

THE BARRIE EXAMINER

Lake still in serious trouble

Posted By Colin McKim

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Lake Simcoe will not recover from years of degradation unless phosphorous levels are cut in half, says a water quality expert.

Dr. Peter Dillon, a professor at Trent University, recently testified at the Ontario Municipal Board hearing into a 2,000-unit waterfront project proposed for Big Bay Point. Dillon told the OMB the lake's recovery is far from complete, and that its overall health is not good.

In 1990, the province created the Lake Simcoe Environmental Management Strategy (LSEMS), and reducing phosphorous levels has long been part of this initiative.

Currently, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, the lead agency implementing the LSEMS is aiming to reduce phosphorous levels by 25 per cent. But Dillon is proposing a far more aggressive approach.

Annabel Slight, founder of Ladies of the Lake and a board member of the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, welcomes a tougher approach.

"On the face of it, 50 per cent reduction of phosphorous is a radical recommendation," Slight said.

But with a co-ordinated effort involving the general public, backed by strict land use and development restrictions, it would be possible to hit the 50 per cent reduction target, she said.

"We'd need farms to use the best management practices, residents to stop using fertilizer on their lawns, golf courses changing their designs, and developers limiting development to urban areas, not forests and fields."

Phosphorous is a nutrient that promotes plant growth in the lake. When these plants die in the fall, their decomposition consumes the oxygen that fish need to live.

This chemical enters the lake from agricultural run-off, storm sewers, sewage and airborne particles.

There's no question reducing phosphorous must be part of any strategy to restore lake Simcoe, says Slight. Already, there are "dead zones" in the lake where fish and other aquatic life cannot survive, she said.

Jim Woodford, founder of Science for Lake Simcoe also supports a more aggressive attack on phosphorous. But that is only part of the problem Woodford says.

Elevated nitrogen levels also play a role in throwing off the ecological balance of the lake, he said.