

## BOLTON LAKES AND WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

### PUBLIC COMMENT RESPONSES

Thank you to those residents who have taken the time and commitment to comment on the comprehensive Watershed Management Plan that was presented in January.

The Bolton Lakes Watershed Management Plan is viewed by the Steering Committee representing the four member towns of Bolton, Coventry, Tolland and Vernon as a dynamic resource. The plan provides a variety of prudent approaches to address short- and long-term issues associated with the Bolton Lakes Region. It is critical to have a plan that provides clear instruction to the member towns, that is based upon sound environmental science, and also provides practical applications for the variety of stakeholders in the watershed. A stakeholders' action should not deviate from the watershed plan. The Committee believes that one of the core strengths of the plan is the focus on education and advocacy of these sound practices. Though there may be instances where the adoption of ordinances or regulations, and associated enforcement, is required to obtain watershed management goals, the Committee also believes that routine encouragement of best management practices can provide the best long-term results. The towns will continue to find balance between community stewardship and regulations, and we endeavor to maintain a consistent approach to support the health of the watershed now and in the future.

Below are the steering committee's responses to the public comments. There were a number of redundancies in the comments, so the information herein was categorized for the ease of comprehension. The responses will be posted on the respective towns and Friends of Bolton Lakes (FBL) websites. Copies are available upon request.

#### **OUR WATERSHED**

The Bolton Lakes Watershed includes the towns of Bolton, Coventry, Tolland and Vernon. It is vital that the four towns and other nearby towns collaborate to maintain the health of the lakes. A map showing the watershed boundaries is provided on the FBL website.

#### **ALGAE/CYANOBACTERIA**

There were a number of public comments with concerns about the algae/cyanobacteria blooms. The state, towns and FBL are aware of the concerns these conditions create. The 2021 blooms were likely triggered by excessive rainfall and subsequent loss of oxygen in the water column. Severe seasonal loss of oxygen in the water column causes internal nutrient loading of phosphorus. The watershed plan describes different options for cyanobacteria and internal loading and management techniques; algaecides which do not provide full seasonal control of cyanobacteria are planned to be used sparingly in emergency bloom situations. Phoslock, an internal phosphorus control technology, is used to bind free phosphorus in the water column and sediments. Phoslock applications are designed to permanently reduce the internal phosphate load that fuels cyanobacteria blooms. The towns of Bolton and Vernon are obtaining the appropriate permits for these options and applied for grants to fund them in case they are needed in the 2022 summer season.

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#### **AQUATIC PLANT MANAGEMENT**

Public boat launches and beaches provide access to the Bolton lakes, making them vulnerable to new infestations of aquatic invasive species that can rapidly colonize large areas of our lakes. Aquatic vegetation is currently mapped seasonally, and is monitored closely by lake managers and lake residents to document the growth of native species and manage the eradication of invasive species. One of the BLWMP recommendations was to have boat-launch monitors. A limited number of FBL volunteers have been trained and awarded accreditation by DEEP and the Connecticut Agricultural Experimentation Station (CAES) to monitor the boat launches for aquatic plant transmission on boat trailers. In addition, FBL volunteers continuously monitor the lake waters and report their findings to the lake managers and the towns.

#### **LAKE FALL WATER DRAWDOWNS**

A number of comments suggested deep drawdowns as a potential invasive plant control mechanism, being a simple and less expensive option. Yet, the effects of drawdowns are complicated. Drawdowns may have good impacts on certain species, including Variable milfoil growing in shallower water, but it does not affect Curly-leaf pondweed, which grows from seed-like structures called turions. Drawdown may also "push" Fanwort to grow in deeper water by extending the light penetration zones for it to become established. Fanwort also reproduces from winter buds, similar to turions which are not as affected by exposure to cold temperatures. Drawdown also leaves the 3-4ft zone very vulnerable to desiccation of native plant species (species richness tends to be highest in the 2-4ft zone). Finally, the rain storms and melting snow can wash the nutrient rich sediment exposed on the lakes shore into deeper water. The BLWMP outlines a formal procedure for drawdown, in consultation with FBL, the towns, and CT DEEP.

#### **WATERSHED NUTRIENT POLLUTION**

The use of any fertilizers on watershed properties is not recommended, including organic fertilizers. The concern of nutrients flowing into the lakes after the use of fertilizer is known. The FBL Welcome Brochure contains a section of the maintenance of shoreline property. It is available to on the FBL website at [friendsofboltonlakes.org](http://friendsofboltonlakes.org). In our watershed there are boat launches, roadside ditches, private properties and parking lots where stormwater runoff contributes to the nutrient loads of our lakes. The plan identifies several of these projects and suggests solutions for remediation. The installation of the Bolton Lakes Regional Water Pollution Control sewer system has reduced the annual nitrogen load to the lakes dramatically. The phosphorus load would have been reduced significantly if there were many failing wastewater systems near the shoreline before the sewer project installations. Questions regarding the sewer system should be addressed to the Bolton Lakes Water Pollution Control Authority by calling 860-649-8066 x6112.

#### **COMMUNICATION/EDUCATION**

The towns and FBL consider public outreach and education an important aspect of the watershed plan. The town halls of Vernon and Bolton have lake-related brochures available to the public. Recently a post mailing went out to 350+ residents with an update on past watershed accomplishments. Residents are encouraged to attend the FBL monthly meetings to hear first-hand about various topics. A request can be made to FBL or the towns for any documents that are available on the website. The local health departments post signage at various public access points when conditions and/or test results indicate a public health advisory is needed. Individuals can call their town offices or sign up for town alerts to get up-to-date information.

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#### **SURVEY RESULTS**

While the BLWMP was being reviewed for content and format, the Steering Committee conducted an online public survey to elicit feedback from the residents. The survey results are available for review on Bolton's website in the Lower Bolton Lake section of the website.

The questionnaire was roughly 50 questions long and has had over 250 responses. This survey was heavily geared towards residents living in the watershed of the Bolton lakes, but it also included questions about lake use and land-use practices, relevant to all local residents. The survey included several questions about lake management and water quality to gauge the existing level of public awareness. One of the goals of the survey was to use community responses as a metric of public engagement over time, and to resurvey residents within ten years. At the time of the initial public survey, only 30% of survey respondents said that they currently participate in either FBL or BLWCA outreach events, and only 24% of respondents said they had attended any of the Bolton public presentations by Northeast Aquatic Research. In ten years, the towns and FBL/BLWCA hope to increase their community participation rates. Similarly, roughly 93% of respondents answered that they were either 'Very Concerned' or 'Fairly Concerned' about the Bolton lakes water quality, yet 60% of respondents also answered that they were not aware of their local inland wetlands and watercourses regulations. The observed disconnect demonstrates a need for additional lake-smart community awareness.

Both lake visitors and lake residents took part in the survey. Most Bolton Lakes visitors use the lakes for boating and most lake residents use the lakes for swimming. Though their recreational interests differ, these two groups have the following in common; the need to easily identify aquatic plant species, familiarize themselves with the existing inland wetland regulations, and gain better understanding of algae blooms and water quality.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS UPDATES**

*Hatch Hill Dam.* The most recent reconstruction of the Hatch Hill dam with its upgraded water control gate will be updated in the plan.

*Recreation and Wildlife.* The steering committee agrees the Value in Balance section of the plan should note that the recreational uses are year-round, and include ice fishing, skating, cross country skiing, and walking on the frozen lake surface. A fuller description of the wildlife supported by the lakes is warranted. In addition to fish, there are numerous waterfowl, raptors (including bald eagles), great blue herons, and even mink. These species are not only important in their own right, but observation provides an additional recreational opportunity. The plan will be updated to include this suggestion.