

The Honorable Keith Ashfield
Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

June 13, 2012

Dear Minister Ashfield,

The below-signed professional scientific associations would like to express our concern about and appeal the Government of Canada's decision to permanently close the Experimental Lake Area (ELA) of Ontario announced on May 17, 2012. The global aquatic and ecological communities are genuinely concerned about the impact closure of ELA will have on the strong and creative science that has been, and continues to be, conducted by Canadian freshwater researchers.

With 4,000 members worldwide (~250 from Canada), the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) is the largest society of aquatic scientists in the world. Over the past decade ASLO has held four conferences in Canada and the editorial offices of two ASLO publications are located in Canada. The Ecological Society of America (ESA) is the world's largest organization of professional ecologists with 10,000 members, a significant number of which are aquatic scientists. Over 400 ESA members reside in Canada and one of the Society's largest conferences was held in Montreal. The Society of Canadian Limnologists represents ~125 aquatic scientists across Canada. The International Society of Limnology (SIL) comprises three thousand freshwater scientists, in around seventy countries, and has an active and substantial membership in Canada, where its triennial congress was held in 2007. The Society for Freshwater Science (SFS) is an international scientific organization whose purpose is to promote further understanding of freshwater ecosystems and ecosystems at the interface between aquatic and terrestrial habitats; SFS has 115 members residing in Canada.

ELA has been a cornerstone facility for the study of inland waters. This unique research facility has been the genesis of several important whole ecosystem experiments that have completely changed the course of research in the discipline of limnology (inland water research). Results from these experiments have been instrumental in establishing public policy, including guidelines to protect freshwaters and reduce air pollution. One classic experiment that added phosphorus to a lake clearly demonstrated that this nutrient promotes algal growth, resulting in eutrophication that can cause fish kills. This experiment led directly to the reduction of phosphorus in detergents that has lessened eutrophication and improved the quality of freshwater ecosystems around the world. Another experiment demonstrated that the acidification of waters has several cascading negative repercussions on lake health. This work at ELA, combined with research in the United States, catalysed the development of the Clean Air Act. The subsequent reduction in sulphur emissions and the recovery of many lakes is hailed as one of the greatest environmental recovery stories.

The long-term monitoring at ELA has also made it possible to document subtle long-term trends of environmental change and distinguish them from natural variability. As it is one of the most studied freshwater ecosystems on the planet, the long-term data available for ELA is unique and irreplaceable in aiding our understanding not only of Canada's waters, but in elucidating the processes at work in freshwaters worldwide. The over 40 years of ELA research has also been instrumental in training generations of aquatic scientists.

People rely on freshwater resources and the many services these ecosystems provide. Facilities like ELA are essential to help researchers understand how these systems work and identify the factors that threaten their long-term sustainability. Scientific research in the environmental sciences is not an impingement on economic progress but rather is an essential part of it. We must protect the resources humanity relies on, freshwater being among our most basic needs.

We therefore request that the Government of Canada repeal its decision to close ELA and commit to sustaining this critical research facility established to help protect inland waters, a critical resource to all of society.

Respectfully,

The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO)
The Ecological Society of America (ESA)
The International Society of Limnology (SIL)
The Society of Canadian Limnologists (SCL)
The Society for Freshwater Sciences (SFS)

Cc:

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister
The Honourable Peter Kent, Environmental Minister
The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada and the Official Opposition
The Honourable Bob Rae, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
The Honourable Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
The Honourable Dalton McGinty, Premier of Ontario, and
The Honourable Jim Bradley, Minister of The Environment for Ontario
The Honourable Michael Gravelle, Minister of Natural Resources