



SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE ASSOCIATION

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Website: www.SMLAssociation.org Phone: 540-719-0690

Protecting the Lake & the Investment of SML Residents

Lake Matters: Fall 2019

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Here we are at the end of summer! I hope everyone has had a safe and pleasurable season!

As you can imagine, work at SMLA kicks into high gear during the summer months. We have just completed our water quality monitoring season. I would like to extend a huge thank you to all of our volunteers! This program would not work without you! As you have read, we have had a few areas reflecting e-coli readings higher than those articulated by the VA Department of Health. We have worked earnestly to get this information out as soon as possible with appropriate advisory guidelines. These readings can be resultant from high water flow events, run-off, etc. The good thing is that e-coli usually dissipates within 24 hours. We look forward to Ferrum College's formal 2019 summer season report later this fall.

The Water Safety Council has worked hard to provide boater education relative to the 'watch your wake' initiative. We are seeing adherence to these guidelines in certain parts of the lake and am hopeful that this will continue throughout the lake. We want our beautiful lake to provide opportunities for all who wish to recreate in a safe manner.

SMLA's buffer landscaping program is doing quite well! SMLA Board member Bob Hastings, has graciously taken this program and is making tremendous progress. We have had a record number of visitations. Buffer landscaping is a critical component of ensuring excellent water quality. A proper buffer between your property and the lake mitigates run-off of undesired chemicals, etc. Our program is proud to have Master Gardeners visit and make recommendations. We thank them for their service! SMLA is currently working on expanding this program to potentially provide additional support to the homeowner. More to come!

SMLA held its Annual Meeting in August. The well received program focused on water safety. A highlight was the presentation of our awards. We congratulate all award recipients! I would like to extend a very special thank you to Gale Easter for her leadership and to all the board members who contributed to the planning and execution of the meeting! We are always open to feedback for interested program topics. I hope this meeting serves our membership well.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a very special thank you to our partners on the Board of Directors, the Western Virginia Water Authority, Bedford Regional Water Authority, AEP and Franklin, Bedford and Pittsylvania Counties. These partnerships are integral to SMLA work. Thank you!

As we move into Fall, we will be sending out Director election ballots for your consideration. Please let us know if you have an interest in serving on the SMLA Board. Please feel free to call me to discuss opportunities. I ensure you will be rewarded by your work!

Have a wonderful Fall season!

Kindest regards,

Lorie Smith

Lorie M. Smith, President

*You can reach us at
540-719-0690 or
via eMail at theoffice
@smlassociation.org*

The SMLA office is located in The Plaza on Scruggs Road in the lower level, right beside the Discovery Shop Annex.

Teresa Picking, Office Administrator, is in the office on Tuesday, and Friday from 9:00 to 5:00, and on Wednesday from 9:00 to 3:00.

We are open most Mondays and Thursdays, from 9:00 to 1:00 (staffed by volunteers).

WATER SAFETY NOTES: SML Summer Season Wrap Up

Now That Labor Day is behind us, let's look at some stats and observations.

DGIF has not finished its incidents report for 2019 since all investigations must be completed. In the state of Virginia, an incident involves boats: where there must be more than \$2000 in damage, or a person is injured and must receive care more than basic first aid, or there is a fatality. So far this year there are 56 incidents, 11 deaths, and 13 injuries in Virginia. At SML there were seven incidents and four injuries. There was a death in Philpot lake that is being investigated and which will increase the death toll to 12. The significant issue here is that in 100% of the deaths no lifejacket (PFD), was worn. This is up from 85% in 2018. To state the obvious, if you can't swim or are too debilitated to swim, your chance of survival without a PFD is zero.

Because of not having a boat involved, the 2018 and 2017 fatalities at our Lake were not added to the incident report. Both young boys were not wearing a life jacket at the time. As I write this there were no fatalities on Smith Mountain Lake in 2019. Congratulations to everyone for your diligence and hard work.

Every Marina Manager and Owner I've talked with said the 2019 season was the best ever financially. It started out with (for once) a beautiful Memorial Day and just kept going. Was it perfect? No! We still have a serious large wake issue, some discourteous and unsafe boat operators, and unfortunately an uptick in operating under the influence of alcohol. We still have work to do.



It was a great season and Smith Mountain Lake put on a great show reminding all of us why we call this our home.

Patrick Massa, Chair—SMLA Water Safety Council

SAVE OUR STREAMS UPDATES PROTOCOL: Changes Follow

An important part of the partnership between *Save our Streams* (SOS) and Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is to ensure that their water monitoring practices in the field match. Consequently, representatives of SOS's parent organization, the *Izaak Walton League*, and DEQ meet periodically to review their common protocol to see if updates or changes are needed.

This time around, the review has resulted in two relatively major changes. First, the nets used to capture macroinvertebrates in our streams will henceforth use a standard 1/32 inch mesh, as opposed to the current 1/12 inch nets. This will mean more aquatic insects and other "critters" will end up in each sample dip, and smaller ones will not be as likely to evade the net. Second, each stream will be monitored twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall, rather than the previous practice of four times a year. DEQ's judgement on dropping the number of monitoring events is that during winter months, more species are dormant, and therefore they do not become part of the sample, while in the summer, insect numbers are prone to be affected by large hatches of one or more species, and that can result in a skewed count. The final count has a minimum of 200 specimens, and as the ratio of pollution-tolerant to pollution-intolerant species is critical to the score, the changes aim to ensure that the results reflect water quality as accurately as possible.

Our approximately 40 volunteer monitors have been stretched to cover 16-18 streams four times a year, but the decrease in required annual events may actually allow us to add additional monitoring points. This could prove especially useful as pipeline and road construction projects continue in our Smith Mountain Lake watershed. Our local *karst* landscape—where dissolved bedrock has left a terrain characterized by sinkholes, caves, springs, and underground streams—is especially vulnerable to surface disruption, which could lead to pollution or water level problems in the Lake. The Save our Streams program enables Virginia's DEQ to extend its span of control beyond what its own staff could reasonably be expected to cover.

As new volunteers are always needed to maintain our vigilance, we are eager to expand our roster of certified monitors. To join in the effort, contact us at smlstreams2019@gmail.com.

Geoff Orth, Chair—SOS

SML WATER QUALITY

The SMLA water quality monitoring program for the summer of 2019 has come to a close. Although the final tests results have not all been completed, the initial results from the summer indicate that:

1. Water clarity, on average, across the lake remained the same as it has been in 2018 and 2017 with the clarity being better as you get closer to the dam.
2. Chlorophyll-a (Algal Biomass Indicator) was down somewhat as compared to both 2018 and 2017, however is still higher than the 5, 10 and 20 year averages.
3. Only 12% of the algae found in the lake were of the Blue Green (BG) variety and only a very small portion of that was of the strains capable of producing toxins. This is very good news. The remaining algae were a combination of diatoms and green algae with diatoms being the majority. This is also very good news.
4. Total Phosphorous in 2019 was found to be higher than any of the past 15 years. Phosphorus is an essential element for plant life, but when there is too much of it in water, it can speed up eutrophication (a reduction in dissolved oxygen in water bodies caused by an increase of mineral and organic nutrients) of rivers and lakes... a sign of this is excess algae in the lake. (Common sources of excess nitrate reaching lakes and streams include septic systems, animal feed lots, agricultural fertilizers, manure, industrial waste waters, sanitary landfills, and garbage dumps.) This is not good news.

While overall the report card for the year is positive, the increase in total phosphorous is of concern.

What can you do to help keep Smith Mountain Lake the paradise that we all enjoy?

- A: have your septic system inspected periodically to ensure there are no leaks and have it pumped out;
- B: don't over fertilize;
- C: install buffer landscaping to prevent excess nutrients from entering the lake;
- D: insure your holding tank on your boat (if you have one) is pumped out to ensure its contents do not make their way into our beautiful lake;
- E: and help influence your friends and neighbors to also act responsibly.

A big Thank You goes out to the more than 50 SMLA volunteers who give their time, boats and gas to collect samples for analysis by our friends and colleagues at Ferrum College.

Michael McCord, Chair—WQM

**An AEP representative is in our office on Fridays from 1:00 to 4:30.
This is an opportunity for property owners to ask general questions
about shoreline management at Smith Mountain Lake.**

No appointment is needed.

For Information about the Shoreline Management Plan go to www.smithmtn.com.

BUFFER LANDSCAPING

The other day, I had the opportunity to take an out-of-town family member for a boat ride up the Blackwater. It was an outstanding August afternoon to enjoy the sunshine, fellowship of family and the beautiful waters of Smith Mountain Lake. My sister-in-law, who is a realtor in Raleigh was quick to tell me how impressed she was with the beautiful homes lining the Blackwater River. I agreed until, as a dedicated member of the Smith Mountain Lake Association, I noticed how many homeowners are growing grass down to their rip rap. I thought to myself, "beautiful houses but, boy oh boy do these homeowners need a buffer garden between their rip rap and grass."

You see, growing grass down to our rip rap provides a runway for pollutants and contaminants to flow directly into our lake water. The US Environmental Protection Agency has reported that runoff from lawns, roads and rooftops is a primary cause of pollution in our waterways. The extra fertilizer from lawns, oil and gas from driveways, soil from building sites, litter, pesticides, herbicides and salt are polluting our lake. And the easiest path for these bad actors to access our pristine water is across our grass. This problematic flow causes many issues with water quality, the most challenging being the growth of algae. Nutrient pollution from landscape runoff can cause explosive algal growth. As the algae die and decompose, they consume dissolved oxygen in

Continued on Page 4

the water to the detriment of fish and other organisms that need it. Erosion can cause turbidity (cloudiness) in water, reducing the amount of light penetrating the water. This inhibits growth of aquatic plants that fish depend on. Actually, in the summer the situation is exacerbated due to warmer water which leads to less oxygen available in the water.

This past March, I wrote about the damage development around lakes have caused in the state of Minnesota. Over the last half-century, quaint lakeside cabins have been transformed, by the thousands, into mega-homes with large fertilized lawns running to the water's edge. Unfiltered runoff has remade these lakes into a nutrient soup that's quite literally suffocating fish and other native species within them. This year's early halt to walleye fishing on Mille Lacs, the state's most popular fishing lake, is a particularly ominous example. "It's death by a thousand cuts," said Peter Sorensen, a fisheries expert at the University of Minnesota and one of a number of scientists who consider the damage irreversible, given the added realities of a warming climate and a stiff political resistance to land-use changes needed to restore central Minnesota's lakes. Over the next few generations, those lakes will die.

*The issue is coming close to home here in Southwest Virginia. A recent article entitled, **Toxic Algae Bloom Advisory Issued For Spotsylvania County Lake. The toxic blue-green algae can be harmful to people and fatal for pets, the Virginia Department of Public Health warns residents** by Megan VerHelst of Patch Staff discusses the health advisory issued for Lake Anna.*

With the advisory, The Virginia Department of Public Health warned people and pets of the dangers of swimming in waters where harmful algae blooms are growing. Test results indicate samples collected July 30 at sites within these areas contained potentially harmful algae—or cyanobacteria—exceeding safe swimming levels. The Department of Health advises both people and pets to avoid swimming and other water activities such as windsurfing, all of which pose a risk of ingesting water or exposure to skin.



So, what can we do to make sure this doesn't happen here at Smith Mountain Lake? An easy step we can all take to protect our lake is to plant a Buffer Landscape garden at our shoreline. As you ride around the lake, take note of our neighbors who have planted natural gardens along the shoreline that have trees, shrubs and perennials beautifully planted. Areas like these serve as a buffer or filter for runoff, catching sediment, debris and pollutants *BEFORE* it reaches the lake. The plant roots hold the soil, slowing erosion thus helping water clarity as well as protecting the aquatic habitat. Trees and shrubs near the water's edge help shade the water keeping the water tem-

perature cooler which improves the habitat for amphibians, fish and other aquatic life. Buffer Landscaping promotes the ideal that lakefront homeowners can have a beautiful lakefront while being lake friendly and environmentally sound.

The SMLA Buffer Landscape volunteers are made up of Virginia Master Naturalists and Virginia Master Gardeners. These folks will work with homeowners to develop garden plans that are designed to manage erosion and provide a natural buffer or filter that will keep harmful sediment, and pollutants out of our lake. It's an easy collaborative (and free) conversation with the homeowners who are in charge of the plan. Our Master Gardeners and Naturalists simply provide recommendation based on what the homeowner tells us they want. The meetings are held at the homeowner's shoreline where our Master Gardeners and Naturalists work with the homeowner to develop a plan best suited for the homeowner's goals. It's that simple.

If you're interested in getting started give us a call at 540-719-0690 or e mail us at theoffice@smlassociation.org.

Bob Hastings, Buffer Landscape Chair

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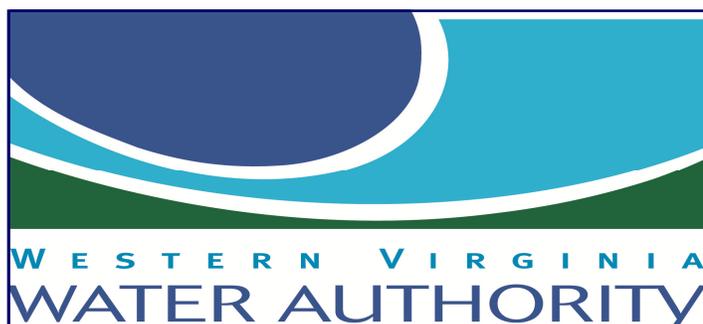
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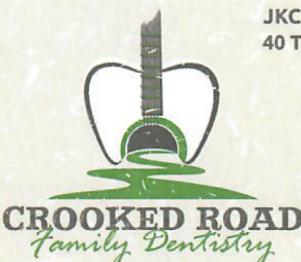
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