is having on the world's oceans.

We hope the achievements of *Save My Lake* gives our funders the satisfaction of seeing real change happening, and as well provides organisations that are considering funding media projects the confidence that they too will experience wide reaching and long-term value and return on their investments. The value of course not only being the advancement of the organisation's social or ecological goals but also increasing the organisation's brand awareness which in turn can attract increased donations to the organisation. It is important to note that media projects, not only amplify awareness for important issues, but are often catalysts for triggering funding opportunities. For example participation in a film's campaign can allow organisations to not only go back to past donors or foundations but can sometimes open them up to new funding sources.

Breakout's goal is to continue to fuel the necessary policy changes and land-use practices that are critically needed to ensure the long-term health and wellness of the Lake Winnipeg Basin. Our research has revealed that the restoration and long-term preservation of the lake's Delta Marsh, and Netley-Libau Marsh are key factors to the regions health and wish to thank all the individuals who we have spoken to during the course of our evaluation as their input as been most valuable.

For the purposes of our evaluation we examined how the film has made impact in the following areas²:

1. Public Awareness
2. Consumer Attitudes and Behaviour
3. Corporate Policy
4. Political Action
5. Impact on NGO's and third-sector organisations

"It (*Save My Lake*) clearly stimulated people a lot more to pay attention to what is happening to our water and our lakes.....it is terribly important to let people know."

- Vicki Burns, Outreach Coordinator for the Lake Winnipeg Foundation

1. Public Awareness

Based on viewer feedback, we believe the high-quality story-telling and production values of *Save My Lake*, the prestige of CBC's *The Nature of Things* and the authoritative voice and influence of David Suzuki, an environmental scientist, all played significant roles in making *Save My Lake* a highly effective tool for raising

² the primary focus of this study is the impact it made within the province of Manitoba, where the film's subject matter has the most direct relevance to it's audience.

awareness for the issues in the film. We believe the other key factor behind the high level engagement is that all citizens of Manitoba are directly affected by the issues. No matter the demographic, Lake Winnipeg plays a significant role in people's lives, and holds special meaning for many people.

- National Broadcast - as of December, 2012 and since April 2011, *Save My Lake* has aired 8 separate times during two separate broadcast windows on CBC, reaching a national audience of over 5.3 million viewers. With regards to unique viewers, meaning viewers who were tuned in for the entire program, the film drew at least 1.5 million and has proved on-going relevancy to Canadian audiences by attracting the same number of unique viewers, more than a year after it premiered.
- Print and Online Digital platforms – with assistance from PR agency, Liberty Link, the release of the documentary received press coverage in both traditional and new media, including 5 feature articles ranging from Winnipeg Free Press to Selkirk Journal /Interlake Today (regional papers), online blogs and in NGO websites news links. A conservative estimate suggests awareness about the films issues reached approximately 590,000 people through feature news articles and online coverage.
- Radio - CJOB featured a radio interview³ with the films director, Paul Kemp. This interview was repeated numerous times.
- Educational & Non-broadcast Sales & Community Screenings – in the province of Manitoba, *Save My Lake* has been CBC Learning's top educational title for the last two years by over 200%. Buyers range from large school districts and public library systems which could reach a potential audience of 40,000 + to single schools that have a reach of 100 students. It has also been bought and screened by government offices, at community screenings and by a number of non-governmental organisations including the Lake Winnipeg Foundation and a number of Manitoba's Conservation Districts. It is not possible to know the exact number of unique views but we estimate the potential educational and community reach to be between 750,000 – 1 million viewers.
- International sales have been made in Finland, Spain and France⁴. The sale to France was to a satellite broadcaster with signals in 53 countries (mainly Africa).

For further details about the reach of print, online and radio audiences, please see Appendix A at the back of this report.

Community Engagement

³ Radio reach not known and not included in numbers

⁴ International reach or unique views has not been included in our final numbers.

- We believe that public awareness of the film grew organically through social media, because of highly relevant issues in the film. The blog “Progressive Winnipeg” covered the films airtimes and related public events as well as pushed broadcast dates and events on Facebook and proliferated interviews relevant to the film.
 - <http://progressivewinnipeg.blogspot.ca/p/save-my-lake.html>
- A google search reveals news articles, blogs and other websites, such as Ducks Unlimited and Victoria Beach Cottage Owners Association (VBCOA) helped to spread the word in the lead up to the broadcast. Social media networks such as Twitter were used as a click through to the documentary on CBC. Social media allowed those who don’t use traditional media to still access *Save My Lake* and immerse themselves in the issues.
- Erin Keating, Executive Director of the Lake Winnipeg Foundation, explained the celebrity effect of the film. *Save My Lake* created buzz and interest in the community not previously seen. It was able to impact the 18-35 demographic, creating interest in a previously disinterested group. She noted that momentum lasted with this film well over a year from it’s initial broadcast and “people are still talking about it.”
- Vicki Burns, Outreach Coordinator for the Lake Winnipeg Foundation, felt that the documentary really showed people the human impact of the problem. This film being on mainstream television made people pay attention. “*Stimulating a community is fundamental to making a difference and Save My Lake made this happen*”

The total reach across all media platforms we estimate 6.6 million Canadians have been made aware of the film and the issues it raised.

2. Consumer / Community Attitudes and Behaviour

“I am now seeing shops which display and carry lake-friendly non-phosphorus cleaning products, and are promoting them with special displays.”

--Karin Boyd, President of Lake Winnipeg Foundation

- Our research with local storeowners indicates that the largest demographic of consumers influenced to use lake-friendly products were the cottage owners in

- and around Lake Winnipeg and use the lake for recreational purposes. After the airing of the film, there was an increased demand for 'lake-friendly' products from consumers, however store-owners noted that the average full-time residents, which were from older demographics, seemed locked-in to 'non-lake friendly' products
- Storeowners mentioned that it was still challenging to provide a full range of lake-friendly products as their suppliers were finding it difficult to justify providing the stock based on lack of demand, and low profit margins. They noted that wider support was needed to provide 'lake-friendly' products. It is interesting to note that the *End of the Line* impact report revealed that many consumers wanted sustainably sourced fish but many shops and restaurants didn't know how to find sustainable suppliers. This identifies a resistance barrier that needs to be addressed by local organisations.

“Save My Lake connected people, connected the downstream users of the lake to what was going on in the broader watershed and that is so important.”

- Hank Vanema, VP of Science and Innovation,
International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

3. **Corporate Policy**

- A number of farmers have indicated that adopting more sustainable and 'lake-friendly' practises has helped them to increase their yield and to save money by reducing their use of herbicides and pesticides
- Sheldon McLeod, CEO of **Manitoba Environmental Industries Association (MEIA)**, confirmed that a large number of industries are starting to implement water resource policies and increasing their gains from implementing sustainable practices both from a savings perspective and a technology investment perspective
- **Manitoba Hydro** - while releasing a [public response](#) to *Save My Lake*, disputing some of the science depicted in the film, they privately acknowledged that the film inspired them to look more deeply at the impact their practices were having on Lake Winnipeg including erosion issues on shorelines and lake levels on marshes. Following the release of the film they have commissioned a number of scientific studies and produced a number of short videos aimed at educating the public with regards to Hydro's role in the local economy and it's environmental impacts and benefits for the province

- we've been told that the film helped to create public awareness and greater dialogue on corporate impacts and land-use practises on the lake. We were told by a number of sources that the film helped to catalyse the momentum for change that is being witnessed in industry

20% of North America's fresh water flows through Manitoba, and creating a system to capture it would not only provide better flood control it would also provide very valuable irrigation opportunities

- Doug Chorney, President of the Keystone Agricultural Producers

- Doug Chorney, President of the Keystone Agricultural Producers, came forward in October 2012, in an article in the [Manitoba Cooperator](#), a large agricultural publication to call for an end to unregulated drainage. He admitted that the drainage played a part in the 2011 flood. He acknowledged it wasn't an easy solution but that it was much better to tackle the problem with millions then pay billions cleaning up the next flood. This type of leadership in the agriculture industry shows a huge shift in mind-set and helps to create the environment for real change.

4. Political Action & Public Policy

From discussions with various individuals in local and provincial government, including a letter from the Premier's office, there is widespread acknowledgement that *Save My Lake* was a catalyst for public awareness which in turn has been mobilizing political action and policy change within the Manitoba government, in particularly with regards to land-use and watershed management.⁵

Municipal, Provincial and stakeholder policy is changing - because of the awareness and education component of Save My Lake there is more openness to change, and change in policy, and one of the key ones is going to be change in agricultural policy and understanding that ecosystems are important in policy direction as opposed to coming in as a lesser priority.

-Wayne Hildebrand, Senior Policy Advisor, Manitoba

- *Save My Lake*, first aired in April 2012 and in May 2012 the Federal Government began discussing continued support for Lake Winnipeg. In June, two months after the film aired the province of Manitoba passed the "Save Lake Winnipeg Act" (Bill 46) which was unanimously supported by all three political parties. The

⁵ There was a short 22 min grass-roots film called "What We Do Matters" produced for the Lake Friendly campaign which was circulating around the same time. It looked at the state of Lake Winnipeg and it's watershed and what can be done. It had limited distribution compared to *Save My Lake*

purpose of Bill 46 is to restore the health of Lake Winnipeg and its watershed. As the government had been involved with a number of initiatives including a scientific study on the health of Lake Winnipeg we cannot directly relate the passing of this bill to the documentary, however, a large number of individuals have said that, in their opinion, that the bill was fast-tracked due to a groundswell of support and the need for the appearance of political action

- Excerpt of letter from Manitoba Premier Selinger's Office:

"The efforts to protect Lake Winnipeg are ongoing in the Province of Manitoba.....Following the documentary our office received a handful of letters from the public specifically discussing the show. The public response to the Save Lake Winnipeg Act was also very positive.... It reaffirmed our strong commitment to protecting Lake Winnipeg and all bodies in Manitoba, and signaled all Manitobans care deeply about decreasing the flow of nutrients to the lake"

- Senator Janice Johnson wrote about her support of the film and its message on her website:

"This documentary is a key initiative to building public awareness of Lake Winnipeg's current environmental status and you can count on my support for any further initiatives you undertake regarding Lake Winnipeg."
- Senator Janice Johnson

- By August 2012, the federal government promised Lake Winnipeg \$18 million dollars to continue work. The funding was specifically allocated to improving water quality. This issue was a primary focus in *Save My Lake*.
- City of Winnipeg / Waste Water Management - like many municipalities Winnipeg has old single-system treatment facilities that process waste sewage and storm water in the same system. Upgrading urban water management systems can be very expensive and the City of Winnipeg has not taken a progressive approach to upgrading these. Our understanding is that *Save My Lake* helped to raise awareness for the level of apathy and the need to address the problems. Though there is some dispute over the best approach, the City of Winnipeg has begun preparations to upgrade 2 of its water treatment plants.
- In March 2008, the government had instituted *The Nutrient Management Regulation* under *The Water Protection Act*. The purpose of the regulation was to protect water quality by encouraging responsible nutrient planning and reducing or prohibiting usage. Nutrient management issues are a continuing issue and the film helped to bring the severity of the issue into greater public awareness and re-stimulate the provinces commitment to the issues. A number of individuals cited lack of enforcement and illegal draining as major issues, and have recommended that incentives would be a more successful route of working with

farmers to address the issues

This film, I believe, has helped boost political movements such as: The South Basin Mayors and Chiefs, The Save Lake Winnipeg Act, Lake Winnipeg Basin fund, and Manitoba Nutrient Management Regulations. Many rural municipality councilors are also finding ways can reduce their nutrient inputs.

Armand Belanger, East Interlake Conservation District Manager, Manitoba

- Conversations with individuals involved with NGO's working on water quality issues in Manitoba have stated that Bill 54 "lacks teeth". A number of organisations don't believe that the proposed laws will make a significant difference in the face of the current challenges. Here are a few laws proposed and why the legislation is considered⁶ to be ineffective:
 - a. Peat-moss Leases and Licenses – the act halts leasing land for peat moss mining, but does not halt the issuing of mining licenses. Many leases have already been granted, and lease holders are now rushing to apply for mining licenses so they will be grandfathered in the event of further legislation
 - b. Wetland Protection – Bill 54 calls to protect wetlands, which is an important factor in reducing nutrient loads in the provinces water systems, however the legislation is limited to wetlands on Crown land and is not sufficient to address adequately address the issues
 - c. Hog farm moratorium – companies are not allowed to expand their operations without permission; this moratorium was apparently already in place but does not call for any change in effluence management.
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In order to transform the way water is managed you need a shared common vision and that has to go from school kids to the CEO."

- *Hank Venema, VP of Science and Innovation,
International Institute for Sustainable Development*

Some of the recurring discussion points that continued to be brought up was the need for both public awareness, political will and grass-roots action. Many believed that good policy and legislation was essential but that a much more effective approach was

⁶ this information was gathered through several conversations and is meant as a few examples of how the legislation lacks rigor

educating landowners and individuals, and in the case of landowners, providing them with incentives to do the right thing.

6. Impact on Non-Governmental Organisations

As was experienced by the non-governmental organizations that were involved with *End of the Line*, local organisations found that the film enabled them to reach out to the community and engage them in the issues and their organizations in unprecedented ways.

Armand Belanger, the Manager for the East-Interlake Conservation District noted that *Save My Lake* helped promote the need for NGO's and stakeholder groups to reach out to all sectors of the community and work at providing alternative choices to current practices and activities that effect Lake Winnipeg

Hank Venema, Vice President of Science and Innovation at the International Institute for Sustainable Development, spoke about the documentaries ability to simplify complex scientific issues for the average person. "*Society needs to understand the issues to make change and this film brought many groups of people together to do just that*"

Many of the groups emphasized how important it is to continue to produce documentaries and to educate people through film.

There has been talk about using the wetlands to protect water quality but the film made everyone sit up and take it seriously.

- Karin Boyd, President, Lake Winnipeg Foundation

Lake Winnipeg Foundation

- Erin Keating, then Executive Director, said "for individuals under the age of 30, it is very important to use film to be able to motivate them to understand what is going on with their lake and then to try and to do something about it."
- Karin Boyd, President, acknowledged, "we haven't had a significant increase in membership as people don't necessarily want to belong to things but there has been a steady increase in donations⁷ since *Save My Lake* aired. One local summer resident has even stepped up to the plate and has started a fundraising drive. The 1st year he raised \$25,000 and last year about \$30,000."

⁷ It is hard to know what other factors played a role in increasing the cashflow of The Lake Winnipeg Foundation, but it is interesting to note that when the film aired the foundation was run on a volunteer basis and in 2012 it is run by 2 part-time staff.

- Due to the increase in awareness about the issues, LWF found that government officials and influential groups were more open and willing to meet with them to discuss their concerns for the lake
- The film has assisted local stakeholders to work more closely together on joint issues. For example, the Lake Winnipeg Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association are coming together to launch a campaign entitled “Keep Water on the Land. “We have requested a meeting with the provincial government caucus to start. We will be presenting a common message – the value of wetlands for flood mitigation, drought mitigation and water quality benefits. Our goal is to educate and persuade the government that it is important to invest significant amounts in protecting existing wetlands and reconstructing wetland areas through a strategic plan and effort

Ducks Unlimited

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is a leader in wetland conservation. A registered charity, DUC partners with government, industry, non-profit organizations and landowners to conserve wetlands that are critical to waterfowl, wildlife and the environment.

Natural ecosystems, such as wetlands, are our best defense to the impacts of weather extremes, our fight against climate change and to help clean up our precious water resources, and the sooner we learn that we need to protect these natural assets the better off we will be in the long term.... The bottom line is that wetland protection is one of the best investments that governments can make...The solution lies with Manitobans.

-from Ducks Unlimited report on Bill 46 (Save Lake Winnipeg Act)

After the film aired, Stornoway received numerous congratulatory emails from individuals associated with Ducks Unlimited. “Congratulations on producing a landmark program addressing one of the most important environmental issues in North America”. Ducks Unlimited communications officer said “you have really helped to communicate to the public why we do what we do”. As a result of including Ducks Unlimited experts and scientists, in *Save My Lake*, Ducks Unlimited received follow up from journalists looking to report on the issues, creating a flurry of media attention for Ducks Unlimited.

Manitoba Conservation Districts Association

The Manitoba Districts Association is made up of 18 Conservation districts including more than 130 municipalities. Part of their mandate is to educate and promote the understanding and value of strong watershed-based programming to public and private partners and to advocate and champion healthy and sustainable watershed

management and stewardship. A number of the Conservation Districts actively promoted the film and used it as a tool to educate and create public dialogue. Inspired by the Nature of Things involvement with Save My Lake, the MCDA invited David Suzuki to be the keynote speaker at the Conservation Districts Annual Conference. The David Suzuki event, which was a ticketed event, was sold out and helped to draw over 1000 individuals to the conference, a 30% increase over 2011 attendance. This not only helped build awareness for their work but helped to generate income. The majority of the MCDA's annual operating costs is generated by the conference. David Suzuki himself used the event to promote a new initiative of the Suzuki Foundation, [“The Right to a Healthy Environment”](#) which he [calls to be enshrined](#) in the Canadian constitution.

People have begun to wake up to the idea that the oceans are threatened, but maybe it's time to start thinking about the fresh water and the watersheds of our country, too.

- Paul Kemp, President, Stornoway Productions

As a company Breakout Educational Network's mission is to use media to create “policy you can see”, and so this report was undertaken to understand: how our work is creating impact and influencing policy, what are the underlying conditions for social change, and what resistances block change. We are committed to developing best practices and to become more effective change makers.

We hope you find this report as useful as we did, and invite feedback.

“Momentum is the key to continued change, and media is the vehicle”

-JoAnne Fishburn, Impact Producer, Breakout Educational Network

APPENDIX A
NEWS & PRESS COVERAGE

Traditional Media:

- 1) [Winnipeg Free Press](#) - Winnipeg daily newspaper

Print Newspaper Circulation:

107,608 daily circulation

145,228 Saturday in 2011

Online:

Regularly attracts 120,000 to 150,000 unique visitors each weekday with about 500,000 daily page views

[Losing The Lake](#), By: Brad Oswald - print and online edition - 04/02/11
David Suzuki narrates CBC documentary on the failing health of Manitoba's freshwater jewel and its global implications

Social network activity - 184 on-site shares; 122 Facebook shares; 17 tweets

[Preaching Against Green Guck](#), By Gabriel Giroday - print and online - 5/23/12

Social network activity⁸ - 174 on-site shares; 140 Facebook shares; 8 tweets ; 9 on-site comments.

Comment highlight:

“There are a finite number of water sources feeding into Lake Winnipeg...including the Red & Assiniboine Rivers among others. It would be interesting to track the nitrogen and phosphorous content of these water sources at a location just before they enter the lake, and of course at various locations back upstream...”

‘Working Ant’ posted 5/23/12

⁸ For a greater perspective one could compare social networking activity on this article vs. other Winnipeg Free Press Articles

- 2) [Uptown Magazine](#) - Winnipeg weekly magazine

Weekly Print Circulation: 188, 700 issues read every month

On-line: 1,000+ page views daily

(TBC as also had weekly magazine distribution at 17,000)

[What's wrong with Lake Winnipeg?](#) By: Marlo Campbell - 04/10/11

'New documentary explores the troubles facing our biggest freshwater body'

- 3) [The Manitoban](#) - University of Manitoba Student Newspaper

[Saving Lake Winnipeg](#) By Noreen Mae Ritsema - 03/08/11

Newspaper Circulation: 10,000 September - April, 5,000 July - Aug

- 4) [Selkirk Journal/ Interlake Today](#) - Regional Newspapers near Lake Winnipeg

[Lake documentary to premiere March 17](#) by Staff - 03/16/11

Circulation: 18,100 weekly, online 21,000 monthly

Radio

[CJOB Radio](#) - Winnipeg Radio station

[Feature interview](#) with Producer Paul Kemp on "The Nighthawk" with Geoff Currier - 04/02/11

Listenership: the most listened to radio station in Manitoba with a reach of approximately 5 million/month

Blogs and Website References

In addition to traditional media, 'Save My Lake' received numerous mentions on a variety of websites and blogs, including scientific and NGO sites, community-based blogs and blogs and news sections of politicians.

- 1) [Website](#) of **Senator Janis G. Johnson - Senate of Canada**

[Current State of the Lake](#) - 01/08/11

- 2) [Website](#) of **Ducks Unlimited Canada**

[CBC documentary highlights DUC research](#) - 03/30/11

In addition to being available on the website, this release was also emailed to all Ducks Unlimited Canada staff and volunteers, and went out to members through the DUC newsletter.

- 3) [Website](#) of **Our Living Waters** - 04/05/11

[Save My Lake](#) Guest article by Paul Kemp

Our *Living Waters* is the blog for Canada Water Week (CWW). In April 2011, CWW issued a release announcing the premiere of the documentary on CBC

Sample Comment on article:

These are scary facts Paul. Thanks for shining a light on these problems and encouraging us all to get involved in finding the solutions.

Posted by Tim Morris, April 6, 2011

- 4) **Blog** of Muriel Lake Basin Management Society – 01/04/11 / [Save My Lake Documentary created for Lake Winnipeg](#)
- 5) **Blog** H2O Ideas and Actions for Canada's Water by Vicki Burns – Outreach Coordinator for Lake Winnipeg Foundation. She is very prolific and working with LWF to continue the momentum built by *Save My Lake*
- 6) **Blog** of Progressive Winnipeg, Graham Natiuk, ['Save My Lake'](#)
- 7) **Blog:** Mrs Brandy Nicholson – Middle School Teacher & Librarian Henry G Izatt Middle School

It brings the message about water pollution and it really hits home for those students as many of them spend time at Winnipeg Beach each summer and have witnessed first the symptoms of the ailing lake first hand.

Brandy Nicholson, Librarian Henry G Izatt Middle School

Mrs Nicholson has promoted the documentary to students involved in projects that are focused on water issues. She believes the students that view it find it informative and interesting:

Library Website: <http://libraryhgi.weebly.com/>

Library Twitter Feed: <http://twitter.com/hgilibrary>

Library Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/HGILibrary>

- 8) **Website and blog** - Victoria Beach Cottage Owners Association PreservingVictoriabeach – [CBC's The Nature of Things](#)

These 8 examples show how word of mouth and online engagement helps to increase audiences for the television broadcasts and drive discussion, awareness, and education for the issues raised in the film.