

## **Presentation to Leduc County Council, July 7, 2015**

Good afternoon, Mayor Whaley and Councillors. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a presentation to your council.

My name is Don Davidson and I must admit I have a passion for Pigeon Lake. Today I want to share some good news about Pigeon Lake; I want to talk about victories.

Pigeon Lake has recently had many victories. We have successfully eradicated the Himalayan Balsam from the shoreline of the lake. It was five years ago when Heather Dichau and a team from Leduc County helped kick off the program to eradicate this prohibited noxious weed from the watershed. I must say that at that time I didn't know the difference between a noxious weed and an obnoxious one. But in the last five years, with everyone pulling together, we managed to achieve this great victory. Hopefully this summer, we can complete the program and get all of these weeds out of the watershed!

Another important victory we have achieved is getting Alberta Health Services to change the protocol of issuing health advisories for blue-green algae. What was happening was an advisory would be issued when blue-green algae bloom was seen in the lake along with the warning to not go in the water. The press would sensationalize this advisory with the obvious result that Albertans were becoming fearful of Alberta's lakes - over something that is a naturally occurring substance. A submission was made to AHS to suggest that the protocol be changed to one based on "education, caution and self-responsibility." This year, AHS has changed its advisories to include a risk assessment. Now, when an advisory is issued, it recommends caution on entering the water when blooms are visible but – and this is very important – it explains that swimming is safe when blooms are not present. This completely changes the message and is a true victory for our lake.

But I am here to speak on another victory we are achieving. That is the eliminating of lawn fertilizers from the area around Pigeon Lake. We all know nutrients are the main cause of algae blooms. Improper sewage handling practices, septic fields, excessive use of fertilizers, and destruction of the riparian areas all contribute to algae growth, and at Pigeon Lake, we are working hard to reduce the impact of these. But getting rid of lawn fertilizers for areas adjacent to the lake is, in the words of the Alberta Lake Management Society, is a "no brainer"!

The Pigeon Lake Management Plan committee, which is well attended by members of Leduc County: Glenn Belozer, Nicholas Moffat and Kim Barkwell, has recommended that lawn fertilizers not be used in the riparian area for the specific reason of protecting water quality. A survey that was done showed that approximately 80 % of the respondents wanted regulation for fertilizers. Another survey conducted by the County of Wetaskiwin showed an astounding

93% of its residents wanted lawn fertilizers regulated near water bodies. The Alliance of Pigeon Lake Municipalities also passed a resolution in support of getting rid of lawn fertilizers.

Last year there were only three municipalities with fertilizer bylaws. Now, a total of six have passed bylaws, one municipality is in second reading, and two others are in review. This is 75% of the municipalities around Pigeon Lake, which are acting on the wishes of their residents and taking responsible action to protect our lake. While this is truly astounding, it is not quite yet a victory.

We want people around the lake to understand and remember the catch phrase “Green lawns, green lake!” We just do not need city lawns at the lake. So I am here today to encourage the Leduc council to pass a bylaw to prohibit fertilizers at Pigeon Lake and other lakes in your county.

I want to address a few concerns which always come up:

1. **How can we enforce this bylaw?** I feel that this is somewhat of a red herring. The very fact that a bylaw exists demonstrates the commitment of the municipality to having a healthy lake. Peer pressure itself will be the biggest enforcer. Last weekend, a resident of Grandview came knocking at my door to tell me that a landscaper was breaking our bylaw. And then she went on to tell my how she had stopped and challenged him on his actions. He sheepishly stopped!
2. **How close to the lake should the restrictions be?** I feel that 800 metres would be the recommended distance for a couple of reasons. At distances less than 800 metres, the drainage ditches that we have installed quickly transport the runoff to the lake, and this would be a safe distance. But the main reason would be that you don't want to split a community with half being restricted and the other half doing their own thing. From the surveys, most people are committed to this program. And remember I am only speaking about lawn fertilizers.
3. **Not many people are fertilizing now:** If this were true, then it wouldn't be much of an inconvenience to the remaining few. But this isn't true. As the complexion of our lake community changes, many city houses are being build and with them come city lawns, and also the landscapers with their chemicals. At Grandview, we have written letters to the landscapers advising them of the bylaw's restrictions.
4. **It won't really make a difference:** Every little bit will help, but in my opinion, the biggest impacts will be the demonstration that the municipality is taking action, and if all municipalities can show that they are working together to protect the lake, it would certainly be a victory for our lake. Can you imagine seeing the headline in the *Edmonton Journal* reporting that all Pigeon Lake municipalities are working together to protect the lake, rather than headlines showing a big algae scum!

5. **Phosphates have been eliminated from lawn fertilizers:** While this is true, any nutrients entering the lake from unnatural sources are not good. They all contribute to the greening of lakes. We don't want our lake filled with weeds!
6. **The bylaw will be too complicated:** My recommendation is to keep the terms of the bylaw simple, easy to understand, and without a big process for enforcement. As I said, peer pressure will be your biggest enforcer.
7. **How do I maintain my lawn?** There are many practices such as over-seeding, that can be used to create a healthy lawn. The PLWA provides advice in this regard.

On the overhead I have an example of the fertilizer/herbicide bylaw from the Summer Village of Grandview. This bylaw is the first in Alberta to prohibit lawn herbicides and was passed in response to concerns raised by our residents and as recommended by the Canadian Cancer Society. Also shown is the sign we have posted to advise that we are protecting our lake.

My purpose today is to recommend only a fertilizer bylaw, but I mention the herbicide information to emphasize the will of the residents to be environmental stewards of our lake.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope you will give this recommendation your earliest attention and soon we will be celebrating another victory for Pigeon Lake! I feel that if the counties come on board, the remaining summer villages will also reconsider this initiative.

Don Davidson

Mayor, Summer Village of Grandview

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