
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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New Hampshire Volunteer Lake Assessment Program

Do you live near a lake or pond? Do you wonder why the water can be clear one week and then green or brown the next week? Do you wonder why slimy green stuff grows on the rocks in the lake or pond one year and why there is no slime at all the next year? Are you interested in finding out how healthy the lake or pond is and what you can do to protect it? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then you may be interested in joining the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Volunteer Lake Assessment Program.

What is VLAP?

The New Hampshire 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. There are more than 900 lakes and ponds in New Hampshire, and with only 10 DES biologists, it was evident that the only way to gather trend data from lakes and ponds was through trained volunteers. VLAP is a cooperative program between volunteer monitors and the DES, which leads to local awareness of land use and human practices that may be detrimental to lake quality and also empowers communities in their decision-making regarding lake management issues. Approximately 500 volunteers from 154 lakes and ponds located throughout the state presently participate in VLAP.



Why is Volunteer Lake Monitoring Important?

Volunteer monitors typically choose the lake or pond that they live by to monitor, and their efforts supplement the environmental monitoring efforts of DES. By sampling a lake or pond several times each year over a period of years, the volunteer monitors help to develop a comprehensive data set from which long term water quality trends can be discerned. In addition to sampling a lake or pond itself, the volunteer monitors are trained to sample the streams that flow into the lake or pond, and also to survey the surrounding watershed.

Routine volunteer monitoring results in early detection of water quality changes, allowing DES to trace potential problems to their source before the quality of the lake or pond is severely impacted. Over time, baseline data is used to determine long-term trends in lake water quality. This data is invaluable, serving as a community planning resource, in maintaining federal lakes funding, and in DES’s mission to protect New Hampshire’s lakes and ponds. If a negative water quality trend in a lake or pond is revealed through VLAP monitoring, then the waterbody and its watershed may be eligible for more intensive study through the New Hampshire Clean Lakes Program.

Regardless of an individual's or group's 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 volunteer monitors play an integral role in protecting the quality of New Hampshire's lakes and ponds!



How does VLAP work?

VLAP is a cooperative effort between volunteer monitors and DES.

The Role of DES

- Teach principles of lake ecology to volunteers
- Provide sampling equipment to volunteers
- Train volunteer monitors how to collect samples
- Conduct an annual visit to each lake or pond
- Analyze samples in the laboratory
- Interpret and publish data in annual reports
- Provide an annual newsletter
- Provide technical/educational materials
- Provide notification of workshop opportunities
- Investigate water quality complaints
- Assist lake associations to address concerns
- Incorporate data collected by volunteer monitors into state water quality reports

The Role of the Volunteer Monitor

- Notify laboratory of sampling dates in advance
- Schedule equipment and bottle pick-up
- Contact DES to schedule annual biologist visit
- Collect water samples at least once per month during the summer (typically June - August)
- 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 violations to DES when necessary
- Pass on water quality information to associations, community, and town officials

A DES biologist conducts an annual visit to each participating lake or pond to meet with volunteers to answer questions, provide training, and to collect additional samples. Volunteer monitors are encouraged to sample at least two additional times during the summer (typically June - August) on their own. Volunteer monitors can arrange to pick up sample bottles and equipment from the DES Limnology Center in Concord or at the Lake Sunapee Protective Association-Colby Sawyer College VLAP Satellite Laboratory in New London.



Associated Volunteer Opportunities

In addition to routine sampling of lakes and ponds during the summer, many volunteer monitors participate in associated DES programs. These volunteer opportunities include the following:

- Clean Lakes Program
- Weed Watchers Program
- Mercury in Fish Study
- Adopt-a-Beach Program

How can I get involved?

The Volunteer Lake Assessment Program 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, economy, and ecological health of the state. Lake associations or individuals interested in learning more about VLAP or other DES volunteer programs, should contact:

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www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/vlap/index.htm