

April 11, 2013

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., B.A., M.A.
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A2

Re: A Final Plea for Prime Minister Harper to Save Canada's Experimental Lakes Area

Dear Prime Minister,

Last week, federal funding for Canada's world-renowned Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) came to an end after forty-five years. Canada's ELA was once a world-class science program dedicated to improving our understanding of the impacts of industry and other human activities on freshwater ecosystems. Through its unique, whole-ecosystem manipulation experiments and long-term ecological monitoring programs, ELA provided the best scientific evidence to guide the development of effective strategies to protect the health of Canada's freshwater lakes and fish populations. The ELA brought Canada to the very forefront of aquatic science worldwide, and was instrumental in the development of sound environmental policies and best management practices in our country and around the globe. In short, the imprudent decision by the Government of Canada to no longer support the ELA program is an international disgrace that seriously threatens the health of Canada's most essential resource – our freshwater. There are many things we can live without, but clean water is not one of them.

We first learned of the Government of Canada's decision to close the ELA research center on May 17, 2012¹. The ELA science team – a group of 17 freshwater scientists, chemists, biologists, and technicians employed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) at the Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba – was informed by Michelle Wheatley, DFO Regional Director of Science, that the ELA would be shut down in March 2013 and that no new research was allowed at the ELA that summer. ELA staff were warned not to speak to media, and given workforce adjustment letters stating their services may no longer be required. The nonsensical rationale provided was that the research conducted at the ELA was “no longer aligned” with this federal department's “core mandate” – a decision that DFO's own managers² and ministers³ had difficulty defending, let alone, explaining. This short-sighted decision was couched by the Government as a so-called “responsible management decision”⁴ under the guise of an austerity measure⁵.

Within days of this decision, concerned academic scientists – recognizing the enormity of what was at stake – quickly assembled themselves into an organization⁶ and drafted a petition for presentation in the House of Commons⁷. First released on May 23, 2012, the “Save ELA” petition called upon the federal government to “recognize the importance of the ELA to the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems; reverse the decision to close the ELA research station; and continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at the current, or higher, level of

commitment”. Supporters of the ELA quickly began mailing in stacks of petitions, and dozens of volunteers generously donated a great deal of their time, taking this petition door-to-door and to major events in their communities, as well as sorting petitions so they could be distributed in geographically-appropriate clusters to Members of Parliament across the country. Organizations – such as the Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations⁸, Boreal Forest Network⁹, Council of Canadians¹⁰, Sierra Club of Canada¹¹, Canadian Wildlife Federation¹², Lake Winnipeg Foundation¹³, Environment North¹⁴, Alberta Lake Management Society¹⁵, Lake of the Woods District Property Owners Association¹⁶, Grindstone Cottage Owners Association¹⁷, Soyers Lake Ratepayers Association¹⁸, Kenora’s ELA Support Group¹⁹, and many others – promoted the issue to its members and worked tirelessly collecting signatures for the Save ELA petition. To date, this petition has been signed by nearly 30,000 Canadians²⁰.

The freshwater science community in Canada was swift to chime in loudly to denounce the closure of the ELA. The President of the Society of Canadian Limnologists informed Minister Ashfield that “the aquatic science community of Canada is dismayed at your department’s abandoning of an internationally recognized research facility”²¹. The President of the Canadian Aquatic Resources Section of the American Fisheries Society said the loss of the ELA “would represent a major set-back to evidence-based conservation in Canada”²². The President of the Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists stated the closure of ELA “will greatly impact on Canada’s ability to protect its environment”²³. The Executive Director of the Water Institute at the University of Waterloo pointed out “there is no facility in Canada, or indeed the world, than can replace or duplicate the ELA”²⁴. The Entomological Society of Canada praised the ELA as “an incredible research facility that is unique to Canada” that has served as “a crucible for the training of highly qualified personnel”²⁵. The Directors of the Canadian Rivers Institute stated that the ELA “has a remarkable history of showing the impacts of human activities on water quality and fisheries, and of conducting science that is crucial to developing effective and economically sensible policies for protecting our natural resources”²⁶. A Canadian fisheries scientist, in a public plea for help from members of the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry, wrote that the ELA is “a field station that has generated outstanding science underpinning policies world-wide on nutrient enrichment, acid rain, metal toxicity, and endocrine disruptors, and which is currently hosting new experiments on ecological impacts of whole-lake treatments by nano-particles”²⁷. The Group for interuniversity research in limnology and aquatic environment (known as GRIL; Groupe de recherche interuniversitaire en limnologie et en environnement aquatique) believes that “the closure of ELA would have major consequences for the development of new knowledge in freshwater ecology, with detrimental implications for the management and environmental policies of these critical ecosystems to Canada”²⁸.

The strong disapproval by the scientific community for the Government’s decision to cancel funding for the ELA came not only from within Canada, but also from our U.S. neighbours, as well as from scientists around the world. An esteemed American scientist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center pointed out that “by shutting ELA you remove a critical tool for finding the most reasonable and cost-effective solutions to national and international environmental issues”²⁹. The Board

of the International Association of Great Lakes Research believes “the ELA has provided valuable science that has supported government actions that have improved the quality of life in Canada, the US, and around the world”³⁰. Current and past Presidents of the North American Lake Management Society stated that the “closure of the ELA will adversely affect our mission to foster the management and protection of lakes and reservoirs”³¹. The Executive Director of North America’s Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry asserted that the loss of the ELA would “constrain informed decision making and public policy on a global level”³². The Australian Society for Limnology urged the Canadian Government to continue funding ELA because “this facility is unique and its research is globally important”³³. Scientists at Israel Oceanographic & Limnological Research asked the Government of Canada to reconsider its decision and allow the “scientific activity at ELA to continue for the benefit of Canada’s environment and freshwater ecosystems worldwide”³⁴. The President of the Japanese Society of Limnology wrote the closure of the ELA would be “a serious loss of a precious institution to detect, understand, and mitigate the impact of environmental perturbations that threaten human society now and in the future”³⁵. A joint letter from five professional scientific organizations – Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography, Ecological Society of America, International Society of Limnology, Society of Canadian Limnologists, and Society for Freshwater Sciences – referred to the ELA as “a cornerstone facility for the study of inland waters” and requested the Government of Canada to “commit to sustaining this critical research facility established to help protect inland waters, a critical resource to all of society”³⁶. In the words of the President of the International Society of Limnology, the ELA was “Canada’s gift to the research world”³⁷, and that the “proposed closure of the laboratory sends the message to the international community that Canada no longer has concern for the future of the Earth’s environment, that it cares only for its own short-term economy, that it is heedless of the problems the next generation of its citizens will face, that it no longer wishes to be a forward-looking, humanitarian society”³⁸.

Early on, it was recognized that for the ‘Save ELA’ movement to gain momentum, the outcry needed to come not only from the scientific community, but from the general public as well. Public outreach by the DFO in the past had been locally focused on the towns adjacent to ELA (Kenora and Dryden, Ontario), and as such, many people in Canada outside of the aquatic science and management community had no clue about the internationally-acclaimed scientific gem that was hidden away in northwestern Ontario. A public education and awareness campaign to inform the Canadian public about ELA and why its research is critically important was initiated by a small group of supporters. A website was launched to serve as a resource of information on the ELA for the public, containing plain-language fact sheets, detailed briefing notes on ELA research, a daily update of news stories about the ELA, a collection of ELA photos and videos, and suggested ways people could help with the effort to save ELA. This website was soon complimented by a Facebook page and a Twitter account³⁹. This initial effort by a few ELA supporters to educate Canadians on the value of the ELA was soon bolstered by other scientists, concerned citizens, and organizations from across the country.

To quickly grab the attention of the country and parliamentarians, ELA supporters scrambled to accomplish two major feats before the House of Commons went on break last summer. First, an open

letter was sent to you, Fisheries Minister Keith Ashfield, and Environment Minister Peter Kent by the world's top aquatic scientists, and was concurrently published in the *Globe and Mail*⁴⁰. These world-renowned scientists – John Smol, David Schindler, Peter Dillon, Warwick Vincent, Robert Hecky, Stephen Carpenter, Gene Likens and Brian Moss – told you that “the ELA is vital to Canadians: Its value lies in the irreplaceable capacity for Canadian scientists and their partners to conduct experiments on entire lake ecosystems”, which “provides key information, unattainable elsewhere, for objective, evidence-based decision-making”. Second, a full-page newspaper ad was published in national and local newspapers with the header “ELA is closing just when the planet needs it most” and endorsed by an impressive list of high-profile individuals and organizations that support ELA⁴¹. These included Phil Fontaine, Former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations; Craig Kielburger, Founder of Free the Children; James Richardson, Past Chair of the Nature Conservancy of Canada; Robert Brennan, Past President of Manitoba Hydro; Honourable David Anderson and Honourable Tom Siddon, former Canadian Ministers of Fisheries; the Right Honourable Paul Martin and the Right Honourable John Turner, former Canadian Prime Ministers; as well as deans and chancellors of academic institutions, Canada Research Chairs, presidents of scientific organizations, editors of scientific journals, chiefs of First Nations, directors of environmental organizations, and presidents of cottage and property owner associations.

ELA supporters worked tirelessly to spur on articles, editorials, and comments – in newspapers, magazines, as well as in scientific journals – to communicate to Canada and the world about the world-class accomplishments of the ELA, and what would be lost if the ELA were closed. For countless hours, volunteers across the country brainstormed how to capture the attention of the media, drafted and edited media advisories and press releases⁴², participated in media interviews, and wrote feature articles in magazines and bulletins. Scientists and their supporters took time out of their busy schedules to travel to Ottawa and other places to speak at press conferences on the ELA⁴³. Because of everyone's dedication and concern, more than 500 articles addressing the uncertain fate of the ELA have been published over the last 10 months. Stories on the elimination of federal funding for the ELA and what it means for freshwater science have appeared in the most prestigious international scientific journals such as *Nature*⁴⁴ and *Science*⁴⁵. The ELA was at the top of the list under “austerity” slashes to world science in *Nature*'s 2012 year in review⁴⁶. Editorials written by scientists condemning the decision to eliminate federal funding for the ELA have appeared in the scientific journals *Environmental Science and Technology*⁴⁷, *Journal of Plankton Research*⁴⁸, and *Marine Pollution Bulletin*⁴⁹. The ELA has been featured in popular magazines such as *Canadian Geographic*⁵⁰, *Alternatives Journal*⁵¹, *Outdoor Canada*⁵², and *The Tye*⁵³, and bulletins such as the *Eco-Journal*⁵⁴, *Flow Monitor*⁵⁵, *The Current*⁵⁶, *Outdoor Edge*⁵⁷, and *Nature Manitoba News*⁵⁸. The on-going saga over the fate of ELA has been covered by international news outlets such as *The Guardian*⁵⁹, *Al Jazeera*⁶⁰, and *Public Radio International's The World*⁶¹, and Canadian news outlets, including the *Globe and Mail*⁶², *Global News*⁶³, *CTV*⁶⁴, *Hill Times*⁶⁵, *iPolitics*⁶⁶, *Huffington Post*⁶⁷, *CBC's Power & Politics*⁶⁸, *CBC's The National*⁶⁹, *CBC's As It Happens*⁷⁰, *CBC's Voyage North*⁷¹, and *CBC's Shift*⁷² and dozens of on-line CBC news stories⁷³. ELA has also been reported on in regional news outlets such as the *Brandon Sun*⁷⁴, *Chronicle Journal*⁷⁵, *Dryden Observer*⁷⁶, *Edmonton Journal*⁷⁷, *Kenora Daily Miner & News*⁷⁸, *Ottawa Citizen*⁷⁹,

Peterborough Examiner⁸⁰, Regina Leader-Post⁸¹, Telegram⁸², Toronto Star⁸³, Vancouver Sun⁸⁴, and Winnipeg Free Press⁸⁵, among many others.

Public events were organized across the country to foster public discourse on the implications of the loss of the ELA and to encourage public participation in advocating for this crucial science facility. Public forums highlighted the impending closure of the ELA were organized in Edmonton⁸⁶, Winnipeg⁸⁷, Kenora⁸⁸, Sioux Lookout⁸⁹, Sudbury⁹⁰, Toronto⁹¹, Thunder Bay⁹², Kingston⁹³, and Ottawa⁹⁴. Former ELA scientists, staff, and students, federal, provincial, and municipal politicians, directors of environmental and social justice groups, and concerned citizens spoke out in support of ELA at these public events. In addition, protests were held in support of the ELA in Kenora⁹⁵, Dryden⁹⁶, Ottawa⁹⁷, Winnipeg⁹⁸, Regina⁹⁹, Gimli¹⁰⁰, Thunder Bay¹⁰¹, and at ELA¹⁰². ELA spokespeople also participated in rallies organized by the Public Service Alliance of Canada¹⁰³, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada¹⁰⁴, and Idle No More¹⁰⁵. In addition, special presentations on the ELA were held at scientific conferences, including the North American Lake Management Society Meeting¹⁰⁶, Canadian Conference For Fisheries Research¹⁰⁷ (where Dr. Ray Hesslein, ELA scientist emeritus, received the prestigious Rigler Award, the highest honour awarded to Canadian freshwater scientists¹⁰⁸), and the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography Aquatics Meeting¹⁰⁹ (where Dr. Karen Kidd gave a plenary talk on her whole-lake experiment at the ELA to demonstrate the effects of synthetic hormones on the health of fish populations).

Public figures began to take notice and speak up about the irrational decision to shutter the ELA, and did their part to raise the issue of ELA in public dialogue. Bob McDonald of CBC's Quirks & Quarks wrote "closing down the Experimental Lakes Area is closing our eyes to the most vital resource we have in the country"¹¹⁰. In an article about the cancellation of the ELA, cleverly entitled "Proof Harper Prefers Fake to Real Lakes", David Suzuki concluded that "any research or findings that don't fit with the government's fossil fuel-based economic plans appear to be under attack"¹¹¹. Maude Barlow, the National Chairperson for the Council of Canadians, expressed her deep concern over the Government's decision to terminate funding for the ELA "at a time of mounting challenges and stress to Canada's freshwater"¹¹². Rick Mercer performed a stinging truthful satirical rant about the closure of the ELA¹¹³. The ELA program was also cited as one of the notable cuts by your Government in Alan Gregg's damning speech "1984 in 2012 – The Assault on Reason"¹¹⁴. Mercury Films, the makers of 'Manufactured Landscapes', kindly produced a short video pro bono on the ELA, "Stop the War on Science – Save The Experimental Lakes Area"¹¹⁵, to help spread the word about the ELA through social media, and promote an action to save ELA organized by Lead Now¹¹⁶.

As the broader public became better informed on the important work of ELA, concerned citizens and organizations from across the country flooded Canadian MPs' offices with countless letters in opposition to the elimination of federal funding for the ELA. Letters condemning this decision and urging the Government of Canada to reconsider its decision were sent to you and your Ministers by First Nations, cottage owner associations, lake stewardship groups, hunting and fishing groups, environmental organizations, and many others. For example, the President of the National Council of Women of Canada asked your Government to overturn its decision so that "Canada will continue to be a

world leader” in freshwater science that “allows the environmental and health protection of Canadians and many millions of people world-wide”¹¹⁷. Grand Chief of Cree First Nation wrote to express that the ELA “has proved to be a most valuable source of information and guidance to us”, specifically in regard to mercury contamination caused by hydroelectric development¹¹⁸. The Lake Winnipeg Foundation “is grateful for the outstanding scientific leadership and effort by the Experimental Lakes Area researchers to help Lake Winnipeg”¹¹⁹. The Chair of the District Municipality of Muskoka stressed that “the economy of Muskoka and other lake-based regions of Canada is dependent on maintaining good water quality”, and requested that your government reconsider its decision to close the ELA¹²⁰. Similar sentiments were also expressed by the Presidents of Muskoka Lake Association¹²¹ and the Muskoka Ratepayers' Association¹²². The Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association¹²³ and The Citizens United for a Sustainable Planet¹²⁴ expressed that “the expansion of mining opportunities in Northwestern Ontario will present new opportunities for region-based research”, and as such, they “believe it is vital that the ELA remain in operation”. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, which represents 100,000 members, believes the Government of Canada “needs to retain a strong freshwater fisheries management capacity” and “has a responsibility to make every possible effort to retain the ELA program”¹²⁵. The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations “supports the ongoing operation of the Experimental Lakes Area research facility”¹²⁶, and stated “the government must reconsider the decision to close this facility and reinstate our commitment to the knowledge it provides our industry, our governments, and civil society” before a parliamentary committee last year¹²⁷. The Alberta Lake Management Society urged the Government of Canada to reconsider its decision because “whole ecosystem research conducted at the ELA is key in advising us how to better manage our lakes, reservoirs and watersheds so that we can still enjoy living and recreating in Alberta waters”¹²⁸.

The ELA also became a major topic of discussion in Canada's Parliament – being mentioned over 200 times in the House of Commons in the last ten months – thanks to Canadian MPs from all political parties. The cancellation of funding was raised in Parliament for the first time by NDP MP Craig Scott and Independent MP Bruce Hyer on May 18, 2012¹²⁹, just one day after the DFO announced to staff it is cutting the ELA program. The Green Party of Canada immediately denounced this decision¹³⁰, and shortly thereafter, NDP MP Robert Chisholm¹³¹ questioned Fisheries Minister Keith Ashfield, and Liberal MP Francis Scarpaleggia¹³² questioned Environment Minister Peter Kent, about their respective departments' cancellation of funding for ELA. NDP MPs Pat Martin, Robert Chisholm, Megan Leslie, and Anne Minh-Thu Quach held a press conference in Ottawa condemning the decision by the federal government to cut the ELA¹³³. Questions regarding the ELA were placed on the order paper by NDP MPs Robert Chisholm¹³⁴ and Megan Leslie¹³⁵, and Liberal MPs Lawrence MacAulay¹³⁶ and Ted Hsu¹³⁷. Liberal MPs Lawrence MacAuley¹³⁸ and Kirsty Duncan¹³⁹ tabled motions to study the ELA at the Fisheries and Environment Committees, respectively, but these motions were dropped while in camera. NDP MP Laurin Liu hosted a breakfast meeting for NDP MPs about the ELA¹⁴⁰. Liberal MP Francis Scarpaleggia also hosted an all-party breakfast meeting for MPs and Senators about the ELA¹⁴¹. NDP MPs, Liberal MPs, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May, and Independent Bruce Hyer participated alongside scientists in several press conferences on ELA last year⁴³. Petitions in support of the ELA have been tabled in the House of Commons over 140 times by MPs from all parties, including

Conservative MPs Stephen Woodworth, Harold Albrecht, Joyce Bateman, and Joy Smith. MPs have also been outspoken on ELA outside of Parliament. For example, Bruce Hyer participated in Town Halls in the Kenora riding, NDP MP Niki Ashton spoke at the ‘Tribute to ELA at the Forks’ in Manitoba, Liberal MP Kirsty Duncan wrote an article on the ELA for the Hill Times¹⁴², and Conservative MP Michelle Rempel, NDP MP Kennedy Stewart, and Liberal MP Kirsty Duncan recently debated the impending closure of the ELA on CBC’s Power and Politics¹⁴³.

Provincial politicians and municipalities have also weighed in on the debate over the ELA’s future. For example, a joint letter from the Manitoba Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship and the Ontario Minister of the Environment stated “the research conducted at the Experimental Lakes Area is relied upon by all Canadian and many international jurisdictions responsible for managing freshwater resources” and “the science that it has generated in the past and its science potential for the future is enormous and simply too important to end at this time when our societies face more environmental challenges than ever before”¹⁴⁴. A strong supporter of the ELA, Jon Gerrard, Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, believes this research center “is a national treasure which all Canadians need to recognize and cherish”¹⁴⁵, and stated “funding Lake Winnipeg research without funding ELA is like sending rowers to the Olympics without oars”¹⁴⁶. Dave Canfield, Mayor of Kenora, said “it would be a shame to shut it down”, pointing to the need for more science for understanding resource development in northern Ontario¹⁴⁷. Sarah Campbell, MPP for Kenora-Rainy River, has been a vocal advocate for ELA in the Ontario legislature¹⁴⁸. The Northern Ontario Municipalities Association, which represents the interests of 37 municipalities, sent a letter imploring the federal government “to continue funding the Experimental Lakes Area and to assist them in finding alternative funding partners to ensure that this unique water research continues for decades to come”¹²³. This led to at least seventeen municipalities in Ontario and Manitoba to pass formal resolutions calling upon the Government of Canada to rescind its decision to cancel the ELA program¹⁴⁹.

Canadian scientists have been highly critical of the Government of Canada’s decision to terminate the ELA as a federal science program, and this is costing the Conservative Party of Canada dearly. For example, Dr. David Schindler, University of Alberta, said emphatically that the “excuse that this is some useless facility that has outlived its days is utter nonsense”¹⁵⁰ and the Government of Canada is “closing the site because they don’t want to be pestered by science”¹⁵¹. Dr. John Smol, Queens University, called your decision to stop funding the ELA “short-sighted”¹⁵², and the closure of ELA “a complete travesty”¹⁵³. Dr. Jules Blais, University of Ottawa, referred to the Government’s rationale for ending financial support for ELA as “palpable nonsense”¹⁵⁴. Dr. Roberto Quinlan, York University, expressed his frustration about the defunding of ELA with the simple statement “shame on this government”¹⁵⁵. Dr. Karen Kidd, University of New Brunswick, asserted “the idea that the research no longer fits within the mandate of the federal government is baloney”¹⁵⁶. Dr. Britt Hall, University of Regina, stated “the decision to close the facility was made with little background information, no foresight, and no planning”¹⁵⁷, and “the only logical conclusion [for cutting ELA] is that the Government doesn’t want the science to happen”¹⁵⁸. Dr. Yves Prairie, Université du Québec à Montréal, was simply baffled; “it’s completely incredible that the government would shut it down given the

international stature that it has and the importance for the field”¹⁵⁹. Dr. Carol Kelly, formerly of University of Manitoba, believes you cut the ELA to advance your resource development agenda: "if you're not interested in making any regulations, then ELA would not be useful to you"¹⁶⁰. For the \$2 million per year it costs to operate and staff the ELA, Canadian scientists, politicians, and citizens are all fully aware that the decision to eliminate the ELA program has nothing to do with ‘austerity’. In the absence of any tangible rationale from your Government, we have been asking for a truthful explanation – so far, nothing has been forthcoming.

Despite the strong outcry against the termination of the ELA that resonated across the country and around the world, the Government of Canada has stubbornly refused to reinstate federal funding for the ELA program. This is not in keeping with the wishes of the majority of Canadians, not even your own Conservative voters. Nearly three-quarters of Canadians oppose the Government’s decision to cancel federal funding for the ELA, including 60% of Conservative voters, according to an Environix opinion poll commissioned by the Council of Canadians last October¹⁶¹. Yet, last month, Fisheries Minister Keith Ashfield stood up in the House of Commons and stated that “we have made the decision that the experimental lakes will be ending as a federal facility”¹⁶², and Fisheries Assistant Deputy Minister Kevin Stringer said in the Fisheries Committee “The government's been clear ... We've given our notice that we will no longer be involved in operating [ELA]”¹⁶³. The Government of Canada has now withdrawn itself from the long-standing agreement with Ontario to operate the ELA on provincial lands¹⁶⁴, and hopes to sell ELA for \$1 to a new operator¹⁶⁵. How is this a financially responsible decision? The federal government has sunk millions of federal dollars into new infrastructure at ELA over the last five years, such as the \$850K Fisheries Research Laboratory constructed in 2011 under the Conservative Government’s Economic Action Plan¹⁶⁶. Furthermore, if a new operator for ELA is not found soon, the demolition of DFO buildings and the remediation costs of shutting down ELA are estimated to cost Canadian taxpayers tens of millions of dollars¹⁶⁷.

Conservative Ministers repeatedly touted that the Government of Canada planned to transfer the ELA to a private organization^{168,169}, and DFO spokespeople said they were working hard to find a new operator to take over the ELA by March 31, 2013¹⁷⁰. But, the time has run out, and there is no succession plan in place. Because the Government under your leadership failed to negotiate a deal to transfer ELA by March 31, DFO may mothball the research center this summer¹⁷¹ and new experiments planned for ELA have been stopped. To the shock of many, DFO recently told scientists at Trent University they are not allowed to proceed with their critically important, whole-lake experiment at the ELA on the toxic effect of nanosilver, a new antimicrobial nanoparticle, even though this research is already fully funded by NSERC¹⁷². Furthermore, DFO still refuses to inform government scientists and academic researchers whether or not they are banned from accessing the ELA this year¹⁷³. With mere weeks to go before the field season begins, it is still unknown whether on-going research projects at the ELA can continue, or whether the longest and most comprehensive freshwater monitoring program in Canada will be broken.

You and other Conservative MPs had the opportunity to do the right thing and listen to the people of Canada and represent the views of your constituents on March 20, 2013. On this fateful day,

the NDP introduced an Opposition Day Motion motion in the House of Commons to support Canadian science, and called upon the Government of Canada to extend funding for the ELA until a new operator is found¹⁷⁴. To the astonishment of scientists, both in Canada and abroad, you and every single other Conservative MP voted against this motion, thereby defeating it. To vote down such a motion is, in a word, disgraceful. This is a slap in the face to every Canadian scientist and every Canadian citizen who rose to stand up for ELA, and I expect will one day serve as an unforgettable symbol of the “Harper” Government’s disdain for science and the environment.

Canadians fought so very hard to save the ELA – the story of how people came together and volunteered their time, energy, and money to call upon the Government of Canada to reinstate federal funding for the ELA as a public science program has been truly moving and inspiring. I am personally so very grateful and appreciative of everyone’s efforts, from the bottom of my heart. Canadians fought a hard battle, but they lost when Conservative MPs unanimously voted down the motion to save ELA on March 20, 2013. You and your party failed Canadians that day. Sadly, the story of ELA has become one of how democracy in Canada is broken. My MP, Pat Martin, kindly nominated me for a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for my role in the fight to save the ELA last year. I respectfully decline this award – on behalf of all the Canadians who fought so hard for the ELA – in protest to your obstinate refusal to listen to the people of Canada.

Canadians have tried every possible means within our democratic rights to persuade you to reverse your decision to cut federal funding for the ELA. But you refused to listen, time and time again, and we have now exhausted all of our legal options. The battle to save ELA achieved little more than left us discouraged, frustrated, and demoralized, and has deeply eroded our faith in the democratic process. What will it take to make you listen to the voices of Canada’s scientists and the concerned public? We have done everything we can in our power to make you listen to reason. Must we resort to acts of civil disobedience to get your attention? I have been surprised to hear from respected scientists right across the country, and even across the border in the United States, who are so fed up that they are ready to chain themselves to fences or participate in sit-ins in protest over your refusal to save the ELA. Do you really want scientists staging illegal acts? Do you want to be responsible for scientists and their allies starting an “Occupy ELA” movement? Do you really want photographs of Canada’s best and brightest scientists being taken away in handcuffs? Can you imagine the international headlines? This would be a political nightmare for you. Although I disagree with many of your policies, I respect you as a strategic politician. You know the Conservative party has slipped far down in opinion polls¹⁷⁵. A public act of civil disobedience by Canadian scientists in protest over the ELA would cause the Conservatives far too much political collateral damage, and you are wise enough to know you cannot afford to take that hit.

Under your watch, the Government of Canada has not only eliminated federal funding to the ELA, it has also failed to safeguard the future of ELA for the benefit of all Canadians. This situation is simply unacceptable – the consequences are far too great. You can be a true leader for Canada and take the following actions now to remedy this dire situation:

1. To protect the physical integrity of the ELA research center, stop any further dismantling or demolition of the ELA field station, and do not permit any removal of scientific infrastructure or any resource extraction from the 58 designated ELA lakes and their watersheds.
2. To ensure the continuity of scientific research at the ELA, permit government and academic researchers on-site this field season to conduct on-going and proposed whole-lake manipulation experiments, as well as routine long-term ecological monitoring.
3. To secure the future of the ELA, negotiate quickly and in good faith to transfer the ELA research center and its staff to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Winnipeg-based policy organization courted by concerned scientists to operate the research facility.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the ELA and discuss these requests in more detail. I recognize that you are an extremely busy man, but the future of our freshwater is of vital importance to Canada. Please kindly let me know by April 30, 2013, if you are interested in meeting with me, and/or you are committed to these requests to safeguard the future of the ELA. These are very reasonable requests considering the current situation, and all Canadians will recognize them as such. Canadians will be watching closely whether you wisely choose to do the right thing for this country and take these actions to ensure that the ELA seamlessly continues to conduct world-class science to help protect Canada's freshwater lakes and fish populations.

The views I express in this letter are solely my own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of any organization or institution. That said, I hope this letter inspires other Canadians to strongly express their concerns about your decision to eliminate federal funding for the ELA without safeguarding its future, and join me in asking that you take these critical actions to save the ELA. With all due respect, it is your responsibility, as Prime Minister of a democratic country, to listen to the voices of the people of Canada.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Orihel, B.Sc., M.N.R.M.
PhD Candidate, University of Alberta
Founder, Coalition to Save ELA
Winnipeg, Manitoba

¹ List-Serve Email from the Society of Canadian Limnology, May 17, 2012.

http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/society_of_canadian_limnologists_2012-05-17.pdf

Press Release from Diane Orihel, May 17, 2012.

http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/press-release_closure-of-canadas-ela.pdf

² Fisheries and Oceans Canada Managers responsible for ELA:

David Gillis, Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, Email: dave.gillis@dfo-mpo.gc.ca;

David Burden, Acting Regional Director General, Central & Arctic Region, Email: Dave.Burden@dfo-mpo.gc.ca;

Michelle Wheatley, Regional Director of Science, Central & Arctic Region; Email: Michelle.Wheatley@dfo-mpo.gc.ca;

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- ³ Statement by Gail Shea, Acting Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, House of Commons, November 19, 2012. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=1&DocId=5842035>
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- ⁴ Statement by Minister Kent, House of Commons, September 17, 2012. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=1&DocId=5708593>
- ⁵ Letter from Minister Ashfield, June 18, 2012. <http://escsecblog.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/ela-response-from-fisheries-and-oceans-canada1.pdf>
- ⁶ Coalition to Save ELA, founded May 18, 2012, by Diane Orihel, Heidi Swanson, and Jason Venkiteswaran. In September 2012, two committees were formally struck. National Committee: Diane Orihel, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta; Jason Venkiteswaran, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Waterloo; Heidi Swanson, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Alberta; David Schindler, Professor, University of Alberta; John Smol, Professor, Queen’s University; John Rudd, Retired Scientist, Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Peter Kirby, Barrister & Solicitor; Michael Turner, Retired Scientist, Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Regional Committee: Carol Kelly, Retired Professor, University of Manitoba (British Columbia); William Donahue, Freshwater Science and Policy Consultant (Alberta), Britt Hall, Associate Professor, University of Regina (Saskatchewan), John Shearer, Retired ELA Operations Manager, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Manitoba); Jules Blais, Professor, University of Ottawa, (Ontario & The North); Yves Prairie, Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal (Quebec); Karen Kidd, Professor, University of New Brunswick (Atlantic). Diane Orihel stepped down as the Director of Coalition to Save ELA on December 1, 2012, to focus on her PhD studies, and Britt Hall now serves as the Director of Coalition to Save ELA. <http://saveela.org/>
- ⁷ Save ELA Petition, released May 23, 2012. http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/save_ela_petition.pdf
- ⁸ ELA on the Federation of Ontario Cottagers’ Association website. <http://www.foca.on.ca/ela>
- ⁹ ELA on the Boreal Forest Network website. <http://borealforestnetwork.com/save-the-experimental-lakes-area-research-project>
- ¹⁰ ELA on the Council of Canadians website. <http://canadians.org/blog/?p=16931> and <http://canadians.org/blog/?p=17876>
- ¹¹ ELA on the Sierra Club of Canada website. <http://www.sierraclub.ca/en/node/5261>
- ¹² Canadian Wildlife Federation website. <http://www.cwf-fcf.org/en/>
- ¹³ Lake Winnipeg Foundation website. <http://www.lakewinnipegfoundation.org/>
- ¹⁴ ELA on the Environment North website. <http://www.environmentnorth.ca/>
- ¹⁵ ELA on the Alberta Lake Management Society website. <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs078/1101570578805/archive/1110028288113.html>
- ¹⁶ ELA on the Lake of the Woods Property Owners Association website. <http://www.lowdpoa.com/news/lowdpoa-shocked-by-closure-of-world-renowned-experimental-lakes-area/>
- ¹⁷ ELA on the Grindstone Cottage Owners Association website. <http://www.grindstonepark.ca/GazetteArchives/Grindstone%20Gazette-Fall%202012.pdf>
- ¹⁸ ELA on the Soyers Lake Ratepayers Association website. <http://www.soyerslake.ca/news.html>
- ¹⁹ Kenora’s ELA Support Group, founded by Peter Kirby, Lawyer, of Kenora, Ontario.
- ²⁰ Total count as of April 8, 2013: 28,968 signatures. Credit for painstakingly counting and sorting petitions goes to Coalition to Save ELA volunteer Ginger Gill of Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- ²¹ Letter from Jules Blais, President, Society of Canadian Limnologists, to Minister Ashfield, June 5, 2012. http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/scl_ela_letter_june_5_2012.pdf
- ²² Letter from Steven Cooke, President, Canadian Aquatic Resources Section of the American Fisheries Society, to Minister Ashfield, June 6, 2012. http://www.fisheriessociety.org/cars/cars/Newsletter_files/AFS_Letter_2.pdf
- ²³ Letter from Robert Stedwell, Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists, to Prime Minister Harper, Minister Kent, and Minister Ashfield, June 26, 2012. <http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/2012-06-26-cseb-letter-re-ela-closure.pdf>
- ²⁴ Letter from Robert Gillham, Executive Director, Water Institute, University of Waterloo, to Prime Minister Harper, Minister Ashfield, and Minister Kent, June 1, 2012. http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/water_institute_letter.pdf
- ²⁵ Letter from Rebecca Hallett, Chair, Science Policy & Education Committee, Entomological Society of Canada, June 15, 2012. http://escsecblog.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/esc_ela_supportletter_15jun2012.pdf

²⁶ Letter from Karen Kidd, David Armanini, Rick Cunjak, Doug Holdway, Deb MacLachy, Kerry MacQuarrie, Chris Martyniuk, Chris Metcalfe, Mark Servos, André St-Hilaire, Science Directors, Canadian Rivers Institute to Ministers Ashfield and Kent, June 16, 2012.

<http://saveeladotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/canadian-rivers-institute-letter-re-ela.pdf>

²⁷ Letter from Peter Hodson, Professor, Queen's University "A Vitaly Important Issue", to members of the Society for Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry, SETAC Globe, June 21, 2012. <http://globe.setac.org/2012/june/hodson-letter.html>

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²⁹ Letter from Cynthia Gilmour, Senior Scientist, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, to Ministers Kent and Ashfield, May 21, 2012.

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³¹ Letter from Al Sosiak, President, Ann Shortelle, President-Elect, Reesa Evans, Secretary, Linda Green, Treasurer, Bev Clark, President 2011, Mark Hoyer, President 2010, Harry Gibbons, President 2009, Ken Wagner, President 2007, Steve Heiskary, President 2004, Jeff Schloss, President 2003, Stephen Souza, President 2002, Steve Colvin, President 2001, Chris Holdren, President 1997, Eugene Welch, President 1993, Dick Osgood, President 2008, North American Lake Management Society to Minister Ashfield, May 25, 2012. <https://www.nalms.org/media.acux/a89d2841-a315-48e3-be7a-b6c22e6c3a96>

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³⁹ Save ELA website: <http://saveela.org/>; Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/savetheela>; Twitter Account: @SaveTheELA (#ELA, #SaveELA). Webmaster: Jason Venkiteswaran

⁴⁰ Open letter ("Water and wisdom: an open letter to Ottawa") from John Smol, David Schindler, Peter Dillon, Warwick Vincent, Robert Hecky, Stephen Carpenter, Gene Likens and Brian Moss, to Prime Minister Harper, Minister Ashfield, and Minister Kent, Globe and Mail, June 5, 2012.

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⁹² “Save the Experimental Lakes Area Forum”, organized by Environment North, Lakehead University and Confederation College, Thunder Bay, October 10, 2012 (Speakers: Greg Pyle, MP Bruce Hyer, and Diane Orihel);

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- ⁹⁶ Protest at MP Greg Rickford's Office, Dryden, June 14, 2012.
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- ⁹⁸ Death of Evidence Rally, Freshwater Institute, Winnipeg, July 11, 2012 (ELA speaker: John Shearer).
- ⁹⁹ Death of Evidence Rally, University of Regina, Regina, July 11, 2012 (ELA speaker: Britt Hall).
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“That, in the opinion of the House: (a) public science, basic research and the free and open exchange of scientific information are essential to evidence-based policymaking; (b) federal government scientists must be enabled to discuss openly their findings with their colleagues and the public; and (c) the federal government should maintain support for its basic scientific capacity across Canada, including immediately extending funding, until a new operator is found, to the world renowned Experimental Lakes Area Research Facility to pursue its unique research program”.

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Sector, University of Manitoba; Heidi Swanson, University of Waterloo; Helen Baulch, University of Saskatchewan; Henry Venema, International Institute for Sustainable Development; Hon. Gord Mackintosh, Manitoba Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship; Hon. James Bradley, Ontario Minister of Environment; Hon. Keith Ashfield, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans; Hon. Peter Kent, Minister of Environment; Hon. Thomas Mulcair, Leader of the Official Opposition; Hon. Tom Siddon, Former Minister of Fisheries; Ian Davies, Fisheries & Oceans Canada (retired); James Beddome, Green Party of Manitoba; James Bence, International Association for Great Lakes Research; James Cowan, Senator; James Currie, University of Winnipeg; James Munson, iPolitics; James Richardson, Ducks Unlimited Canada; Janet Hering, Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology; Jason Venkiteswaran, University of Waterloo; Jay Ritchlin, David Suzuki Foundation; Jeffrey Hutchings, Dalhousie University; Jennifer Baichwal, Mercury Films; Jennifer Carpenter, Science Journalist; Jennifer Janzen, The Collegiate of the University of Winnipeg; Jennifer Pink, Science North; Jenny Ryan, NRC Research Press; Jim Elser, Arizona State University; Jim Johnson, Kenora's ELA Support Group; Jim Munson, Senator; John Bennett, Sierra Club of Canada; John Downing, Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography; John Klinch, The District Municipality of Muskoka; John Rudd, Fisheries & Oceans Canada (retired); John Shearer, Fisheries & Oceans Canada (retired); John Smol, Queen's University; Jon Thompson, Dryden Observer; Josh Brandon, Green Action Center; Judi Brouse, Muskoka Watershed Council; Jules Blais, Society of Canadian Limnologists; Karen Kidd, Canadian Rivers Institute; Katherine McCarter, Ecological Society of America; Katie Gibbs, Evidence For Democracy; Laurie Allen, CBC As It Happens; Lindsey Enns, Dryden Observer; Lori Tate, Fisheries & Oceans Canada; Mac Harb, Senator; Maggie Xenopoulos, Trent University; Margo McDiarmid, CBC News; Maria Chaput, Senator; Marie-Andrée Fallu, Group for interuniversity research in limnology and aquatic environment; Mark Jaccard, Simon Fraser University; Mark Whitmore, University of Manitoba; Matt Martens, University of Manitoba; Matthew Carroll, Lead Now; Matthew Coon Come, Council of the Crees; Maude Barlow, Council of Canadians; Max Paris, CBC News; Meagan Fitzpatrick, CBC News; Mia Rabson, The Winnipeg Free Press; Michael Harris, iPolitics; Michael Riordin, Writer; Michael Turner, Fisheries & Oceans Canada (retired); Michael Twiss, Clarkson University; Michio Kumagai, Japanese Society of Limnology; Mike De Souza, Postmedia News; Miriam Diamond, University of Toronto; MLA Jon Gerrard, Manitoba Liberal Party; MP Anne Minh-Thu Quach, NDP Deputy Environment Critic; MP Bruce Hyer, Thunder Bay-Superior North; MP Craig Scott, Toronto-Danforth; MP Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party; MP Francis Scarpaleggia, Liberal Water Critic; MP Harold Albrecht, Kitchener-Conestoga; MP Joy Smith, Kildonan-St. Paul; MP Joyce Bateman, Winnipeg South Centre; MP Joyce Murray, Vancouver-Quadra; MP Justin Trudeau, Papineau; MP Kennedy Stewart, NDP Science Critic; MP Kirsty Duncan, Liberal Environment Critic; MP Laurin Liu, NDP Deputy Science Critic; MP Lawrence MacAulay, Liberal Fisheries Critic; MP Megan Leslie, NDP Environment Critic; MP Michelle Rempel, Calgary Centre-North; MP Niki Ashton, Churchill; MP Pat Martin, Winnipeg Center; MP Philip Toone, NDP Deputy Fisheries Critic; MP Robert Chisholm, NDP Fisheries Critic; MP Stephen Woodworth, Kitchener Center; MP Ted Hsu, Liberal Science Critic; MPP Sarah Campbell, Kenora-Rainy River; Nastashya Wall, University of Winnipeg; Neil Besner, University of Winnipeg; Paul del Giorgio, Université du Québec; Paul Frost, Trent University; Peter Dillon, Trent University; Peter Hodson, Queen's University; Peter Jackson, The Telegram; Peter Kirby, Kenora's ELA Support Group; Peter Vanrolleghem, Université Laval; Peter Wells, Dalhousie University; Premier Greg Selinger, Manitoba; Premier Kathleen Wynne, Ontario; Ray Hesslein, Fisheries & Oceans Canada; Rebecca Hallett, Entomological Society of Canada; Rebecca Rooney, University of Waterloo; Reid Woods, Manitoba Nature Federation; Richard Van Noorden, Nature; Rick Mercer, Rick Mercer Report; Rob McCormick, Peterborough Examiner; Robert Gillham, Water Institute of the University of Waterloo; Robert Hecky, University of Minnesota; Robert Silver, University of Winnipeg; Robert Stedwell, Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists; Roberto Quinlan, York University; Robyn Benson, Public Service Alliance of Canada; Rolf Vinebrooke, Canadian Journal of Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences; Ron Nelson, Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association; Roxanne Razavi, Queens University; Rt. Hon. 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