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Algal blooms, septic systems, and water quality: Dangerous waters?

While algal blooms in Lake George have not turned toxic from Hazardous Algal Blooms (HAB) as in other nearby water bodies like Moreau Lake, Friends Lake, Lake Champlain, Lake Hopatcong, NJ and Greenwood Lake, NJ, HAB are exploding and degrading the quality of our drinking water. Inadequate management of nutrient loading from stormwater, septic, sewers and fertilizers lead to beach and lake closures in some cases.

To better understand the presence of algae in and around Assembly Point, we sampled algal blooms at 28 different points last summer. We concentrated our samples around Assembly Point to assess visual algal bloom formation along docks and the shoreline which are becoming more common. Results revealed that multiple sites around the Point had algae that are associated with septic waste based on the Palmer Pollution Index (PPI). The Waterkeeper has also recently reported on hot spots of algae growth from 50 sites sampled this summer from around the lake (Lake George Mirror- August 2019).

In response to our efforts and others, the Town of Queensbury passed a septic system property transfer regulation that requires septic inspections whenever the property title changes hands. Some communities such as Hague and the Town of Lake George deem this insufficient to protect the Lake and are calling for periodic, mandatory inspections as happens in many other communities. A letter to the editor in the Post Star (4/30/19) reprinted here with permission from the author, details the need for septic inspection.

Dear Editor,

I'm delighted that Lake George will upgrade its wastewater treatment plant. I am sympathetic to property owners who do not want to shoulder the costs for the new plant. So, if local and federal government can offer grants, great. But we all need to accept that we have to pay our share to keep our lake clean. My sewer tax in Hague is more that

\$1,300 annually-half of that is capital costs and interest. Sure it's painful to pay this every year, but it's far better than the alternative—having no sewer. Which brings me to another point. Many properties here still have septic systems. Our Hague Water Quality Awareness Committee is drafting a law to require regular inspections of septic systems that are near the lake or a tributary. To those who argue that such a law could be expensive for residents with failing septic systems, I say: if your roof is failing, you fix it. If your septic system is failing, you should also have to fix it. Many septic systems in Hague were installed decades ago, some have never been maintained. In fact, some homeowners don't even know that they have a septic system or how to care for it. We need regular inspections, not just when ownership of the property changes. And one more example, if you change the oil in your car regularly and perform other maintenance, your car will last longer. The same is true for your septic. But even so, you will still have to replace your car (or septic) at some point. The big difference between replacing your car and replacing your septic system is that, if your septic system is polluting the lake, well, that's something that we can't simply replace.

Ginger Henry Kuenzel, Hague

The tale of HAB's in nearby lakes is a cautionary tale. So should we be concerned about pollution from inadequate septic systems, runoff and fertilizer on Assembly Point? Our study found 21 of the samples contained one or more forms of potentially harmful *cyanobacteria*. If you would like to know the results of our analysis on sites near you, please contact us. High concentrations of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) can produce neurotoxins under certain conditions including excessive nutrient levels. High exposure to neurotoxins is linked to ALS, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and symptoms of respiratory and intestinal distress, skin rashes, and hay fever.

Queensbury Town Board Awarded for new Site Plan Review Regulations and recognizes the contribution of the APWQC

Town Board member, Catherine Atherden, recently acknowledged the APWQC for our efforts on the Waterfront Residential Committee in the developing new Site Plan Review Regulations. We would like to share with you her letter to our Board on 9/3/2019.

To: The Board of Directors of the Assembly Point Water Quality Coalition,

Re: Letter of Recognition to the APWQC to recognize your impact to our community.

On May 6, 2019, the Town Board approved a set of changes pertaining to the zoning code for all Queensbury Water Bodies. After approval by the Adirondack Park Agency, a

Public hearing and SEQRA negative designation, Resolution 137-2019 was passed. This significant set of changes helps protect our lakes, rivers and streams from stormwater runoff by extending the buffers, increasing the robustness of the vegetation and expanding the reasons for a site plan review thereby ensuring these measures are more frequently examined by the Zoning and Planning Boards.

The public is becoming more aware of the dangers of stormwater runoff. Indicative of the importance of this resolution in protecting our waters, the Town of Queensbury received the Fund for Lake George Waterkeeper Langmuir Award in July 2019.

*This is a promising and much needed set of changes but it is also important to note how it came to be. **This resolution was a direct result of APWQC** approaching the Town Board at a workshop, resulting in a committee of residents and the Town to address the concerns and hence the resolution. This is yet another example of how grassroots can make a positive impact on the community, that we are a Town willing to listen and take action; an encouragement for others to become more involved in local matters.*

Thank you for all your efforts to improve our community,

Catherine Atherden

Queensbury Town Board

Short notes

- The Town of Queensbury is re-issuing a septic survey for North Queensbury. Considering that Assembly Point has been very densely developed and that severe rain events, high water table, and poor soils could compromise the efficiency of individual septic systems, it is probable that pollutants are seeping from our septic systems into the Lake and feeding the algal blooms. So please provide any information you can!
- APWQC held a Board Meeting August 1, 2019. Board members agreed that the Coalition should press for periodic mandatory septic inspections. We elected Bob Carbognin as chair for 2019/2020. Many thanks to Rolf Ahlers for serving as chair 2017/2019 and Luise Ahlers for the lovely cocktail party that followed the meeting.
- APWQC informal social was held at the Cleverdale Country Store on August 22, 2019. Thanks for joining us.

Check out our website assemblypt.com and contact us at apwqc7@gmail.com



Coalition Board
and Officers at
their August
Meeting

Please consider a tax-exempt donation to the APWQC.
APWQC, 35 Knox Road, Lake George, NY 12845

The Assembly Point Water Quality Coalition, Inc. is a 501c3 non profit corporation committed to improving and restoring water quality and compromised ecosystems in the Lake George Lake Champlain Basin by supporting policies, regulations and practices which preserve and protect waters and watersheds.

Assembly Point Water
Quality Coalition
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