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Lake monitors expand their duties

The Lake Winnipesaukee Watershed Association (LWWA) is looking for volunteers to be part of its Adopt Winni program, an effort that aims to keep water quality levels at their highest in Lake Winnipesaukee and other bodies of water in the state.

In a joint effort by the LWWA, the Lakes Region Planning Commission, North Country Resource Conservation and Development (NCRCD), the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and the Center for the Environment at Plymouth State University, the Adopt Winni program has been designed to increase the efforts of UNH's Lakes Lay Monitoring Program in collecting data that will provide essential information regarding the current water quality of the lake.

Project manager Pat Tarpey said the water quality of the lake not only affect the lake physically, but it also affects the local economy.

"It's important economically," said Tarpey. "This is the key tourist attraction in the state so it's important to keep the health of the lake and the watershed."

Part of the initial focus of the program is on the amount of phosphorus in the lake. Phosphorus is a nutrient that plants need to grow and it is naturally found on land, but not in the lake. People may not realize when they fertilize their lawns that large quantities of phosphorus may run off into the lake. When phosphorus is carried into the water, it promotes the growth of aqueous plants, including milfoil or other invasive plants.

"The milfoil bloom by the Meredith docks is significant," said Rick Demark, coordinator for the NCRCD. "That's just one example, as there are several other blooms in the area. The communities may be concerned beyond phosphorus, though, with there being other contaminants running into the water."

UNH has been conducting lake sampling for 25 years as a way of monitoring the water quality levels and seeing what long-term changes are occurring over time. In the Adopt Winni program, there are dozens of locations around the lake that are designated as monitoring sites.

"We're looking to see if we can see a relationship between where the tributaries empty into the bays and near shore sampling in respect to the phosphorus levels," said Tarpey. "We also want to see in the deeper lake sites how it's assimilating all that phosphorus coming in."

Volunteers in the program, known as Winni-Bay Watchers, will be assigned different tasks, depending on what type of site they choose to sponsor. No experience is needed to become a volunteer, as training will be provided by the UNH Lakes Lay Monitoring Program or the NH Volunteer River Assessment Program.

Lake sampling for specific water sites must be done on a weekly or biweekly basis which will require around one hour of commitment per site between the beginning of May and the end of September. While at the site, volunteers should be willing to do simple processing of the samples.

Tributary sampling will be done on a biweekly or monthly basis, which will require approximately a

half-hour per site, starting in April and going through the end of September. After collecting the data, program members will be observing the results to see what is happening in and around the lake with respect to water quality.

Financial support is necessary to cover the cost of laboratory analyses, supplies and diagnostic reports.

"We need sponsorships for the sites because the lab analysis for the phosphorus costs money and we need volunteers with boats for the lake sites or volunteers without boats for the tributary sites," said Tarpey. "We're hoping to get some businesses in the area to sponsor sites."

Sponsorship costs for the program are set at $100 for a tributary site and $500 for a lake site. Recognition of financial support will be publicized in press releases, websites and newsletters. Winni Bay Watcher decals will be available for display in business windows and/or on vehicles.

Erica Anderson , senior planner at the Lakes Region Planning Commission, said the project is being done in phases because there is such a large watershed to cover.

"We are working on a comprehensive watershed management plan for Lake Winnipesaukee," said Anderson. "DES is funding the first phase of the project, which includes us looking at Meredith, Sanders and Paugus Bay. In the next year, the plan is to expand the project to Center Harbor, Moultonborough and Tuftonboro."

Eventually, the plan is to have the program span the entire lake, but a great amount of support is needed by the public to keep the program in full swing.

"The goal is to build some social capacity within the watershed and help people become more aware of what the watershed is and what they can do to help keep the water clean," Anderson said.

On Oct. 1, the Lakes Region Planning Commission will be holding a watershed management planning meeting at Prescott Farm in Laconia to discuss the quality of water with regard to the phosphorus levels. The meeting will run from 6 to 8 p.m.

The Adopt Winni program is accepting volunteers through the end of September and will be looking for more at the beginning of the April. For more information, contact Pat Tarpey at 527-2093 or e-mail patricia. tarpey@nh.usda.gov.