
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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New Hampshire Volunteer Lake Assessment Program (VLAP)

Have you ever wondered how clean New Hampshire's lakes are, and how we get that information? If so, you may be interested in the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) Volunteer Lake Assessment Program.

What is VLAP?

The Volunteer Lake Assessment Program (VLAP) was initiated in 1985 in response to an expressed desire of lake associations to be involved in lake protection and watershed management. By collecting water samples from their waterbodies at regular intervals, VLAP volunteers make it possible for the state (with only eight aquatic biologists) to better understand water quality trends for New Hampshire's more than 900 lakes and ponds. VLAP is a cooperative program between volunteer monitors and NHDES: Volunteers collect water samples, and NHDES analyzes and interprets data to provide annual water quality reports for each lake. This cooperative effort empowers communities to make informed decisions about how to best manage their lake and the surrounding watershed area.



Approximately 500 volunteers from nearly 180 lakes and ponds located throughout the state currently participate in VLAP!

Why is Volunteer Lake Monitoring Important?

By sampling a lake or pond several times each year (usually once a month during the summer) over a period of years, volunteer monitors help develop a comprehensive data set from which long-term water quality trends can be discerned. In addition to sampling the waterbody itself, volunteer monitors sample the streams that flow into and out of the waterbody and survey the surrounding watershed.

Such monitoring results in the early detection of water quality changes, allowing NHDES to trace potential problems to their source. If the data gathered through VLAP reveals a significant water quality problem, the historical data can be used to justify implementation of a more intensive watershed study.

VLAP data sets are invaluable, serving as a community planning resource, in maintaining federal lakes funding, and in NHDES' mission to protect New Hampshire's lakes and ponds.

Regardless of the motivation for joining VLAP – whether it is to improve community planning decisions, to do their part in protecting the local environment, or to protect their own investment in property adjacent to a lake or pond – the end result is the same: VLAP volunteers play an integral role in protecting the quality of New Hampshire’s lakes and ponds.



How does VLAP work?

VLAP is a cooperative effort; volunteer monitors and NHDDES each have a role to play:

The Role of the Volunteer Monitor:

- Schedule sampling dates with NHDDES.
- Schedule equipment and bottle pick-up.
- Collect water samples (typically once per month during the summer).
- Deliver collected water samples to the laboratory within 24 hours of sample collection.
- Provide minimal financial support for sample analysis.
- Report on potential water quality issues to NHDDES when necessary.
- Pass on water quality information to associations, community, and/or town officials.

The Role of NHDDES:

- Teach principles of lake ecology.
- Train volunteers how to collect samples.
- Provide sampling equipment.
- Conduct sampling audits.
- Analyze samples in the laboratory.
- Interpret and publish data in annual reports.
- Provide technical/educational materials.
- Provide notifications of workshop opportunities.
- Investigate water quality complaints.
- Assist communities in addressing concerns.
- Incorporate data collected by volunteer monitors into state water quality reports.

Sampling Audits: NHDDES biologists regularly train volunteers and accompany them on a sampling trip to make sure they follow proper sampling procedures. This provides volunteers with additional training and allows them to discuss any areas of concern with the biologist.

Pick-Up and Drop-Off: Volunteers can pick-up and drop-off sample bottles and equipment from the NHDDES Jody Connor Limnology Center (JCLC) in Concord and can also use the Lake Sunapee Protective Association – Colby Sawyer College VLAP Satellite Laboratory in New London.



Related Volunteer Opportunities

Many VLAP volunteers also participate in associated NHDDES programs, including:

- Weed Watchers Program
- Mercury in Fish Study
- Volunteer River Assessment Program
- Cyanobacteria Monitoring

How can I get involved?

VLAP could not be a success without the dedication of volunteer monitors who realize how important New Hampshire’s lakes and ponds are to the beauty, economic and ecological health of the state. Lake associations or individuals interested in learning more about VLAP or other NHDDES volunteer programs should contact:

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