

The Tale of Shoal Lake 40

Shoal Lake 40

An Ojibway reserve located approximately a two hour drive from Winnipeg and Kenora, situated on the Western shore and peninsula of Shoal Lake, located on the Ontario-Manitoba border.



Moved to a Peninsula, the Peninsula Was then Cut Off



In 1919 a portion of Shoal Lake, including a burial ground, was annexed (which means taken) by the city of Winnipeg and the Shoal Lake 40 residents were relocated to the peninsula. An aqueduct was dug to provide Winnipeg with water, cutting off the Peninsula and rendering Shoal Lake 40 inaccessible. A dam was built to ensure that the city's water remained pristine, while simultaneously leaving contaminated water on the reserve's side.

The reserve is located between Shoal Lake 39, which has access to clean water, and the reservoir of clean water for the City of Winnipeg, this has been a source of grievance and caused a general feeling of being forgotten. States of emergency have been declared in the past due to a high youth suicide rate.

Residents have been left to cope with the situation as best they can.

Water Advisory for Over Two Decades

The Shoal Lake 40 First Nation's approximately 285 residents have been living under a water advisory for over two decades. Finding solutions to the non-potable water that feeds the reserve is compounded by issues of access, and by the fact that the community is divided by the provincial boundary between Ontario and Manitoba.

Shoal Lake 40 does not even have a water treatment facility. The lack of all-season road access has made it too expensive for the community to build a water treatment plant.

An entire generation of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation residents have grown up relying on bottled water.

Water has been shipped in by Chief Erwin Redsky weekly from Kenora, Ontario in his truck. Water shipments have cost the community approximately \$150,000 per year. Waste and garbage cannot be easily removed from Shoal Lake 40. There is no sewage system or garbage collection system at Shoal Lake 40.

Walking on Winter Ice to Get to the Mainland

The only means of transportation to Shoal Lake 40 has been a barge that is in a severe state of disrepair.

It costs \$120,000 per year to operate the barge and states of emergency have been declared when it has gone down.

This isolation costs Shoal Lake \$1000 per person on water and barge infrastructure.

Nine people have died attempting to cross the aqueduct in canoes or on the ice.



On City of Winnipeg's Website...

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Water treatment program background

Aqueduct

Since [Shoal Lake](#) is higher than Winnipeg, water flows downhill through the aqueduct. The aqueduct is a large concrete pipe that was built to carry the water. Construction started in 1915 and was completed in 1919. It cost 17 million dollars at the time and can carry 386 million litres, or 85 million gallons, of water per day.

More from City of Winnipeg's Website


Shoal Lake and Winnipeg's Drinking Water

Winnipeg's drinking water comes from Shoal Lake, which is part of the Lake of the Woods. It is a large isolated lake in the southeast corner of Manitoba, at the Manitoba-Ontario border.



Construction of the Winnipeg Aqueduct began in 1915 and was completed in 1919. The aqueduct is a noted engineering marvel, patterned after ancient stone/masonry architecture with a dish-shaped concrete floor and a parabolic-shaped shell to cover and protect the water from freezing in winter. Gravity carries the water down the aqueduct to Winnipeg as Shoal Lake is higher in elevation than the city.

Does the City of Winnipeg have permission to withdraw water from Shoal Lake?

Yes. We withdraw water from Shoal Lake based on the authority granted by Provincial Acts from both Manitoba and Ontario, as well as a federal government bill from the Senate of Canada. This authority was reviewed and approved by the [International Joint Commission in 1914](#)  .

Does the City of Winnipeg pay anyone for the raw water?

No. Legislation permits us to withdraw the water, stating that the water "is not property to be paid for."

Does the City of Winnipeg sell water?

No. We charge to recover the cost of transmission, storage, treatment and distribution of water to customers.

‘Freedom Road’

Construction of Shoal Lake’s ‘Freedom Road’ (expected to finish by 2019) is a crucial factor in making development of water services on the cut-off peninsula feasible. There is also considerable expectation within the community that the completion of the ‘Freedom Road’ will usher in economic integration with the region and mark the “turning point in our relationship with Canada, the City of Winnipeg, and the Provinces” as indicated by Chief Redsky at the Freedom Road ground-breaking ceremony in 2015.

Economic development of Shoal Lake is enforced by the 1989 “Tripartite Agreement” between the City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba, and the Federal Government, sharing the cost of the road.

There is considerable unease in the community about government inaction as there have been numerous feasibility studies and negotiations in the past with no progress since the current pumping systems were installed in 1996.

The desire for complete independence means Shoal Lake seeks its own water treatment system, rather than being integrated with neighbouring reserves.

Fixing the Situation?

The Freedom Road and the Design Phase of the water treatment facility must be completed by 2019 to meet the 2021 deadline.

Once the road is completed, water can be delivered to Shoal Lake from Winnipeg via the Trans-Canada highway and waste can be offloaded from the Peninsula in the interim.

After the boil water advisory is removed, economic integration, greater self-governance, and negotiations with the city of Winnipeg can begin.



Considerable Attention Has Been Drawn to Shoal Lake 40



Attention has been drawn to the plight of Shoal Lake 40 by Vice News Canada, David Suzuki, the Prime Minister's visit in 2016, a Human Rights Watch presentation at Geneva in 2015, and the presence of the Museum of Human Rights Violations at Shoal Lake, which runs a tour of the conditions on the island.



A Video About Shoal Lake 40's Story

Let's watch a video about Shoal Lake 40:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHOJ0c2izbo&t=69s>

