

# Editorial

June 21, 2023

## What is Being Done to Address the Harmful Algal Bloom Swimming Advisory at Smith Mountain Lake?

The Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Swimming Advisory issued earlier this month by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) on a portion of Smith Mountain Lake (SML) has raised questions and concerns. Among the questions asked on social media are “what’s being done to remediate the problem, monitor the issue and prevent it from happening again”?

The following is provided by the Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA), the longest serving advocate for SML and the lake community.

### **Remediation**

The HAB must die off and therefore, we are relying on Mother Nature and time to rid the lake of it. This can take days to weeks, and possibly months. It is impossible to predict when this might occur. The duration of a bloom depends on physical and biological conditions that influence its growth and persistence, including sunlight, water temperature, nutrients, and speed and direction of wind. While there are chemicals that can be infused into the lake to help reduce the HAB, the sheer size of SML, the unintended impact to the aquatic ecosystem and the cost associated with this approach make it prohibitive to pursue.

### **Monitoring**

VDH and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) are the experts responsible for monitoring and testing the Blackwater arm of SML, as well as any other areas that are reported to VDH by the public. VDH and DEQ maintain frequent contact with SMLA about their work and in turn, we share it with the public on our social media pages and online HAB Resource Center: [www.smlassociation.org/hab](http://www.smlassociation.org/hab).

Additionally, SMLA and the Smith Mountain Lake Water Quality Program at Ferrum College have scientists, students and over 50 volunteers out on the lake every other week, collecting our normal summertime water quality samples. These volunteers are trained to observe and report any evidence of algal blooms. The Ferrum team collects samples for algae which are analyzed for species present, and if elevated cyanobacteria species are noted in the samples, they will report it to VDH and DEQ.

### **Prevention**

SMLA is advocating to all stakeholders how they can help keep the lake clean including:

- Landowners and residents: Install a buffer garden between lawns and rip rap; reduce or eliminate use of lawn fertilizers; avoid blowing leaves or grass clippings into the lake; regularly monitor, maintain, and pump septic systems; and clean-up after pets.
- Boaters: Properly pump out and dispose of sewage from holding tanks. Do not throw trash into the lake.
- Builders and Contractors: install and maintain silt fencing, and frequently remove debris from building sites in a timely manner.
- Bedford, Franklin, and Pittsylvania Counties: continue to enforce the laws and regulations established to protect the lake.
- Commonwealth of Virginia: enhance state funding and resources for inland waterways (SML).



Additionally, SMLA has created a HAB Working Group, the first of its kind on Smith Mountain Lake. The Working Group is comprised of a diverse group of SML stakeholders. The initial goal of the Working Group is to develop a community communication strategy to spread information about potential HAB situations and to bring needed updates to the community. A subsequent goal is the development of a resiliency strategy which could include initiatives such as local monitoring and sampling efforts to enhance the work done by state agencies and Ferrum College.

The Smith Mountain Lake Association is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. We rely on memberships, grants, and donations to support the programs that keep SML clean and safe. With less than 1,200 individual, family and business partner members, we encourage the over 10,000 lake front property owners who have invested in SML, the hundreds of businesses who benefit from the SML economy, and the thousands of visitors who enjoy SML, to join us and be a Steward of the Lake. Annual membership is only \$25 for new individuals/families and \$75 for business partners. Donations in any amount are always appreciated. We need community support now more than ever. Join, donate and volunteer online at [www.SMLAssociation.org](http://www.SMLAssociation.org).