



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

John Vidovich, Communications Director
Smith Mountain Lake Association
SMLACommunications@gmail.com

Smith Mountain Lake Association Announces Results of its Water Monitoring Program and Town Hall Meeting to Discuss the Health of Smith Mountain Lake

For the past 37 years, the Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA) has employed an all-volunteer team of 50 plus lake residents to regularly collect water samples and measure water clarity at 84 sites on Smith Mountain Lake (SML). These water samples are analyzed for chlorophyll and phosphorous content by scientists at the Ferrum College Water Quality Lab, who also perform bacteria sampling, algae sampling, and depth profiling at various sites around the lake.

Key results of the most recent week of sampling highlight elevated levels of bacteria (specifically e. coli), chlorophyll and decreased water clarity in certain areas of the lake.

It should be noted that while SMLA and Ferrum College collect water samples on a regular basis every summer, this team does not collect water samples for Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) analysis. The current HAB Swimming Advisory, in place since June 6th for the Blackwater arm of SML, is managed by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

SMLA is closely working with partners at Ferrum College, VDH and DEQ to unravel the complex interaction of factors that are contributing to the current excessive cyanobacteria (aka blue-green algae) growth in SML.

Understanding the Health of Smith Mountain Lake

SMLA has invited representatives from VDH, DEQ, Ferrum College and County Ag Extension programs to speak with the lake community about the health of SML.

The purpose of the meeting is to bring together subject matter experts from statewide agencies to share information on the current HAB situation. The goal is to further educate the residents on this topic, address their questions, and share solutions that can protect the health of SML.

Date: Thursday, July 6
Time: 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Location: Trinity Ecumenical Parish, 40 Lakemount Drive, Moneta, VA

Space is limited for the meeting, therefore, SMLA is requesting all interested attendees register for the meeting at www.SMLAssociation.org/HAB.



Results from Second week of SMLA Water Quality Monitoring Program

Bacteria

Bacteria levels around the lake (specifically e. coli bacteria originating in the intestines of warm-blooded animals, not cyanobacteria which are the cause of the recent HAB) remain generally low in the lake so far this year. However, the most recent SMLA/Ferrum sampling identified two locations where the concentration of e. coli bacteria exceeded the VDH standard for recreational waters. One location in Becky's Creek is near Bayside Marina and the other is in Little Bull Run near the Penhook boat ramp.

It is typical after periods of heavy rain, like we recently experienced, to be followed by a temporary increase of e. coli bacteria in the water. This increase is due to runoff into the lake from the surrounding watershed area which collects agricultural waste, wildlife waste and/or leakage from aging septic systems into stormwater discharges. Any of these may pollute the water with bacteria, though bacteria typically do not thrive for very long after entering the lake.

Water Clarity, Chlorophyll, and Phosphorous

In the week ending June 10th, concentration of chlorophyll-a, common to both green and blue-green algae (cyanobacteria), and water clarity both continue to be significantly worse than the respective averages over the past 20 years. This is consistent with recent observations of excessive algae growth in some areas of the lake. On the other hand, levels of phosphorous, a measure of polluting nutrients in the water, have been slightly lower than the 20-year average. This latter result is somewhat surprising because increased phosphorous is usually a key driver of excessive algae growth. It perhaps is indicative of increased consumption of phosphorus by cyanobacteria.

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ABOUT SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE ASSOCIATION

Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA) is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, all volunteer organization whose mission is to protect the water of Smith Mountain Lake and promote safe recreation. SMLA relies on memberships and grants to support the programs that keep SML clean and safe. The Association is administered by the SMLA Board of Directors, with leadership from its Lake Quality and Water Safety Councils. Join, Donate, Volunteer and learn more at www.SMLAssociation.org.