

Algae reappearing in former reservoir

Huras, Adam. [Telegraph-Journal](#) [Saint John, N.B] 09 June 2009: A.3.

The guck of the Irish is coming back.

Alyre Chiasson, a Universit de Moncton biology professor, says the slime that turned Moncton's Irishtown Nature Park Lake green last summer is returning.

The lake within New Brunswick's largest urban park was plagued with blue- green algal growth last August, turning its waters from a brownish tinge to vivid green.

As a result, park officials closed the popular canoe and kayak waterway to boating, swimming and fishing, while the cause of the mystery bloom was investigated.

Chiasson and the City of Moncton have applied for research funding.

"A program has already been started up to try to identify the cause behind the bloom," said Chiasson. "Under most circumstances, it's due to an excess of nutrients, but that doesn't say anything about where the nutrients are coming from."

Quebec issued 78 warnings about waterways that were infested with blue-green algae last year, which cleared beaches and tourists.

Manitoba and Nova Scotia also have battled algal scum in past years, while Saskatchewan and Alberta have had lakes with high levels of cyanobacteria due to nearby farm runoff.

In New Brunswick, only Lake Utopia in southern Charlotte County has been affected.

Collecting water samples on Monday, Chiasson said he could already see green flecks in the water. That could signal more closures this summer.

"It doesn't seem to look good right at the moment," he said.

The Irishtown Nature Park Lake used to be a reservoir, but was disconnected from the city water supply decades ago and now serves solely as a recreational body of water.

"Our first avenue of research will be to try to identify the source of the nutrients," Chiasson said. "From there we will have to look at the best measures for controlling them."

Chiasson is attempting to find the lake's tipping point for nutrient concentration.

This week, tests will be conducted around the perimeter of the lake in an effort to see where phosphate and nitrate levels are high.

"We are going to be looking, as well, (to see) if there are any potential natural causes, but since this has occurred suddenly within the span of a few years, it suggests that it has something to do with human activity," Chiasson said. "So we are going to be testing around the entire perimeter of the lake to see if there are any hot spots.

"If there are, we will trace them and find out where they are coming from."

Petitcodiac Riverkeeper Tim Van Hinte has said the increase in algae could be due to water pollution. Higher levels of phosphates, commonly used in fertilizers, are known to cause algal growth.

Van Hinte also said algal bloom happen naturally after long periods of rain, which increases runoff in the lake's watershed.

Whatever the cause, algae can have unwanted effects on humans and animals.

"If you swallow it, it could cause you to have various symptoms and potentially cause disease," said Van Hinte. "Swimming in algae is not recommended at all, because you can get potential skin rashes that could be serious or quite severe."

The algae may also exhaust oxygen in the water, killing fish and other life.

"We are pretty certain that is not due to leaky septic tanks or sewage because the E. coli levels are acceptable," Chiasson said. "If it was that we see high levels of E. coli form in the reservoir, but we don't see that."

Chiasson has been taking fish and water samples from the lake for the last two years ago and has noted higher levels of nutrients.

He is again working with the city on the project after an application was submitted to the Environmental Trust Fund to look at the problem.

The city is also looking into colour-coded signs to tell visitors when the water is not safe.

"From what I've seen in the water so far, there is a definite possibility we will be faced with a bloom this year," Chiasson said.

"If you have an abundant supply of nutrients and lots of heat you get the perfect combination for a big bloom."

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