



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bass Lake passes environmental tests Stewardship could lead to a higher grade

UTOPIA, Ontario, June 26, 2009 – Students aren't the only ones receiving grades at this time of year. Bass Lake in Oro-Medonte was recently graded, and test results indicate it is in fairly good health.

The sub-watershed was evaluated on forest conditions, surface water quality, and wetland conditions. Each category received a grade of B.

The study was conducted by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority in partnership with the Bass Lake Ratepayers Association and the Township of Oro-Medonte. The ratepayers association requested data on the lake to help encourage lake residents to undertake stewardship projects to enhance the ecosystem's land, water and wildlife resources.

There will be a public presentation of the report card at McCabe's Restaurant in the Highwayman Inn in Orillia on Saturday July 25th from 10 a.m. and noon. All Bass Lake residents and others interested are invited to attend.



NVCA staff Ian Ockenden and Natosha Fortini test water quality in Bass Lake by profiling dissolved oxygen.

“The Bass Lake sub-watershed lies within a significant natural heritage corridor that stretches from the Niagara Escarpment to the Canadian Shield, so it is important to protect and enhance the area's water, forests, and wetlands,” says David Featherstone, Manager of Watershed Monitoring for the NVCA.

The area's water quality and natural conditions are generally healthy, but some stretches of the shoreline show areas of impairment and need for improvement.

Forest conditions are graded on three components: forest cover, forest interior and riparian cover. The sub-watershed has substantial forest cover (Environment

Canada recommends a minimum of 30 per cent and it has 42.2 per cent), but it has comparatively low forest interior habitat. This is important for sensitive wildlife species which require undisturbed, deep forest habitat to thrive. However, fish species can find excellent habitat as riparian (streamside) cover is abundant.

Wetland condition grades are achieved by evaluating both wetland cover and wetland buffer (a distance of 100 metres surrounding the wetland). The Bass Lake sub-watershed has extensive wetland coverage, which supports flood control, groundwater supplies, and fish and wildlife habitat. It also filters water for nutrients and pollutants. However, the buffers separating the wetlands from urban and agricultural lands are lacking.

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The water quality grade is based on both tributary water (streams flowing into Bass Lake) and the lake water.

Most tributary streams are in good health, especially those from the south and west, which flow through the Oro Moraine. These streams have the potential to support brook trout which is a sensitive species that requires cold, clear streams to thrive.

Some streams however, received only fair grades. Kyle's Creek, upstream of the 11th Line, is less healthy due to onstream ponds and lack of streamside vegetation, which affect its temperature and functions. Downstream of Langman Creek is also considered impaired as a result of past stream alterations.

The water quality in the lake is generally good. Average total phosphorus levels are well below the Ministry of the Environment's 0.02 mg/L objective. Phosphorus is an important indicator of lake nutrient levels, which if too high, can lead to excessive growth of algae and aquatic vegetation.

"The phosphorus levels in Bass Lake may even have decreased since the 1990's due to zebra mussel colonization," says Featherstone. "This invasive species filters the water, shifting nutrients to the bottom sediments."

Water clarity tests and E.coli monitoring at public beaches also received good grades.

Areas of concern for water quality are dissolved oxygen levels and the state of the shoreline.

Dissolved oxygen profiling indicated that there is an oxygen deficit in the lake during the winter in depths below three metres. Dissolved oxygen is not only important for the survival of aquatic organisms but also to prevent sediments at the bottom of the lake from generating large amounts of phosphorus. This deficit emphasizes the need for wise stewardship to reduce nutrient loadings into the lake.

Guidelines suggest that 25 per cent or less of a lake's shoreline should be developed to maintain a healthy lake system. Currently, 63 per cent of the Bass Lake shoreline is developed. The southwest shoreline is the healthiest as it is largely natural, with overhanging vegetation and habitat for fish and wildlife. The north shoreline is in relatively poor health as there is little vegetation cover due to shoreline alterations made by homeowners.

"The lake's health depends on property owners living in harmony with the shoreline. They can greatly improve habitat by undertaking simple stewardship actions such as creating a vegetation buffer at least three metres wide around the shoreline and using floating docks which minimize disturbances to aquatic habitat," says Featherstone.

For more stewardship suggestions and to read the report card, please visit www.nvca.on.ca or call (705) 424-1479.

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About the NVCA

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority is a public agency dedicated to the preservation of a healthy environment through specialized programs to protect, conserve and enhance our water, wetlands, forests and lands.

For more information on the Bass Lake Report Card, please contact:
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