

# MEMPHREMAGOG CONSERVATION INCORPORATED: “SHOWING THE WAY TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION”

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In 2001, Memphremagog Conservation Incorporated (MCI) generously donated to the Eastern Township Research Centre (ETRC) a large number of documents and studies relating to Lake Memphremagog. Much of the source material donated relates to the organization's efforts directed at protecting the lake. Thanks to a grant from the Bélanger-Gardner Foundation, a year long project to organize over three decades of MCI history was carried out. MCI decided to archive this large collection in order to make publicly available its 35-year history of conservation activities. Indeed, the fonds, rich in history, is one of the largest within the ETRC archives collection.

## A Brief Introduction to MCI

In the early 1960s the environmental movement was on the rise, and with it came growing public awareness concerning the quality of the environment in and around Lake Memphremagog. In response to the increasing pollution problems and the appearance of “green slime” on the surface of Lake Memphremagog, three individuals from Georgeville—Gordon G. Kohl, Peter Kohl, and Herbert Mitchell—decided to take some much-needed action. They formed *Memphremagog Conservation* in 1967, a conservation organization to protect the lake. The association became incorporated the following year under the Quebec Companies Act. MCI (as it is more commonly known) is a non-profit organization that pursues the following objectives:

1. *To encourage responsible stewardship of the lake and its environs among those who live, work, and take their leisure at Lake Memphremagog;*

2. To lobby government authorities at the local, provincial and federal levels to enact and enforce legislation which protects and enhances the quality of life in and around the lake;
3. To take an active part in monitoring the quality of water in the lake and its tributaries, cleaning the shoreline, and protecting the region's flora and fauna;
4. To increase public awareness of issues affecting the environmental health and natural beauty of the lake and its environs.

To meet these objectives, the organization has financed a large number of studies through memberships and donations. MCI is also heavily involved in lobbying relevant sectors of the government on environmental issues that affect the Lake Memphremagog watershed. These activities are documented in the "Projects" section of the fonds, primarily in the form of reports (prepared by MCI and other organizations) and memoranda between MCI and government officials at the local provincial/state and federal levels in Canada and the US. This correspondence also includes international organizations such as the International Joint Commission (which is responsible for transboundary environmental issues between the two countries) and various conservation and environmental groups. These documents provide a rich source of information for researchers as well as MCI newsletters (figure 1). They have been mailed to individuals, companies, government agencies and other organizations for over 35 years. Yet another window into MCI's history is the minutes file which provides evidence regarding the concerns and priorities of the organization's board of directors, which meets several times a year, and those of the general public, who are invited to an annual general meeting held every August.

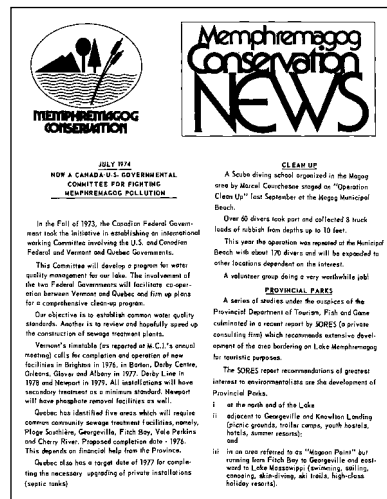


Figure 1. An early MCI newsletter (July 1974).

## A Brief Summary of MCI Projects

MCI's efforts have always focused on the improvement of environmental conditions within the Lake Memphremagog basin. One of its first priorities shortly after its founding in 1967 was the assess-

ment of water pollution problems and sources. Accordingly, water sampling has been undertaken every summer since and has indicated a general improvement in water quality since the dramatic appearance of “green slime” that concerned local residents in the 1960s; indeed, eutrophication and associated algal blooms were important justifications for the establishment of a conservation organization in the region. This is consistent with environmental activism throughout North America during this period leading up to and shortly after Earth Day 1970 and the establishment of integrated environmental agencies such as Environment Canada and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

As for sources of pollution, MCI has also participated in the development of anti-pollution by-laws that have been established by local governments throughout Quebec. Additionally, MCI devoted time, resources and energy during several of its early years to inspections of septic systems along the lake shore. In fact, the first training courses on sanitary inspections offered in Quebec during the early 1970s were given in partnership with MCI. The organization is also a founder of the “Federation of Association for the Protection of the Environment of Lakes of Quebec” (F.A.P.E.L) and has, since its beginning in 1975, continued to contribute to its activities. From these activities, one can see how water quality has been and still remains MCI’s primary concern.

It has not all been clear sailing, however, for MCI or Lake Memphremagog. One of the more significant obstacles to a clean environment was the threat of a US Department of Energy plan to bury nuclear waste in Northern Vermont (at the southern tip of the lake) in the early 1980s (Figure 2). Other concerns included proposals to establish a commercial, “Club-Med style” houseboat operation

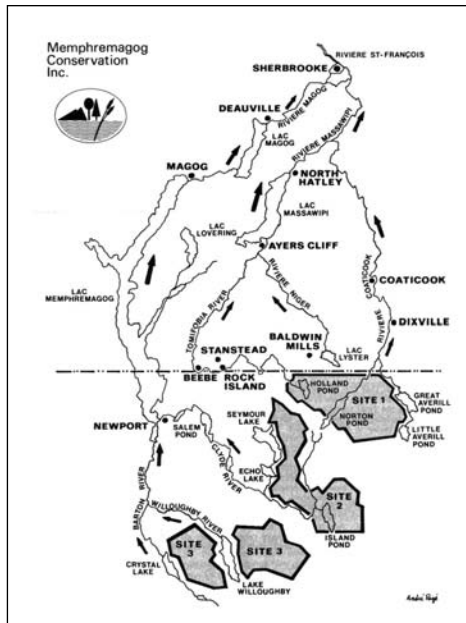


Figure 2. MCI had a deep concern and a firm opposition to a proposed nuclear waste disposal site. This map shows three of the potential Vermont sites.



*Figure 3. At a press conference, past Memphremagog Conservation Inc. leaders (left to right) Peter Weldon, Gisele Benoit, A.G.H. "Smokey" Sturton and Penny Baudinet outline their plans to fight the Three Buoys houseboat project (1985).<sup>2</sup>*

*Source: The Record, Tuesday February 4th, 1986, page 3.*

on Lake Memphremagog. More recently, the general improvement of water quality in the lake has led to other environmental impacts. In an MCI newsletter commemorating the organization's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary former President Roger Williams wrote, "Success of course, creates its own problems. The fact that Lake Memphremagog is now so clean makes it now even more attractive. And that brings us to the present. A healthy lake has brought in new homes, new recreational facilities, more tourists, more fishing boats, more leisure craft—in short, much more pressure on the lake and its environs."<sup>1</sup> For these very reasons, MCI has supervised, since 1972, an annual summer Lake Patrol (once called Youth Patrol).

### **A Description of the Memphremagog Conservation Inc. fonds**

The MCI fonds includes source material mainly related to the organization's focus on the improvement of the environmental conditions of Lake Memphremagog. Further, the fonds includes the organization's action against the proposed Vermont Nuclear Waste Disposal Project, a proposal to establish a commercial houseboat operation on the lake, and a project to sand Magog's municipal beaches, among many others. The fonds also highlights the organization's ongoing involvement with "Operation Clean Up" and the International Joint Commission. Countless water quality studies, public and private sanitary facility studies and descriptions of sim-

ilar projects being carried out by other conservation groups are also included in the fonds. The fonds provides notes and other information on the activities of specific individuals of the MCI board of directors, including: Gordon Kohl, Stewart Hopps, Jack Leslie, and John Lynch-Staunton to name a few. In general, the fonds demonstrates the organizations's participation in the improvement of the water quality of Lake Memphremagog, the cleanup and protection of the shore of the lake and its tributaries via the Lake Patrol, and in countering plans which pose a threat to the lake and its drainage basin. It is also a source of information on the relations between MCI and other environmental organizations.

The fonds includes newsletters, minutes books, letters of correspondence, videos, photos, financial statements, a financial ledger, newspaper clippings, speeches, photographs, slides, studies and publications, and many other documents that will hold the researcher's interest. It comprises the following series: Administration (1967–2001), Financial Resources (1968–1999), Public Relations (1968–1997), Municipalité Régionale de Comté (1970–1985), Youth Patrol (1972–1997), Projects (1968–1987), Water Studies (1968–1997), Pollution (1968–1988), Property Inspections and Legal Material (1968–1989), Publications & M.C.I Library (1971–1999), Organizations (1961–1989), Conferences (1975–1986), and Media (1960–1980).



Figure 4. McPherson Bay at Lake Memphremagog. (slide)

**NOTES**

- 1 ETRC Archives, Memphremagog Conservation Inc. fonds, Newsletters, P137/001.01/001.
- 2 ETRC Archives, Memphremagog Conservation Inc. fonds, Projects, P137/006.01/018