



Mona Peloquin and Catherine Robertson, two of three protesting the frog jumping competition at St Pierre's Frog Follies, suggest using mechanical frogs in the competition, or ridding the festival of the contest all together.

Fed up with frog jumping

by NICOLE BUFFIE

A frog jumping competition should end according to Mona Peloquin, Gisele Prefontaine and Catherine Robertson.

The trio are denouncing the long-standing tradition in St Pierre during the community's annual Frog Follies festival, the national frog jumping competition.

"It's time to stop this barbaric practice," Peloquin said from her home near St Pierre last Thursday.

The group are taking issue with the trapping of the amphibians, their capture for the four-day festival and the toxins they could be exposed to when being handled.

Northern leopard frogs, the species used during Frog Follies festivities, are native to parts of Canada and the U.S. Reaching about 11 centimeters in size, they're ideal for hopping competitions.

However, the creatures hibernate underwater and breathe through their skin, absorbing oxygen and passing carbon dioxide through diffusion. The three speculate products on one's hand could be absorbed by and poison a frog when being handled.

"They could die the next day and we wouldn't know," Prefontaine said.

Northern leopard frogs have been identified as a species at risk by the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. Peloquin, too, has noticed a decline in the species around her property in recent years, a lush acreage which backs on to the Joubert Creek.

The three self-described animal rights advocates are boycotting the village's festival, a staple in the community.

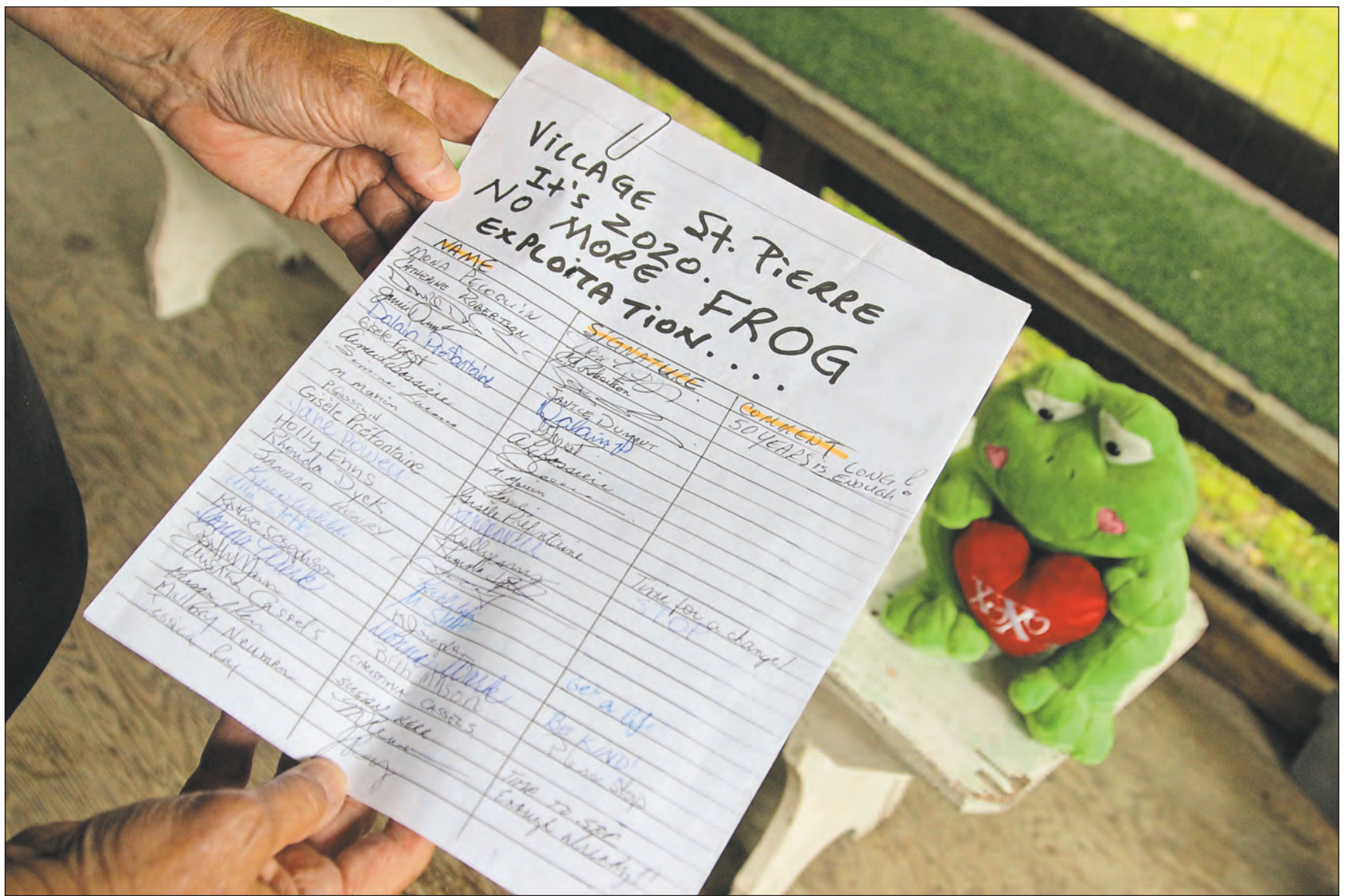
The idea for Frog Follies came during Manitoba's centennial celebrations in 1970. To poke fun at their own francophone stereotypes the Societe de la francophonie manitobaine (SFM) chose a frog jumping contest as the theme for the festival which would honour its distinguished guest, Queen Elizabeth II, who was visiting different parts of the province for its birthday.

With that, Frog Follies came to be.

In the early years the frog jumping competition, the only one to be held in Canada, garnered serious participants; "frog farms" in secret abodes, special diets and training for competitors were some of the tactics used to win the cash prize promised for the farthest hopper. Others merely rented frogs for a dollar just to take part in the fun.

Tactics used to generate the furthest hop include blowing on its backside or capturing a fresh frog with an empty stomach, others involve ensuring a frog is without a crooked nose which can prevent a crooked jump.

These days, the festival has less jumping and more family-oriented activities such as a baseball tournament, children's activities and live music.



In 2020 Peloquin gathered dozens of signatures on a petition to end the frog jumping competition, which gained little traction from the Frog Follies committee.



Throughout the decades different tactics have been used to jump frogs the furthest, including blowing on a frog's backside to nudge it forward.

This year, Roland Gagne, acting president of the Frog Follies committee, said the three-day festival will feature less than 20 frog jumps during the competition, a stark departure from the upwards of 300 the festival used to see.

"We're trying to make both sides happy with this and I think it's more than fair," he said.

Gagne adding there will only be

one handler of the frogs, one day of jumping and the committee has implemented a system which will track where frogs are captured so they can be released at the end of the day back to their initial habitat. Gagne ensures the well-being of the slimy creatures is of utmost importance.

Prefontaine and Robertson argue compromise isn't enough.

"A little abuse is still abuse," Pre-

fontaine said. "Sounds like pie in the sky to me," Robertson added. Peloquin agrees.

"I just shake my head, because you're missing the whole point of it...the only option is not to have it, in our minds," Peloquin said.

Gagne, a lifelong attendee of Frog Follies and heavily involved member of the committee, agreed the festival has changed since its inception 53 years ago, only drawing 1,200 attendees versus upwards of 10,000 in its hey day. However, while the festival is geared towards families in recent years, the novelty of the festival remains, which includes the revered competition.

In other parts of the province, contests which seemed integral to a festival have stopped in the name of animal rights: Boissevain ended their nationally-regarded Turtle Derby in 2001 after a near-30 year run; this year, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon announced they would be doing away with hog and calf scrambles after animal welfare advocates cried foul.

In 2020 Peloquin informed the committee she had a petition signed by dozens to end the practice of frog jumping which garnered little action; she said members showed little interest.

The trio are also not without sug-

gestions for alternatives; paper, rubber or mechanical frogs could be used in place of the real thing, or people could be used to compete, too. They also suggest more education on frogs and their habitats replace the contest all together.

"The brand is already established, the Frog Follies is the Frog Follies whether there's a frog there or not," Robertson said.

The advocates do, however, give credit where credit is due.

"They're dedicated. They do a lot of good to try to keep the community together," Peloquin said.

They plan to demonstrate at the event, but they only wish to make people aware of the harm done to frogs through the event and educate the public on the species and their habitats, not abolish the three-day festival nor make enemies.

Gagne said there may be a day in which the frog jumping competition croaks, but until then the frogs will continue to hop.

When asked if she sees an end to frog jumping, if not this year but eventually, Peloquin's answer was simple.

"There has to be," she said. "I'm not going to stop until it does."

Frog Follies runs in St Pierre Sept. 15 – 18.

NEWS »

Combined effort frees tangled humpback

Teamwork worked to disentangle a whale from recreational prawn fishing gear

PAUL GALINSKI
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A two-day operation in local waters to free a humpback whale of gear from recreational prawn fishing resulted in the whale swimming free.

The search for the whale started on October 13 after a report from a tugboat operator that there was a whale towing around a big yellow buoy and a bunch of rope south of Thormanby Island, off the lower Sunshine Coast, according to Powell River fishery officer Ben Rahier. Rahier said he and fishery officer Bill van Egteren headed down in the fisheries boat to have a look.

"While we were searching around down there, we were assessing different humpbacks and killer whales, looking for gear," said Rahier. "We received another call that a whale towing a yellow float was actually in front of Nanaimo. We went over there and we had an RCMP vessel, we had coast guard, and we had a bunch of folks on the water trying to track this whale down, but we weren't able to

find it.

"Conditions were tough and there were a lot of whales in the area. We looked everywhere and couldn't locate the whale."

Rahier said as soon as the crew was pulling the boat out of the water, another call came in from another tugboat operator near Lasqueti Island, in the southern Texada Island area, where there was a whale towing a yellow float. He said, however, that the fishery officers were not able to track down the whale that day.

In the morning of October 14, another report was made by a whale-watching vessel, between Savannah Point on Texada Island and Cape Lazo in Comox. He said there were two whales, one of which was towing a yellow buoy attached to a bunch of rope.

"We headed out from Powell River to the west side of Texada Island," said Rahier. "The whale-watching vessel was able to stay on station. We got on it right away, and as per our training, we have a satellite tracking tag that is affixed to a buoy on a length of rope.

"The first thing we wanted to do is attach that tracking buoy to whatever gear attached to the whale so we didn't lose the whale again."

Rahier said he was operating the vessel and on almost the first try, they were able to affix the satellite tag and get it deployed. He said it was a complicated operation, given that the whale was moving at five to seven

knots; there was another whale in the vicinity.

Once that operation was concluded, regional marine mammal response coordinator Paul Cottrell, in another vessel with his assistant, went in to disentangle the whale from the rope. Rahier said he remained on station as the rescue vessel.

There was also a support vessel from the Lower Mainland on station, which operated a drone, to provide real time footage on how the whale was entangled, as well as the whale's movements.

"The whale had a string of recreational prawn gear through its mouth," said Rahier. "One side of the whale was pulling the traps and the line went through its mouth and back around to the buoy. We were able to hook onto the trap side and essentially work our way up, cutting as we went and bringing it into the vessel. We would have to wait for the whale to settle after reacting to our work and then go back in and try to cut more rope, the goal being cutting the rope as far up to the mouth as possible.

"On the other side, which was trailing the yellow float, as well as our satellite tag, we attached multiple big floats to create drag. You want that other side with the floats to have as much drag as possible in the hope that the line will be pulled out of the whale's mouth."

Rahier said the whale eventually ended up breaching, almost doing a backflip, and in doing so, with the



LENGTHY OPERATION: Showing the recreational prawn fishing gear that was pulled from a humpback whale's mouth in the Salish Sea are [from left] fishery officers Bill van Egteren and Ben Rahier, with Paul Cottrell, regional marine mammal response coordinator, who was responsible for cutting the line that the whale was entangled in. After several hours, the whale was freed, with no apparent damage. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

drag from the extra buoys, the rope dislodged.

"The whale swam off with its companions," said Rahier. "It was a really positive experience. It sounds like a simple process but I think it took us more than five hours to get to the point where we were attaching the other buoys to pull the rope out of the whale's mouth. It was a lengthy process.

"Being the vessel operator, there are potential dangers, weaving among the whales. It was a matter of keeping the crew safe and making sure the line did not end up in the propeller. Worst case scenario is being towed by a whale."

Rahier characterized the operation as a success and it appears there was no permanent harm done to the

whale. He said having the rope through the whale's mouth makes it a challenge for the whale to feed and go through its regular life processes. He said such entanglements generally lead to death if not cleared.

Rahier said a big shout-out goes to the vessel operators who called it in.

"If we didn't have all of those eyes on the water calling in the location of the whale, it would have been really difficult to track it down and disentangle it like we did," said Rahier. "We always encourage people to report any marine animal in distress, especially entangled whales, by calling the marine mammal incident reporting hotline."

The number is 1.800.465.4336.

QUICK PEAK

Friendly change

In a special resolution at a special general meeting, Powell River Friends of the Library Society changed its name to qathet Friends of the Library Society.

Friends of the library director Linda Harris said at the September 30 meeting, those in attendance voted unanimously in favour of the name change.

"The friends of the library supports the library in a number of ways, such as raising funds," said Harris. "We have a book cube with books for sale there always and we have larger book sales several times during the year.

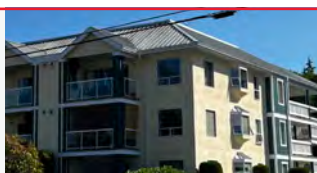
"Sometimes, there are other special events that are sponsored by the friends of the library to raise money."

Harris said the money raised goes toward various programs at Powell River Public Library, or toward tangible items that can be funded.

Illegal entry

At approximately 4:47 pm on October 20, Powell River RCMP responded to a break and enter in the 4900 block of Kiwanis Avenue. A door on a shed at the rear of the senior housing complex had been pried open and the shed was entered. Nothing was taken from inside, but the door was damaged as a result.

Anyone with information about the incident is asked to contact Powell River RCMP at 604.485.6255, or to remain anonymous, contact Crime Stoppers at 1.800.222.TIPS (8477) or online at bccrimestoppers.com.



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'Devastating' call inspired better policing

By Lisa Gervais

The phone call that would change Paul McDonald's life came in the middle of the night.

When he was 18, the partner of his 22-year-old sister had tried to strangle her to death with a telephone cord, all because she had told him she was pregnant with his baby.

McDonald jumped in his car and drove the hour to his sister.

"That's a devastating call to get at two o'clock in the morning," McDonald says, his eyes welling up with tears.

It was bad enough his sister had been beaten. On top of that, he said the police who responded to the call did not demonstrate how he thought policing should be done.

He chooses his words carefully, since he is a 15-year member of the OPP.

"A negative interaction with an element of policing that is not how I want to see policing done," he said during an interview at the Minden OPP detachment.

"From the get go, the officers that showed up asked her 'why are you calling? What happened?' The perception we got as a family, myself, my oldest sister, and my father, the whole time during that interaction at the hospital and police station with male officers and a female victim was that they were making my sister feel like it was her fault. Revictimizing the victim right at the onset of the call and not looking like they actually cared."

It was a defining moment for the fourth-generation police officer.

"I always knew I wanted to be a police officer. From an early age I just knew and after this incident with my middle sister, I knew I was going to try and do better than the people that came before me."

McDonald, who works out of the Haliburton Highlands OPP detachment, has been nominated in the 7th annual Police Services Hero of the Year awards program.

Nominations came from a victim of a sexual assault who can't be named as her matter is still before the courts; McDonald's wife, Krystal McDonald-Smith, the father of a hockey player McDonald coached, John Salfi, and the family of a deceased



Sergeant Paul McDonald through the mirror of his police cruiser. Photo by Lisa Gervais.

accident victim.

"Because of you, I am able to fall asleep at night feeling a sense of security," the sexual assault victim wrote.

Salfi refers to McDonald as an "amazing community role model" in his nomination.

Ben Middleton shares the story of his young brother's death in a July 2015 car accident and McDonald going "above and beyond" with the family that night. "To officer Paul McDonald, as I write this with tears in my eyes and a very heavy heart, I need you to know that you made an incredibly horrifying situation better," he wrote.

McDonald-Smith talks about her husband's mental health struggles after many on-the-job tragedies. It led him to eventually become the mental health liaison officer for the mobile crisis intervention team out of Peterborough County. He was promoted in September 2021 as a sergeant out of Haliburton.

Did nothing for years

However, McDonald admits he did not take care of his physical or mental health for

years.

He added like most police officers, he hid behind a badge of bravado, not sharing his struggles with his family.

"I became extremely distant and callous, withdrew and bottled everything up inside to protect them, it made me a worse person until my wife made me see the person I had become."

The sexual assault case involving the unnamed woman triggered him.

"You don't sign up to do this job to see death and decay and destruction. It takes its toll on you."

He knew he needed help and went to counselling, which led to him becoming the mental health officer in Peterborough.

"I thought, if I can go and get counselling for myself and talk to people, then why can't I do that for other police officers and the general public?"

He got healthier and it saved his marriage.

"Mental health is not talked about. Everybody hides it. Everybody has skeletons in their closet that they're too embarrassed to show. But we go to the dentist for a broken tooth, we go to a doctor for a broken arm, why aren't we going to

the medical profession and counsellors for a broken mind?"

The new mental health liaison officer now also comes to the Haliburton detachment.

Through it all, McDonald said he has never forgotten how his sister was treated that night. He added he believes he has been gifted with emotional intelligence. He tries to bring that to every aspect of his life and certainly his policing.

He always asks himself, "If this happened to my wife, my sister, my father, how would I want the officer to be interacting with me right now?"

As for the awards nomination, he said he doesn't do his job for recognition. He doesn't care if he wins but the nominations have touched him deeply, especially his wife's. "To say that I'm her hero really takes its toll. If it wasn't for her telling me that I needed to wake up, I wouldn't have progressed to where I am right now."

"I just want to help the most people I possibly can before I'm not able to do it anymore."

The Police Association of Ontario award winners will be formally announced during the PAO's annual general meeting in June.

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