



Time to Check the Quality of our Swimming Water!

The Volunteer Water Program Has Brought Us Many Benefits

By JUDITH GRANT

Once again, we are asking shore residents to serve as volunteer water samplers. The program began in 2001 when we (i.e. FoTTSA) worked with the Simcoe County District Health Unit to produce the first-ever comprehensive assessment of swimming water quality along the 72-kilometer-long shores bordering Tiny Township and Farlain Lake.

In the summer of 2001, 177 specific locations were sampled after each weekend. Laboratories then analysed the samples for the presence of the bacterium E. coli. The Health Unit uses the number of E. coli as an indicator when it decides whether to recommend the posting of a beach. An E. coli count of 100 or more per 100 mL of water is the cutoff. (Although E. coli is usually harmless in itself, it was thought to be reliable evidence of recent pollution by warm-blooded animals, and thus an indicator that dangerous fecal pathogens could also be present.)

FoTTSA's purpose in contributing to that first comprehensive water sampling program was to:

- create a baseline record of the township's recreational water quality, including streams entering the Bay at the shoreline
- alert authorities to the need for remedial action if areas of impaired water quality were found, and
- develop a commitment on the part of all stakeholders to the need for surveillance over the environmental quality of our waters.

The first and third objectives were well met. The 1,595 samples from that summer established the desired statistical baseline, and the members of FoTTSA, like the Health Unit, Awenda Provincial Park, and Camp Marygrove, committed themselves to keeping a regular, watchful eye on the township's swimming water. (The results of this ongoing surveillance are available on FoTTSA's website under "Water Reports.")

The second objective turned out to be more challenging. We discovered that the Health Unit had no mandate to investigate sources of contamination or to undertake remedial action. Its responsibility extended primarily to recommending the posting of warnings and, in extreme circumstances (a sewage, manure, chemical, or oil spill) ordering the closing of a beach. However, it did agree to monitor several additional stretches of shore in subsequent years. It also analyzed the data its samplers recorded about weather and water conditions, eventually determining that high E. coli counts tend to be associated with rain, high winds, and turbidity.

Faced with the Health Unit's limited mandate, FoTTSA approached Tiny Township council, which hired the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) to undertake a series of investigative studies in the years from 2003 to 2007. These focused on the watersheds of streams at Woodland Beach, Jackson Park, Balm Beach, and Lafontaine Creek. SSEA also looked at silt deposition along the shore as captured in aerial photographs, and at rainfall as recorded by

gauges set up near Woodland Beach, Balm Beach, Huronia Airport, and Georgian Sands. At the same time, thanks to shore resident Allan Crowe, a research hydrologist, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Environment Canada undertook some investigative work into E. coli contamination in groundwater and sand below the beaches at Balm, Jackson Park, and Woodland. They came to the conclusion that there was a permanent presence of E. coli in groundwater within ten metres of the lake, arising from gulls and geese, wave run-up, and streams, and that this band of E. coli results in "major loading of E. coli into lake water during erosion of shoreline during storm."

The SSEA made recommendations to the township council, as did Allan Crowe. The SSEA urged:

1. That the township's re-inspection program for septic tanks be continued. (At the end of this summer, the entire township will have been re-inspected twice.)
2. That stream water be treated prior to discharge near beaches during and after storm events, particularly at Balm. (In November 2011, work on this recommendation was completed: water from the outlet near the Surf Restaurant was diverted to join that from the main Balm brook in two catch basins with oil/grit separators. These remove oils, sand, fine grit, and organics before the water flushes into the cove during spring runoff and heavy storms. The basins are cleared spring and fall each year.)
3. That streams discharging directly onto beaches be moved to nearby points where dispersion and mixing would be more effective. (Not done, since this would have aroused the ire of affected landowners.)
4. That the drain on the border between Deanlea and Bluewater Dunes beaches be investigated and corrective action taken as necessary. (So far, no action has been taken.)
5. That erosion of the Lafontaine Creek banks be prevented by establishing natural vegetation buffers, possibly "through enhancement of the Severn Sound Healthy Streams Program in cooperation with the Environmental Farm Plan Program". (There may have been action on this, but confirmation had not been received when the Cottager went to press.)
6. That selected groynes in the Lafontaine area and further north be removed or modified to improve water circulation. (The planned changes are described in the "Final Project File Report" on the township's website under Living in Tiny / Master Plans / Lafontaine Beach Park, Beach Water Quality Improvements. All going well, the next Council will authorize the changes.)
7. That guides be prepared to inform shoreline owners about how to care for sewage systems, dune systems, and natural shore vegetation. (These were made available for a time on the township website, but were then taken down. They are to re-appear soon, probably with Building Department information.)
8. That the township be alert to any proposed mod-

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