

Goshen's Public Lakes: Our Threatened Community Asset

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If someone asks you why Goshen is famous, what do you answer? The Goshen Fair? The Rotary? The Goshen Players?

At times, we all are guilty of taking some of the best things for granted. Goshen's three public access lakes – Tyler Lake, Dog Pond, and West Side Pond - may be good examples. These lakes are a significant asset for everyone who calls Goshen home.

They are ecological gems. An incredibly wide range of wildlife calls them home. Migratory birds depend on their stops here north or south each year. Bald eagles, osprey, beavers, deer, bear and more all call our lakes home. Stocked with bass, rainbow and brown trout they offer some of the best lake fishing in the State.

They are also recreational gems for our town's citizens. Thanks to the State of Connecticut, each of these lakes has a public access point, open to anyone to use. They offer four-season activities: fishing, swimming and boating in the warm weather, and ice fishing, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling in the winter. Each year hundreds of our Town's youth attend summer programs at Camp Coch on Dog Pond and hundreds of Scouts use Camp Strang on West Side Pond all year long.

Finally, these lakes are also an important economic asset of our town. Lake area properties – those on or near a lake - contribute significantly to our town's Grand List and its tax base. They also attract seasonal home owners and "vacationers" who pay taxes but use less of our town's services while adding their spending to our local business community. A study done by the University of Connecticut and the CT DEEP found that "lake area" homes tend to lose between 20% and 43% of their value when lake quality declines, and this impacts the entire town.

So, how are we taking these public access lakes for granted? The reality is that these lakes are under attack by significant threats. If we do nothing, our beautiful lakes will fall prey to human-influenced processes that will destroy their value.

Each lake is subject to a natural process called eutrophication by which, over time, the lakes will change. They will fill with sediment and change from deep clear waters to shallow waters clouded by organic matter. Aquatic plants will grow in the shallower waters, accelerating the sedimentation. Given enough time, any given lake is on its way to becoming a meadow. But, this natural process takes many centuries.

Human activity has resulted in a flow of nutrients into our lakes that is accelerating this process. These nutrients (one type of non-point source pollution) come from our roads and the chemicals used to keep them clear in the winter, from our failing septic systems, from the fertilizers we use for a green lawn, and from agriculture that produces the food we eat. The path for these nutrients into our lakes is made easier by over-development of land within watersheds, by ineffective storm water management practices, and by home owners unaware of their important role. Unintentional transport of invasive

plant species with no local counter-balances that grow unfettered in the high-nutrient water has made things worse, and bluegreen algae that are present almost everywhere but usually dormant, create potentially toxic blooms in these conditions.

The good news is that a group of citizens have come together to stop taking our lakes for granted. Thanks to our Board of Selectmen, a "Lakes Committee" was organized in 2014 with representatives from each lake. They have been studying issues, researching solutions, and planning how best to restore and maintain our beautiful lakes.

This season, each lake has started executing against those plans. Volunteers are sampling and testing the water quality. Our limnologist (lake scientist) will be surveying the aquatic plant population so the impact of our actions to make the lakes better can be tracked. Each lake is planning mechanical "harvesting" or "hydroraking" of excessive weeds.

You can help, too. If you want to volunteer, contact any of the Lakes Committee members. Pushing back on these threats is expensive and money is being raised through donations. If you would like to help financially, you can make a tax-deductible contribution via the Town's Lakes Committee (stop by the Selectmen's office for details).

The natural but human-influenced processes that threaten our lakes are relentless. Preserving our lakes as a wonderful environmental, recreational, and economic asset for our town will take equally relentless effort by volunteers, homeowners, sportsmen, and all who care.

We're not taking our lakes for granted any longer!