

Water Quality is a Key Concern for IRLC

by Ed Robertson

The Indian River Lakes are all at various trophic stages. Excessive loading of phosphorous (P) during the warm, algae and weed growing, cottage season is expediting the eutrophication process of the lakes.

Some of the lakes are sick and in the warm season are vomiting toxic blue-green algal blooms. This trend is dangerous and is becoming a clear threat to the natural functions of the lakes, the fish population and the public. This deterioration will impact public health, public use of the lakes and lake water and eventually even the economic viability of the communities around the lakes.

IRLC is evaluating many small and some large (and expensive) fixes to accomplish the primary goal to significantly reduce the load of phosphorous going into the recreational waters of the Indian River Watershed.

What the Water Project is doing:

Evaluating all possible phosphorous sources and remedies

- Looking at the waste-water treatment plants in the watershed and all other non-point sources.
- Researching small "cluster" municipal systems, non-water based sanitary waste systems and any other on-site systems that retain the nutrients in residential sanitary waste and prevent them from reaching our recreational waters.
- Promoting the growth of waterfront buffers to absorb and consume the P from run-off before it can reach the lakes.
- Evaluating and promoting improved grey-water systems to treat waste water from sinks, showers, etc. for cottages using composting toilets where an effective alternative system is not feasible.
- Planning to look at well water in the area and to start monitoring the quality of the drinking water being pumped from the water-table.

Raising awareness and involving all local stakeholders while broadly reaching out for knowledge and assistance

- Developing a collaborative educational program designed to help us all understand the root causes of the problem and to start implementing effective remedies.
- Preparing a communication and educational outreach program to keep conversations going about the GOAL and effective short and long-term plans and strategies to accomplish it.
- Crafting a Community Outreach/Public Participation Plan in preparation of an Indian River Watershed Management/Action Plan.

We will need volunteers to fill many roles that will be required to:

- Do water sampling and analysis
- Work with municipal officials and boards
- Communicate with and assist lake associations
- Put together workshops on growing buffer zones and on alternative systems, composting toilets and improved grey water systems
- Coordinate with soil and water conservation districts and state agencies to prepare and execute a community outreach/public participation plan in preparation of an Indian River Watershed Management/Action Plan
- Prepare applications for and manage grants
- There will be many more as yet unidentified tasks for volunteers

Yes, there is a lot to do. It will be challenging, fun and probably frustrating at times. There should be plenty of milestones along the way to celebrate.

The fundamental flaw in the whole century old "system" is that the soils around the lakes are generally, with few exceptions, not suitable for septic systems. Yet almost all of us are still using some sort or another of a "septic system".

Our goal is to understand what will work here, around the Indian River Lakes, and then find ways to help people implement those solutions.

Continuing with the status quo will lead to a very unpleasant dead-end.

All of us stakeholders have too much invested, not just in our love of the place but in cottages, homes and businesses, to continue to contaminate the water that brings us all together here.

Walter Dutcher recently quoted Henry David Thoreau: "A lake is a landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It's earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."

It is time for us to engage our better nature and start working to solve our problem. Please contact April Frederick or Ed Robertson and tell us how you would like to help!



Reflections on Grass Lake photo by: M. Scarlett