

2020 Water Test Report - Page 1 – New Phosphorus Threshold

As reported at the 2019 AGM, the historical norm of phosphorus thresholds individualized by lakes was found to be based on factors that could not be supported when faced with legal challenges. As a minor example, the precision of the threshold with 2 decimal places could not be tested with any current lab. Other challenges were of a broader nature that questioned the underlying assumptions about human influence on the watershed, the impact of wetlands and the accuracy of the model inputs...for example, Clear Lake still is described as having an inflow from the Camp Bay, which does not exist.

As an immediate result, District, Township and MLA have adopted a different approach, which essentially sets the bar high and punishes lakes that exceed it.

The new standard is 20 micrograms/litre (ug/l). For context, our threshold was set at 4.79 ug/l and our 2019 test results average for all sites was 4.6 ug/l. Further, according to our records, Clear Lake's phosphorus levels have been in single digits since 1973.

While we haven't seen the final text, it is our understanding that once a lake hits 20 ug/l, an enhanced monitoring process starts. If 20 ug/l is hit or exceeded for subsequent years, we go into overdrive, which could include causation studies (currently planned for Ada Lake, Brandy Lake, Bruce Lake, Stewart Lake, Three Mile Lake, Leonard Lake), enhanced engineering studies, formal and committed action and remedial plans and generally a state of emergency.

There is a second-order effect to this change. Phosphorus thresholds have been the mainstay of Township of Muskoka Lakes planning department for decades. Clear Lake has been classed as over-threshold, therefore Clear Lake was subject to enhanced development restrictions, even though we have about the lowest Phosphorus of monitored lakes. With the rejection of thresholds as a guiding principle, TML has elected to tighten the screws further. The proposed amendments now focus on a new concept called [Capacity Recreational Carrying](#), which is not explained well but could have the effect of making every property on our lake non-compliant... one of the policy directives is "Direct the updated zoning by-law to include updated and more restrictive provisions on lot coverage and required yards and setbacks". In a practical sense, this means any property development will now be treated as an exception and will have to go through additional hearings and approval processes, at significant cost and effort for cottagers for even the most minor change.

The Official Plan re-write process is entering Stage 4, which invites public input. It is our opinion that the proposed changes will do nothing more than incent cottagers to even more ignore the rules and do their development under the radar and without permits.

Respectfully submitted by Bob Cleverdon
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