

Smith Mountain Lake Association

STEWARD OF THE LAKE

Spring 2022



President's Message:

When my neighbor informed me that there was an organization dedicated to protecting safe recreation and water quality at Smith Mountain Lake, I desired to know more. Their name, he said, was Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA) and was made up of volunteers. He explained the SMLA mission is to: "Protect the Water of Smith Mountain Lake and Promote Safe Recreation." Because we were new property owners who wanted to be involved in our lake community and very much liked the idea of a safe and clean lake, it was a simple choice for us to join the association and volunteer where needed.

The Board of Directors of SMLA have started the year off with a number of important goals which can be boiled down to the following three categories:

1. Protecting the water at Smith Mountain Lake

- a. Continue with our robust water quality management program by broadening the scope of water testing on Smith Mountain Lake (SML).
- b. Support the work of our newly formed Lake Council by building technical expertise in maintaining clean water at SML, while at the same time, anticipating and preparing for any future events/changes which would jeopardize our water quality.

2. Protecting safe recreation opportunities for residents and visitors of SML.

a. Supporting the excellent work of the SMLA Water Safety Council through boat safety checks, safety education in the public schools,

clubs and communities.

- b. Boater safety courses will now be offered in high school AG departments in different counties in Virginia.
- c. Create and enforce no wake zones for safe recreational events like the Fourth of July fireworks.

3. Educating the public of the work of SMLA.

- a. Septic education for homeowners on the lake.
 b. Vessel pump out throughout the boating season to ensure no effluent is released into the
- son to ensure no effluent is released into the lake.
- c. Monitoring of our streams and tributaries entering the lake to identify potential lake hazards from our water sources.
- d. Communicate and warn residents of algae blooms, high water events and any other hazardous conditions that could develop at SML.
- e. Encourage community participation in the "Take Pride in SML" clean-up event during the Month of May.

I want to thank all of our members and volunteers who make the important work of SMLA possible through your membership and volunteering efforts. Without your support we could not continue our work as the "Steward of Smith Mountain Lake."

I wish you all a safe and exciting season of swimming, fishing, skiing, wake boarding, wake surfing and barbequing on the "Jewel of the Blue Ridge" this summer with your family and friends. Be safe.

Bill Butterfield

President, SMLA

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Water Quality Monitoring

The cold days and long nights of winter have given way to the more moderate temperatures and lengthening days of spring here at the lake. This means that our group of 55 citizen volunteers will soon be back on the lake taking water samples and water clarity readings as part of our SMLA Water Quality Monitoring Program. If you happen to see one of these volunteers dangling hoses or Secchi disks over the side of their boat, a friendly wave of the hand is always appreciated more than a wave from the wake of a boat. If you happen to be one of these volunteers, thank you for all your efforts to protect the quality of our beautiful lake. If you are not currently one of these volunteers, but are interested in learning how you can help, please contact the Smith Mountain Lake Association office at 540.719.0690.

The final report of our 2021 monitoring season was distributed to Lake Association members via email in early March of this year. It is also available on the SMLA web site. While it is packed with data, charts, and a certain amount of technical language, the key take-aways from this report are straightforward:

- 1. The water quality of the lake is very good, among the best in the region.
- 2. The amount of nutrients in the water is higher than we would like, but 2021 was in line with the average of the past 20 years.
- 3. The levels of chlorophyll in the water, a measure of algae growth, was dramatically lower in 2021 than in 2020, and was well below the average of the past 20 years.
- 4. The water clarity in 2021 was in line with the average of the past 20 years.
- 5. At no time in 2021 were bacteria levels outside the standard determined by the Virginia Department of Health to be safe for recreational waters.

As we head into our 36th consecutive year of water quality monitoring, there are some recent enhancements that have been made to our program. The most significant change is that we have expanded the length of our monitoring season. Previously, our program covered the period from late May to mid-August of each year, covering the important summer months. Thanks to the efforts of our team of volunteers, in 2021 we extended our monitoring an additional 3 months into early November. During this extended period, we were able to obtain water clarity readings at about 75% of the usual 84 monitoring sites around the lake. To further expand our capabilities the SMLA acquired water temperature sensors that enabled us to take water temperature readings at various depths from 5 sites around the lake. We expect these additional readings to provide a more complete picture of how the lake changes from one season to the next, as well from one year to the next.

Based on the success of our extended fall monitoring in 2021, we have decided to get a head start in 2022, resuming the water clarity and temperature monitoring two months earlier than our usual start date in late May. This will add to our growing body of data and hopefully provide us with additional insights into the changes that the lake undergoes during the non-summer months.

BUFFER GARDEN ADVISORY VISIT SLOTS GOING FAST

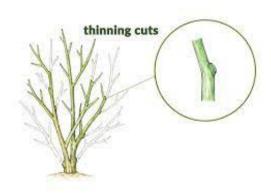
With spring approaching homeowners are beginning to request the services of SMLA's *Buffer Landscaping Advisory Service Teams (BLAST)* to guide homeowners to understand and design shoreline buffer gardens. These gardens are the *ONLY* way to reduce the flow of fertilizers, pollutants, and sediment from entering our lake. Grass lawns only serve as a "runway" for these bad actors to get into the lake and cause harmful algae blooms. Act fast as the Teams do get busy in the coming months. You may request an appointment for one of our Teams by calling the SMLA office "*How To Guide*" may be seen at the following link. http://smlassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/A-Buffer-Landscape-Committee-brochure.pdf

SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE IS A NO DISCHARGE ZONE!

It's illegal to discharge untreated sewage from boats into the lake. The Smith Mountain Lake Vessel Pump Out Program (VPOP) is a cooperative effort between the Virginia Department of Health, TLAC and SMLA. There is NO cost to boaters for this service, and boats can be pumped as part of this program at many participating Marinas around the lake. It can't be any easier. The Program will operate this season from May 21st through September 10th. More details about how to schedule this service will be provided in a future edition of our President's AHOY monthly update. If you are not on this email only list please email theoffice@smlassociation.org to be added so you don't miss timely announcements.

SPRUCE UP YOUR BUFFER GARDEN

Spring is in the air and it's time to get out and spruce up the garden, and don't forget your shoreline buffer garden. Prune off dead limbs from the trees and shrubs. While dormant pruning is usually done in late winter, six to 10 weeks before the average last frost, you can remove that dead limb any time of year. Shape your shrubs by pruning down to a new growth bud or shoot. Cut the ornamental grasses down to about 12-18" tall. Pull unwanted weeds, but don't use weed killers or preemergents near the waterline as these can be harmful to fish. You also would void the purpose of a buffer garden! Prior to adding new mulch, loosen old mulch to promote air movement and water retention. Easy steps to make your buffer garden beautiful.



SPRING MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

SMLA is conducting a spring membership drive and we hope to increase our membership by 25% by June 1st. We will use mailings, local media, and participate in events such as the business expo to make the public aware of our programs which support our mission to protect the water of SML and promote safe recreation.

We ask you to help in this effort. Most of us joined SMLA due to the influence of a neighbor or friend. As members of SMLA, your words of support to your neighbors would add a personal touch to our outreach and help us explain that our lake needs their support.

As you talk to your neighbors, please remind them of the many benefits of joining SMLA, including:

- A quarterly newsletter highlighting our activities to keep the lake clean and safe;
- An informative website, social media, and neighbor centered groups highlighting current issues impacting the lake;
- A Smith Mountain Lake map (chart) annotated with GPS grid, underwater structures, facility listings, marinas, fishing areas, boat ramps, and much more, available for purchase in our office, from our website and at many local marinas;

A brochure "Protecting Your Waterfront Investment—10 Simple Shoreland Stewardship Practices" which describes simple steps you can take to reduce pollutants, slow the flow of runoff, to capture and clean potential pollutants; and

 Reporting tools to take an active role as lake stewards by reporting floating debris, accidents, wake incidents, abandoned boats, and algae blooms.

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Also tell them that their membership will support two initiatives we are currently pursuing to protect the water of our lake. They are:

- Remote electronic sensors to monitor water quality. These would supplement our already extensive citizen volunteer water quality monitoring program that occurs throughout the summer by extending our monitoring capabilities to all seasons; and
- Buffer Landscape Demonstration Projects. We are working with local master gardeners and master naturalists, along with local landscapers, to develop demonstration gardens that slow the flow of runoff and remove pollutants—protecting water quality and adding to the value of your property.

Membership and charitable donations support the good work of SMLA, so we need your help to continue our mission to protect the water of Smith Mountain Lake and promote safe recreation. Please visit our website at www.smlassociation.org for more information on the work that SMLA performs or how you can support our continued efforts. It is our best and most efficient insurance for maintaining our property values and preserving our treasure—The Jewel of the Blue Ridge.



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UPDATE TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN: SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE 2030

The recent Water Quality Monitoring 2021 annual report states *the water quality in Smith Mountain Lake is very good*. And we all continue to benefit from the combination of natural factors and efforts of residents, businesses, and organizations around the lake who have worked to protect the water of SML and promote safe recreation.

This report is a lagging indicator—telling us the results of our past efforts. We must continue to be diligent and take the actions so that our lake stays clean and safe into the future.

There are ongoing threats to our lake, including the impact of warming temperatures and extreme weather events, increasing boat traffic and shoreline development due to the increased popularity of the lake, and the impact of runoff of silt and contaminants from surrounding properties.

However, there are opportunities to address these threats through improvements in networked sensors, improved data, and analytics, and through partnerships with research organizations. Additionally, social media networks provide us opportunities to improve awareness of how our individual choices of landscaping fertilizer use impact our lake.

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Our Smith Mountain Lake Association must also look internally to ensure we are a learning organization, with the required technical and management skills to address new and emerging threats and take advantage of the opportunities of new technologies. And that our efforts are coordinated with other stakeholders of the lake. We must look at how we are organized and how we raise the resources needed for the future.

To organize and coordinate our efforts and to ensure those efforts are resourced, SMLA is working to update its strategic plan which we will publish this summer. The plan will include initiatives we will pursue to improve use of technology to monitor our lake, improve our partnerships, improve our education and outreach programs, and plans to mature our organization and its ability to raise funding.

All our efforts will focus on achieving our mission—to protect the water of Smith Mountain Lake and promote safe recreation. And to be able to do that for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren.

Our plan is tentatively called **Smith Mountain Lake 2030**. Our hope is that when the 2030 Water Quality Monitoring program report comes out, it will say the water quality in **Smith Mountain Lake** is very good.



Silver Sponsor

The SMLA volunteer water quality monitoring team is looking to add two volunteers to take bi-weekly water clarity readings from their boat at six sites (three sites each) on the Roanoke channel this summer. Three of the sites are near Hales Ford Bridge, and the other three sites are near Long Island Estates. No experience is necessary. Please contact the SMLA office for further details.

SAVE OUR STREAMS: Call For Volunteers

Smith Mountain Lake's Save our Streams (SOS) program is responsible for monitoring 14 streams which flow into Smith Mountain Lake. By surveying the health of each of these streams twice a year, SOS acts as a canary in the coalmine for the health of our watershed, since pollution in our tributaries can lead to pollution in the Lake itself.

SOS uses a biological method to determine water quality. That is, rather than taking a water sample and sending it off to a lab for chemical analysis, we gather a sample of benthic macroinvertebrates (i.e., stream bottom dwelling bugs), identify them, and plot a water quality rating by comparing the number of pollution tolerant-bugs to pollution-intolerant bugs among the 20 or so species sampled.

Stream volunteers train with teams of three certified monitors assigned to streams in the Lake area and are generally able to become certified within a full season. For the first time since the onset of the pandemic, we are accepting new volunteers. We are looking for vaccinated individuals in good physical condition to join the program. All necessary equipment is provided, and volunteers are assigned to a team in their home area. If interested, please email the area coordinator, Geoff Orth, at smlstreams@gmail.com.

WATER SAFETY COUNCIL: Boating Season is About to Start—Are We Ready?

Can't wait to start boating? A little preparation will go a long way for an enjoyable and safe boating season. Think of this time as an annual physical exam for your boat.

After you uncover that boat, you first need to check to see if you have not had any critters that have been using your boat for a winter home and enjoyed chewing on the electrical wiring and seat cushions. That does unfortunately happen once and awhile. Hopefully, that is not your problem and you can proceed with a good cleaning.

Now, check on the fluids. Is the engine oil clean and full and looks like no water has entered? Next check the hydraulic and cooling fluids, if you have them. Move the steering and lubricate the connections. Rubber hoses must not be stiff and brittle; replace before they fail. If you have an out drive, check the rubber boot between the out drive and hull. A worn out boot can lead to sunken boat.

If you have at least five seasons on your battery, it is time to replace. Many times boat batteries don't make five seasons. Make sure your navigation lights are working even if you never plan on going out at night.

After the mechanical and electrical checks have been completed, pull out your boating safety equipment. Fire extinguishers must be showing "green" on the dial, or the 'pin" must pop back if that is the design. Note—many "Kidde" brand fire extinguishers have been recalled. Let the life jackets air out in the sun while you check to see that all snaps and buckles work properly and that each one is marked "Coast Guard Approved." Any jackets that don't meet that test must be removed from your boat.

Next, check to see if all of the gear that you keep on your boat is still there. Some may still be in the garage or loaned to someone else or taken by others without your knowledge. It is always best to have an inventory list of your boating gear.

This beginning season task may take a little time and money but if done completely it will make for a safe and enjoyable boating season.

And one last thing, please make sure that that you have your "Certificate of Number" (boat registration) as well as your "Virginia Boating Safety Education Certificate" on board. These documents are the first things that law enforcement will ask for when stopping your boat.

Have a great summer and let's all keep up the good SML safety record from last year.

PS, The Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Sail and Power Squadron will be holding their annual FREE, boating safety check weekend on May 21st and 22nd at the Bridgewater Plaza docks and the Crazy Horse Marina docks.











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SEPTIC SYSTEM EDUCATION

Septic systems require care, periodic inspections, and pumping. Failed septic systems can leak into the watershed, polluting the lake you so enjoy. Septic systems are expensive to replace and have a lifespan, which can be extended through proper practices. What you put down your drains could be harming your septic system.

Unsure what septic system type you have? Check with your Health Department. Different systems have different regulatory requirements regarding inspection and pumping. Local County ordinances outline how frequent you should have a certified septic professional inspect and/or pump out your system.

The SMLA website has convenient links to learn more about septic systems. Go to www.smlassociation.org, where you can direct yourself to **Programs** then choose **Septic Systems**. Within that section are valuable links such as the "New Homebuyer's Guide to Septic Systems," "Onsite and Well Information for Virginia Citizens," and "What You Should Know When Buying a House with an Onsite System."

Learn about how what happens on, or within, the watershed affects the water, whether that be erosion or pollutants such as septic runoff. This site has links to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) where you can learn how septic systems work, responsibilities as a septic system owner, and the types of septic systems. There is a link to VDH's "Onsite and Well Information for Virginia Citizens" and "What You Should Know When Buying a House with an Onsite System." There is even a link to VDH guidelines for the care and maintenance of a variety of types of systems. Take care of your system through your daily actions.

A LAKE NETWORK—SUBDIVISION VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

For the past few months, we have been running a test of a lake network in a select number of subdivisions on the lake. The concept is very simple—when we find information that we think is of value to our neighbors, we send it to our group of subdivision leaders who then forward it to the members of their respective neighborhoods. Our test so far has involved 6 of the approximately 266 subdivisions on the lake. These include Beechwood West, Boardwalk, Park Place, Sandpiper Bay, Village East and Cedar Key Estates.

We are doing this because a recent survey of lake residents shows that email is their preferred method to get important information about issues related to the SMLA mission to protect the water of SML and promote safe recreation. This was by a wide margin over other media and social media channels.

And while the lake association can communicate to our members who have provided email addresses, we have no way to communicate with the larger lake population—the 14,000 + property owners on or very near the lake through their preferred method of email.

As a result, we turn to local media, such as the Laker Magazine, Laker Weekly newspaper, and SML Eagle and social media such as Facebook and Nextdoor to communicate about our programs and alert property owners to threats to their safety—high water events, algae blooms etc. However, each of these methods have limitations, and are not the residents' preferred communication method of email.

We are looking for SMLA members who would be willing to volunteer to be a subdivision leader for our lake network. The commitment would be to take SMLA approved communications we send and resend it to your community. We anticipate that this would be no more than 1 or 2 message/s a month (unless there are emergencies) and that it would take no more than 30 minutes a month.

All communications would be high quality information and you would be the final say whether to resend to your community.

Don't forget to shop at KROGER and AMAZON SMILE after designating SMLA to receive 5% of your total qualified purchases...all at NO COST TO YOU! Contributions help us protect the water, safety and property values on the lake! Please email theoffice@smlassociation.org if you need more info on signing up.

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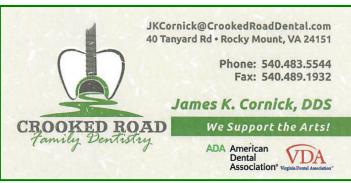




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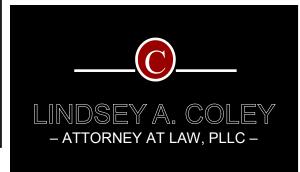




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Buffer Garden Photo Contest

Are you proud of your buffer garden? If so, send us two pictures of it from different perspectives along with your name, address and phone number. We'll be collecting these and selecting the 10 best photos to comprise a "virtual buffer garden tour" on the SMLA website in the fall. The plan is to provide an award to the best buffer garden; process and details to be determined. The award will be presented at the Annual SMLA Membership Meeting. Please email your photos to theoffice@smlassociation.org no later than August 1, 2022.

<u>~</u>*~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

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