

Greatness

An Ontario 150 Celebration of the Great Lakes

Ontario's shimmering necklace of Great Lakes is mother to us all, of our lives and of our livelihoods. *Greatness* is an initiative to bring tens of thousands of Ontarians into a grand celebration of the Great Lakes and the sixth of the world's accessible fresh water they embrace. It is an undertaking by indigenous and non-indigenous partners, including to date Nibi-Emosaawdamajig (Those Who Walk for the Water), Ecologos Water Docs, Waterlution and Trent University's Indigenous Studies Departments. Other organizations are seeking to join this unique partnership.

Most of all, *Greatness* is an act of reconciliation and respect for those who have kept faith with the Great Lakes even when most had forgotten. And it is a demonstration of how indigenous and non-indigenous people will work together in common accomplishment and mutual respect during the next 150 years of Ontario's history.

Greatness is a necklace of four mutually-energizing projects:

- ∞ *Greatness*: The World Water Day Launch
- ∞ *Greatness*: The Great Lakes Student Rally
- ∞ *Greatness*: The Great Lakes Sacred Water Walk
- ∞ *Greatness*: The Great Lakes Youth Initiative

The World Water Day *Greatness* Launch

What better way to launch *Greatness* than on the 25th Anniversary of World Water Day and the Opening Night of the 6th annual Water Docs Film Festival, March 22, 2017. World Water Day was instituted by the United Nations to raise global awareness and action to address serious water issues worldwide. The Water Docs Film Festival is a shining celebration of water in all its dimensions in our lives. It features superb water-themed documentary films, animated discussion and community learning, hands-on interactive and art exhibits, and opportunities to take action. Its mission is to evoke a sense of reverence for water, inform about threats that imperil water, and inspire citizen action to protect water.

The World Water Day *Greatness* Launch will be a grand celebration of Ontario 150 and the intrinsic connection between Ontario and the Great Lakes. It will feature :

- ∞ Inauguration of the *Greatness* necklace of programs through an indigenous water blessing ceremony. Each of the four programs will be described and the audience invited to participate.
- ∞ A special invitation will be made to participate in the Sacred Water Walk to be led by Grandmother Josephine Mandamin the following summer.
- ∞ A fine feature documentary on an Ontario water theme.
- ∞ Prize winners of the Ontario Waterways Documentary Films Challenge will be announced. The Challenge is in two categories – for young and emerging filmmakers and for established filmmakers – and will focus on Ontario subjects and/or be created by Ontario filmmakers.
- ∞ The inspiring culmination of the event will be a formal declaration of the City of Toronto as a Blue Community, a distinction with real teeth for protecting water on a city-wide basis.

Greatness: The Great Lakes Student Rally

A wonderful Great Lakes Student Rally will take place on May 25, 2017. Hundreds of grade 7 and 8 students from around Ontario will join fellow students who have been intensely engaged in the Water Docs @ School program (WD@S) in their classrooms. WD@S unfolds in each classroom from September to May beginning with an in-depth study of the Great Lakes and the class's home watershed followed by a hands-on water-protection project. Projects have focused on conservation such as "The 21 Day Challenge" by an inner-city Toronto class, on preventing pollution such as the suburban GTA project called "Kids Against Road Salt", or on mitigation of violent weather events such as "Porous Pavements" by a class in a large regional city. In tandem with their action projects, classes create a documentary (and social media campaign) for the issue they are addressing. Finally each year, all participating classes gather for an inspiring Student Recognition Day where their films are shown and celebrated with prizes for the best action projects and the best films.

WD@S is a partnership project between Ecologos Water Docs and Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF). It has so far engaged 100 classes over four school years and inspired 2200 young people to see themselves as knowledgeable *Water Keepers for Life*. The project is lauded by teachers and parents for instilling a deep caring for the environment, and for developing skills of leadership, team and coalition building, project planning and management, filmmaking and storytelling.

The Great Lakes Student Rally will draw hundreds of students into a powerful awareness of the Great Lakes and their integral importance to Ontario and our way of life. It will also create momentum for a huge jump in WD@S registrations during Ontario 150 – jumping up to 150 classes in the single school year 2017/2018. A special initiative will expand the program to French-speaking and indigenous classes.

The Rally will feature:

- ∞ Opening with an indigenous water ceremony to bless the Great Lakes.
- ∞ An interactive presentation on 'The State of the Great Lakes'.
- ∞ A celebration of the Great Lakes in song, dance and spoken word presented by a team of indigenous and non-indigenous students.
- ∞ Screening of the winning WD@S films from the school year just concluding, and presentation of prizes.
- ∞ Inspiring calls to action by TVO's The Water Brothers and the amazing teenage Water Warrior, Robyn Hamlyn.

Greatness: The Great Lakes Sacred Water Walk

From time immemorial, the original peoples of Ontario held the Great Lakes as a sacred gift to be cherished and revered. They are not alone in this attitude. The antiquities of every culture that came to join Ontario's mosaic reveal a deep connection between water and the sacred, which should make honouring the Great Lakes obvious and essential. Sadly this is not so. Cut off from our lakes and rivers in frenetic urban enclaves and a culture of entitlement, we have forgotten. A remembering is badly needed.

In First Nations culture, women hold primary responsibility to protect the water. In 2003, a modest Anishinabek Elder from Thunder Bay decided to demonstrate this responsibility in an extraordinary way. "Josephine Mandamin grew up on Manitoulin Island eating fresh fish and drinking straight from Georgian Bay. During her lifetime, she has seen the Great Lakes nearly ruined – the fish killed by invasive species, the harbours poisoned and the water evaporating into the clouds of global warming. So, in 2003, when she was 'moved by the spirits', it was natural for her to pick up her copper pail and start walking, encircling Lake Superior and telling the people that 'the water is sick ... and people need to really fight for that water, to speak for that water, to love that water.'" [Toronto Star]. At every tributary Mandamin stopped and talked directly to the water, offering prayers, tobacco and thanks. In subsequent summers, the 17,000 km circling of all five Great Lakes was completed.

Since then, indigenous women have led Sacred Water Walks around many Ontario lakes and rivers, mostly engaging small bands of indigenous and non-indigenous people who recognize the power of this symbolic act. The Great Lakes Sacred Water Walk seeks to engage the many thousands of walkers needed to have a meaningful impact on the awareness of Ontarians. It is a full-day walk across the shorefront of Lake Ontario from the mouths of the Credit and Humber Rivers to a point on the central Toronto waterfront to be joined at that point by walkers coming from the mouths of the Rouge and Don Rivers in the east.

Early of a mid-summer morning, citizens will gather at the mouths of the Credit and Rouge Rivers for a blessing of those historic Ontario rivers. Their waters will then be carried on the first leg of the Water Walk to reach the Humber and Don Rivers respectively by mid-day. Some will join for stretches. Others will go the distance. Many will walk but others are invited to use any means that encourages them to participate – canoes, boats, bicycles, roller blades. Early the next morning, gatherings Mid-day gatherings at the mouths of the Humber and Don Rivers will bless those two rivers, followed by a continuation of the Water Walk toward a meeting place on the central Toronto waterfront, proposed as Ontario Place. Intense tracking of this extraordinary journey by social and conventional media over two days will swell public attention and draw thousands to the central meeting place to join in a beautiful early evening celebration.

Grandmother Josephine will lead these thousands in a blessing of the Great Lakes. She will be joined in this ceremony by the Cardinal Archbishop of Toronto and symbolic leaders of the Protestant, Baha'i, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Sikh, Taoist and Zoroastrian faiths. Following the ceremony, each faith will offer a traditional presentation – song, dance, spoken word – that reflects its love and respect for water.

Greatness: The Great Lakes Youth Initiative

In tandem with the Great Lakes Sacred Water Walk, a special initiative will take place to involve very large numbers of youth. Indigenous and non-indigenous youth organizations will be engaged and a joint team formed as a steering committee. The committee will be led by four dynamic university students, indigenous and non-indigenous, employed through a government-sponsored summer jobs program for university students.

- ∞ On the day before the Sacred Water Walk, four teams of youth will assemble as large work parties. The teams will clean especially polluted locations on the Credit, Humber, Don and Rouge Rivers. Each of the four work activities will commence with an indigenous water blessing.
- ∞ A primary objective of this initiative is to engage hundreds of youth in the Great Lakes Sacred Water Walk so they can experience the power of this ceremonial activity and deeply internalize the significance of the Great Lakes in our lives.
- ∞ On the day following the Sacred Water Walk, an Ontario 150 Great Lakes Youth Summit will take place. Indigenous and non-indigenous youth will explore how they can work together going forward. Specific projects to protect the Great Lakes and their watersheds will be defined and practical work plans created. It is intended that this Great Lakes Youth Summit become an annual activity, always coupled with sacred water walking.