



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **A drought in environmental education offers opportunities for local innovation**

#### **NEW REPORT: WHALES IN LAKE SIMCOE? GOING BEHIND YOUTH EDUCATION about Lake Simcoe and the Lake Simcoe Watershed.**

Lake Simcoe's Ladies of the Lake have turned their dismal, just-released report card on the state of environmental education in the Lake Simcoe watershed into a beacon of hope for the future. On May 5, 2007 at their first Annual Meeting, the 100-strong champions for the health of ailing Lake Simcoe released a startling report about what kids are learning about the environment in general and Lake Simcoe in particular. But they are countering the gloomy news with practical suggestions for improvement.

Ladies of the Lake Co-founder Annabel Slight says, "Our report was named for a 2006 Toronto Star headline - "Some kids expect whales in Lake Simcoe." That was an indicator of how disconnected kids are from nature. But it also speaks of our collective responsibility to help our youth keep their sense of wonder about the mystery and magic of nature as we help learn the science of the world."

The 20-page research scan was commissioned by the Ladies of the Lake to take the pulse of the evolution of education in the Lake Simcoe watershed given the specific health issues that the Lake and Watershed are facing. The report looked at formal, non-formal, and non-formal education in York, Durham and Simcoe County. The idea for the research grew out of last summer's **Naked Truth Citizens' Action Plan for Lake Simcoe** - a joint venture of the Ladies of the Lake, the Windfall Ecology Centre and 300 residents of the Lake area.

"Just as nature is ever-changing, so environmental education must continually evolve," says Hilary Van Welter, Chair of the Windfall Ecology Centre, one of the editors of the report. "Innovative education is increasingly critical given the current state of our environmental health".

Goody Gerner, Chair of the Ladies of the Lake Education Committee, says "the report indicates a very clear need for more comprehensive, locally-focused environmental education for the youth in the Lake Simcoe/Watershed area".

The Report contains a number of possible directions for environmental education, which not only deal in scientific content, but in local context and human creativity. The Report recommends that youth be seen as the champions of the environment, which means adults learn from youth as much as youth learn from adults; the education needs to restore a sense of meaning and connection to all inhabitants in the eco-system; that curiosity and enquiry needs to be stimulated through multi-sensory ways; and that finally, we must look to nature as a mentor and muse for human creativity.

The Ladies of the Lake are not going to stop here. They have seen the need to mobilize real change and are committed to working on creating a vehicle to bring together youth and adults to co-create a way forward – be it a conference or an actual physical centre. Lake Simcoe and its Watershed is a diverse and large area, but it is, as well, a controllable and manageable area that could set the pace as a vanguard for integrated, place-based environmental education in Ontario. This Research Paper can be *the* rallying cry to take environmental education to a level that doesn't only educate but actually innovatively deals with the issues.

[www.lakeladies.ca](http://www.lakeladies.ca)

Ladies of the Lake is a not for profit group of over 100 women who are championing a healthy Lake Simcoe and Watershed. Their mandate is to give voice to all people who love Lake Simcoe and to bridge the gap between what governments can do and what everyone can do to help the Lake. The research report is their third project. The first was a "cheeky but not cheesy" photographic calendar that raised a quarter million dollars; the second, with the Windfall Ecology Centre, rallied hundreds of citizens to create **the Naked Truth Citizens' Action Plan to Save Lake Simcoe**.