Lakewatch

THE ALBERTA LAKE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY
VOLUNTEER LAKE MONITORING PROGRAM

2013 Island Lake Report

COMPLETED WITH SUPPORT FROM:

Alberta Government

Alberta Lake Management Society's LakeWatch Program

LakeWatch has several important objectives, one of which is to collect and interpret water quality data on Alberta Lakes. Equally important is educating lake users about their aquatic environment, encouraging public involvement in lake management, and facilitating cooperation and partnerships between government, industry, the scientific community and lake users. LakeWatch Reports are designed to summarize basic lake data in understandable terms for a lay audience and are not meant to be a complete synopsis of information about specific lakes. Additional information is available for many lakes that have been included in LakeWatch and readers requiring more information are encouraged to seek those sources.

ALMS would like to thank all who express interest in Alberta's aquatic environments and particularly those who have participated in the LakeWatch program. These people prove that ecological apathy can be overcome and give us hope that our water resources will not be the limiting factor in the health of our environment.

Acknowledgements

The LakeWatch program is made possible through the dedication of its volunteers. We would like to thank volunteer Steve Milne for assisting with monitoring in 2013. We would also like to thank Jared Ellenor, Nicole Meyers, and Elynne Murray who were summer technicians with ALMS in 2013. Program Coordinator Bradley Peter was instrumental in planning and organizing the field program. Technologists Chris Ware and Sarah Hustins were involved in the training aspects of the program. Lisa Reinbolt was responsible for data management. This report was prepared by Bradley Peter and Arin Dyer. Alberta Environment and the Beaver River Watershed Alliance (BRWA) were major sponsors of the program.

ISLAND LAKE: (near Smoky Lake, 62 -17-W4)

Island Lake is not labeled on most maps and, unsurprisingly, goes by the alternate name of 'Unnamed Lake'. It is located in Smoky Lake County, about 30 km north of the town of Smoky Lake, and is accessed off of Highway 855.

Figure 1 – Island Lake soft boat launch. Photo by Nicole Meyers, 2013.

Island Lake is largely accessed for fishing. The boat launch is just a soft hand-launch area accessible by an unimproved road to its south-eastern shoreline (Figure 1; Figure 2). The water hides several large rocks, so the lake is most suitable for small boats and canoes.

Sport fishing species include northern pike and perch. There are large nesting colonies of pelicans and loons.

Island Lake has a very complex shoreline and several islands (Figure 3). Its maximum depth (~8 m) occurs in the north basin of the lake. After comparing historical bathymetric maps[1] to personal observations on the lake, it appears that water levels have recently declined.

Figure 2 – Volunteer Steve Milne on the road to Island Lake.

The lake is completely surrounded by forest and has limited oil & gas exploration and development within its watershed (Figure 3). Forest cover is representative of the dry mixedwood natural subregion, with large wetland complexes to the north and east of the lake and upland forests to the west and south. It lies within the Beaver River drainage basin.

[1] Hennig, J. 2006. Lakes of Alberta Directory. One Stop Services Ltd, Spruce Grove AB.

WATER QUANTITY:

There are many factors influencing water quantity. Some of these factors include the size of the lakes drainage basin, precipitation, evaporation, water consumption, ground water influences, and the efficiency of the outlet channel structure at removing water from the lake. Requests for water quantity monitoring should go through Environment and Sustainable Resource Developments Monitoring and Science division.

Figure 3 - Island Lake. Retrieved from Google Maps, 2013.

Currently no water quantity data exists for Island Lake.

WATER CLARITY AND SECCHI DEPTH:

Water clarity is influenced by suspended materials, both living and dead, as well as dissolved colored compounds in the water column. During the melting of snow and ice in spring, lake water can become turbid (cloudy) from silt transported into the lake. Lake water usually clears in late spring but then becomes more turbid with increased algal growth as the summer progresses. The easiest and most widely used measure of lake water clarity is the Secchi disk depth.

In 2013, average Secchi disk depth measured 2.33 m (two missed trips in 2013 may result in a skewed average compared to other LakeWatch lakes). Secchi disc depth fluctuated little throughout the summer, measuring a minimum of 2.10 m on September 15th to a maximum of 2.50 m on July 14th. Changes in Secchi disk depth appeared consistent with changes in chlorophyll-*a* concentration, suggesting that algae/cyanobacteria may be the primary factor affecting water clarity at Island Lake.

WATER TEMPERATURE AND DISSOLVED OXYGEN:

Water temperature and dissolved oxygen profiles in the water column can provide information on water quality and fish habitat. The depth of the thermocline is important in determining the depth to which dissolved oxygen from the surface can be mixed. Please refer to the end of this report for descriptions of technical terms.

No thermal stratification was observed in Island Lake in 2013. Because of its large size, it is possible that wind energy is able to mix Island Lake, resulting in relatively uniform water temperatures through the water column. Given the temperature profiles measured in 2013, it is possible that temporary thermal stratification is established on calm, hot days in Island Lake. Maximum surface water temperature measured in Island Lake was

19.93 °C on August 25th. A minimum surface water temperature of 13.87 °C was observed on September 15th.

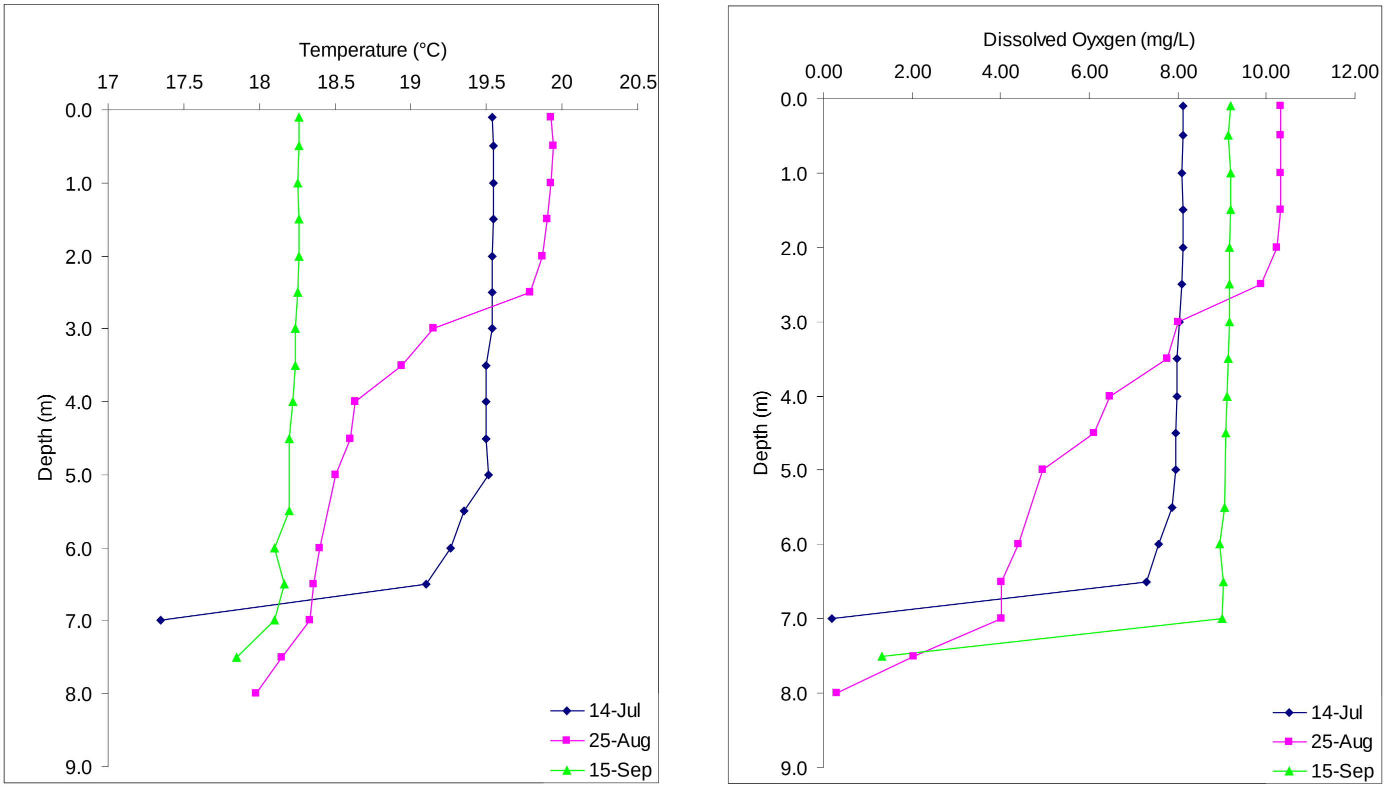

Figure 4 - a) Temperature (°C) and b) dissolved oxygen (mg/L) profiles measured three times over the course of the summer at Chip Lake.

For two of three sampling trips dissolved oxygen concentrations remained well above the Canadian Council for Ministers of the Environment guidelines of 6.5 mg/L for the Protection of Aquatic Life. However, on August 25th, dissolved oxygen concentrations declined steadily with depth, suggesting the possibility of a thermal stratification event which separates surface dissolved oxygen from lower waters. At the surface, dissolved oxygen concentrations were high, with a maximum of 10.31 mg/L on August 25th and a minimum of 9.19 mg/L on September 15th. High surface dissolved oxygen concentrations may be an indication of oxygen-producing photosynthesis due to algae/cyanobacteria. At the sediment, dissolved oxygen concentrations decreased likely due to the oxygen-consuming process of decomposition which occurs on the lakebed.

WATER CHEMISTRY:

ALMS measures a suite of water chemistry parameters. Phosphorus, nitrogen, and chlorophyll-a are important because they are indicators of eutrophication, or excess nutrients, which can lead to harmful algal/cyanobacteria blooms. One direct measure of harmful cyanobacteria blooms are Microcystins, a common group of toxins produced by cyanobacteria. See Table 1 for a complete list of parameters.

Average Total Phosphorus (TP) measured 44.3 µg/L in 2013 (Table 1). An average value of 44.3 µg/L falls into the eutrophic, or productive, classification. Throughout the summer, TP concentration ranged from a minimum of 26 µg/L on July 26th to a maximum of 57 µg/L on September 15th (Figure 3). It is important to collect multiple years of data with five summer sampling trips in order to determine a proper baseline average for TP.

Average chlorophyll-*a* concentration measured 10.1 µg/L in 2013 – as with TP, this value falls into the eutrophic classification (Table 1). As the lower cut-off for this classification is 9.0 µg/L, Island Lake likely fluctuates between a mesotrophic, moderately productive, and eutrophic classification. Throughout the summer, chlorophyll-*a* concentration ranged between a minimum of 6.3 µg/L on July 14th to a maximum of 14.4 µg/L on September 15th (Figure 3).

Finally, total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN) measured an average of 1536.7 µg/L in the summer of 2013 (Table 1). This value falls into the hypereutrophic, or extremely productive, classification. TKN can be highly variable, and fluctuated between a minimum of 950 µg/L on July 14th to a maximum of 1880 µg/L on September 15th (Figure 3).

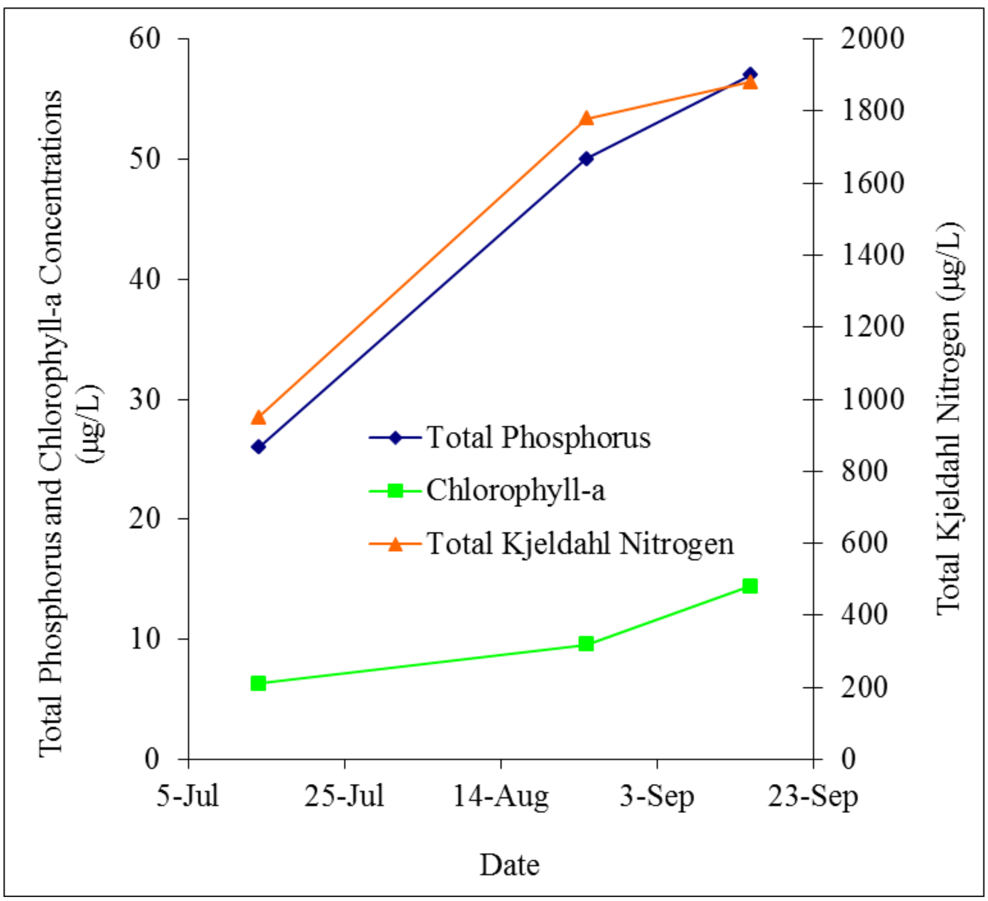

Figure 5 - Total phosphorous (µg/L), chlorophyll-*a* concentration (µg/L), and total Kjeldahl nitrogen (µg/L) measured five times over the course of the summer at Island Lake.

Average pH measured 8.84 in 2013 – this value is well above neutral. Island Lake has moderately high alkalinity (282 mg/L CaCO3) and bicarbonate (291 mg/L HCO_3) concentrations which help to buffer against changes to pH (Table 1). Conductivity in Island Lake is moderate (554.3 uS/cm) with calcium (20.7 mg/L), magnesium (29.9 mg/L), and potassium (19.6 mg/L) as dominant ions. Microcystin:

Metals concentrations were monitored twice throughout the summer, and all concentrations fell within their respective guidelines (Table 2).

Table 1 – Average Secchi disk depth and water chemistry values for Island Lake. Previous years averages are provided for comparison.

Parameter	2013
TP (μg/L)	44.3
TDP (μg/L)	16
Chlorophyll-*a* (μg/L)	10.1
Secchi depth (m)	2.33
TKN (μg/L)	1536.7
NO_2 and NO_3 (μg/L)	5.67
NH_3 (μg/L)	21
DOC (mg/L)	19.87
Ca (mg/L)	20.7
Mg (mg/L)	29.9
Na (mg/L)	9.7
K (mg/L)	19.55
SO_4^{2-} (mg/L)	8.25
Cl^- (mg/L)	2.5
CO_3 (mg/L)	25.67
HCO_3 (mg/L)	291
pH	8.84
Conductivity (μS/cm)	554.3
Hardness (mg/L)	174.5
TDS (mg/L)	206
Microcystin (μg/L)	
Total Alkalinity (mg/L $CaCO_3$)	282

Note: TP = total phosphorus, TDP = total dissolved phosphorus, Chl-*a* = chlorophyll-*a*, TKN = total Kjeldahl nitrogen. NO_{2+3} = nitrate+nitrite, NH_3 = ammonia, Ca = calcium, Mg = magnesium, Na = sodium, K = potassium, SO_4 = sulphate, Cl = chloride, CO_3 = carbonate, HCO_3 = bicarbonate. A forward slash (/) indicates an absence of data.

Table 2 - Concentrations of metals measured in Island Lake on August 25th and September 15th 2013. Values shown for 2013 are an average of those dates. The CCME heavy metal Guidelines for the Protection of Freshwater Aquatic Life (unless otherwise indicated) are presented for reference.

Metals (Total Recoverable)	**2013**	**Guidelines**
Aluminum μg/L	37.85	100[a]
Antimony μg/L	0.05385	6[e]
Arsenic μg/L	1.55	5
Barium μg/L	57.75	1000[e]
Beryllium μg/L	0.00885	100[d,f]
Bismuth μg/L	0.0331	/
Boron μg/L	81.2	5000[ef]
Cadmium μg/L	0.0038	0.085[b]
Chromium μg/L	0.2345	/
Cobalt μg/L	0.06095	1000[f]
Copper μg/L	0.3815	4[c]
Iron μg/L	149	300
Lead μg/L	0.08595	7[c]
Lithium μg/L	21.25	2500[g]
Manganese μg/L	28.65	200[g]
Molybdenum μg/L	0.6405	73[d]
Nickel μg/L	0.281	150[c]
Selenium μg/L	0.05	1
Silver μg/L	0.05555	0.1
Strontium μg/L	87.65	/
Thallium μg/L	0.00125	0.8
Thorium μg/L	0.0491	/
Tin μg/L	0.0243	/
Titanium μg/L	1.19	/
Uranium μg/L	0.1335	100[e]
Vanadium μg/L	0.2915	100[f,g]
Zinc μg/L	0.653	30

Values represent means of total recoverable metal concentrations.
[a] Based on pH ≥ 6.5; calcium ion concentrations $[Ca^{+2}]$ ≥ 4 mg/L; and dissolved organic carbon concentration [DOC] ≥ 2 mg/L.
[b] Based on water Hardness of 300 mg/L (as $CaCO_3$)
[c] Based on water hardness > 180mg/L (as $CaCO_3$)
[d] CCME interim value.
[e] Based on Canadian Drinking Water Quality guideline values.
[f] Based on CCME Guidelines for Agricultural use (Livestock Watering).
[g] Based on CCME Guidelines for Agricultural Use (Irrigation).
A forward slash (/) indicates an absence of data or guidelines.

INVASIVE SPECIES:

Quagga and Zebra mussels are invasive species which, if introduced to our lakes, will have significant negative ecological, economical, and recreational impacts. ALMS collects water samples which are analyzed for mussel veligers (juveniles) and monitors substrates for adult mussels. In order to prevent the spread of invasive mussels, always clean, drain, and dry your boat between lakes. To report mussel sightings or mussel-fouled boats, call the confidential Alberta hotline at 1-855-336-BOAT.

In 2013, no zebra or quagga mussels were detected in Island Lake.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO LIMNOLOGY

INDICATORS OF WATER QUALITY:

Water samples are collected in LakeWatch to determine the chemical characteristics that characterize general water quality. Though not all encompassing, the variables collected in LakeWatch are sensitive to human activities in watersheds that can cause degraded water quality. For example, nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen are important determinants of lake productivity. The concentrations of these nutrients in a lake are impacted (typically elevated) by land use changes such as increased crop production or livestock grazing. Elevated nutrient concentrations can cause increases in undesirable algae blooms resulting in low dissolved oxygen concentrations, degraded habitat for fish and noxious smells. A large increase in nutrients over time may also indicate sewage inputs which in turn may result in other human health concerns associated with bacteria or the protozoan *Cryptosporidium*.

TEMPERATURE AND MIXING:

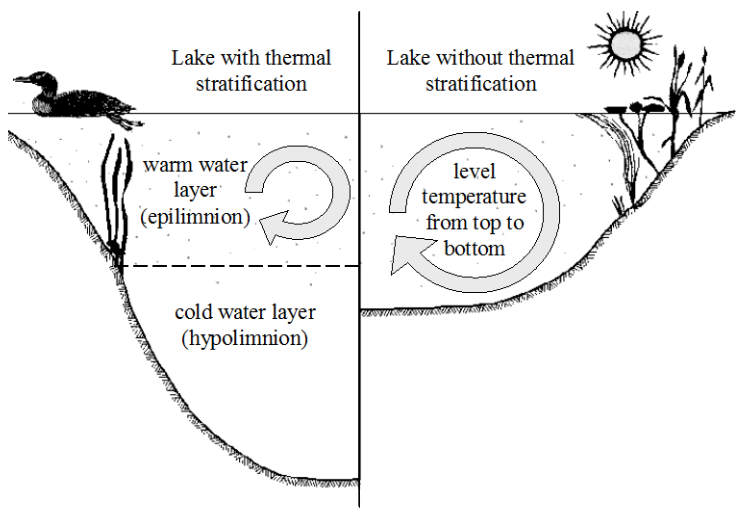

Figure A: Difference in the circulation of the water column depending on thermal stratification.

Water temperature in a lake dictates the behavior of many chemical parameters responsible for water quality. Heat is transferred to a lake at its surface and slowly moves downward depending on water circulation in the lake. Lakes with a large surface area or a small volume tend to have greater mixing due to wind. In deeper lakes, circulation is not strong enough to move warm water to depths typically greater than 4 or 5 m and as a result cooler denser water remains at the bottom of the lake. As the difference in temperature between warm surface and cold deeper water increases, two distinct layers are formed. Limnologists call these layers of water the **epilimnion** at the surface and the **hypolimnion** at the bottom. The layers are separated by a transition layer known as the **metalimnion** which contains the effective wall separating top and bottom waters called a **thermocline**. A thermocline typically occurs when water temperature changes by more than one degree within one meter depth. The hypolimnion and epilimnion do not mix, nor do elements such as oxygen supplied at the surface move downward into the hypolimnion. In the fall, surface waters begin to cool and eventually reach the same temperature as hypolimnetic water. At this point the water mixes from top to bottom in what is often called a **turnover** event. Surface water cools further as ice forms and again a thermocline develops this time with 4° C water at the bottom and near 0° C water on the top.

In spring another turnover event occurs when surface waters warm to 4° C. Lakes with this mixing pattern of two stratification periods and two turnover events are called **dimictic** lakes. In shallower lakes, the water column may mix from top to bottom most of the ice-free season with occasional stratification during periods of calm warm conditions. Lakes that mix frequently are termed **polymictic** lakes. In our cold climate, many shallow lakes are **cold monomictic** meaning a thermocline develops every winter, there is one turnover event in spring but the remainder of the ice free season the lake is polymictic.

DISSOLVED OXYGEN:

Oxygen enters a lake at the lake surface and throughout the water column when produced by photosynthesizing plants, including algae, in the lake. Oxygen is consumed within the lake by respiration of living organisms and decomposition of organic material in the lake sediments. In lakes that stratify (see temperature above), oxygen that dissolves into the lake at the surface cannot mix downward into the hypolimnion. At the same time oxygen is depleted in the hypolimnion by decomposition. The result is that the hypolimnion of a lake can become **anoxic**, meaning it contains little or no dissolved oxygen. When a lake is frozen, the entire water column can become anoxic because the surface is sealed off from the atmosphere. Winter anoxic conditions can result in a fish-kill which is particularly common during harsh winters with extended ice-cover. Alberta Surface Water Quality Guidelines suggest dissolved oxygen concentrations (in the epilimnion) must not decline below 5 $mg \bullet L^{-1}$ and should not average less than 6.5 $mg \bullet L^{-1}$ over a seven-day period. However, the guidelines also require that dissolved oxygen concentrations remain above 9.5 $mg \bullet L^{-1}$ in areas where early life stages of aquatic biota, particularly fish, are present.

GENERAL WATER CHEMISTRY:

Water in lakes always contains substances that have been transported by rain and snow or have entered the lake in groundwater and inflow streams. These substances may be dissolved in the water or suspended as particles. Some of these substances are familiar minerals, such as sodium and chloride, which when combined form table salt, but when dissolved in water separate into the two electrically charged components called **ions**. Most dissolved substances in water are in ionic forms and are held in solution due to the polar nature of the water molecule. **Hydrophobic** (water-fearing) compounds such as oils contain little or no ionic character, are non-polar and for this reason do not readily dissolve in water. Although hydrophobic compounds do not readily dissolve, they can still be transported to lakes by flowing water. Within individual lakes, ion concentrations vary from year to year depending on the amount and mineral content of the water entering the lake. This mineral content can be influenced by the amount of precipitation and other climate variables as well as human activities such as fertilizer and road salt application.

PHOSPHORUS AND NITROGEN:

Phosphorus and nitrogen are important nutrients limiting the growth of algae in Alberta lakes. While nitrogen usually limits agricultural plants, phosphorus is usually in shortest supply in lakes. Even a slight increase of phosphorus in a lake can, given the right conditions, promote algal blooms causing the water to turn green in the summer and impair recreational uses. When pollution originating from livestock manure and human sewage enters lakes not only are the concentrations of phosphorus and nitrogen increased but nitrogen can become a limiting nutrient which is thought to cause blooms of toxic algae belonging to the cyanobacteria. Not all cyanobacteria are toxic, however, the blooms can form decomposing mats that smell and impair dissolved oxygen concentrations in the lake.

CHLOROPHYLL-*A*:

Chlorophyll *a* is a photosynthetic pigment that green plants, including algae, possess enabling them to convert the sun's energy to living material. Chlorophyll *a* can be easily extracted from algae in the laboratory. Consequently, chlorophyll *a* is a good estimate of the amount of algae in the water. Some highly productive lakes are dominated by larger aquatic plants rather than suspended algae. In these lakes, chlorophyll *a* and nutrient values taken from water samples do not include productivity from large aquatic plants. The result, in lakes like Chestermere which are dominated by larger plants known as macrophytes, can be a lower trophic state than if macrophyte biomass was included. Unfortunately, the productivity and nutrient cycling contributions of macrophytes are difficult to sample accurately and are therefore not typically included in trophic state indices.

SECCHI DISK TRANSPARENCY:

Lakes that are clear are more attractive for recreation, whereas those that are turbid or murky are considered by lake users to have poor water quality. A measure of the transparency or clarity of the water is performed with a Secchi disk with an alternating black and white pattern. To measure the clarity of the water, the Secchi disk is lowered down into the water column and the depth where the disk disappears is recorded. The Secchi depth in lakes with a lot of algal growth will be small while the Secchi depth in lakes with little algal growth can be very deep. However, low Secchi depths are not caused by algal growth alone. High concentrations of suspended sediments, particularly fine clays or glacial till, are common in plains or mountain reservoirs of Alberta. Mountain reservoirs may have exceedingly low Secchi depths despite low algal growth and nutrient concentrations.

The euphotic zone or the maximum depth that light can penetrate into the water column for actively growing plants is calculated as twice the Secchi depth. Murky waters, with shallow Secchi depths, can prevent aquatic plants from growing on the lake bottom. Conversely, aquatic plants can ensure lakes have clear water by reducing shoreline erosion and stabilizing lake bottom sediments. In Alberta, many lakes are shallow and bottom sediments contain high concentrations of nutrients. Without aquatic plants, water quality may decline in these lakes due to murky, sediment laden water and excessive algal blooms. Maintaining aquatic plants in certain areas of a lake is often essential for ensuring good water clarity and a healthy lake as many organisms, like aquatic invertebrates and insects, depend on aquatic plants for food and shelter.

TROPHIC STATE:

Trophic state is classification of lakes into four categories of fertility and is a useful index for rating and comparing lakes. From low to high nutrient and algal biomass (as chlorophyll) concentrations, the trophic states are; **oligotrophic**, **mesotrophic**, **eutrophic** and **hypereutrophic (Table 2)**.

A majority of lakes in Alberta contain naturally high levels of chlorophyll *a* (8 to 25 µg/L) due to our deep fertile soils. These lakes are usually considered fertile and are termed eutrophic. The nutrient and algal biomass concentrations that define these categories are shown in the following table, a figure of Alberta lakes compared by trophic state can be found on the ALMS website.

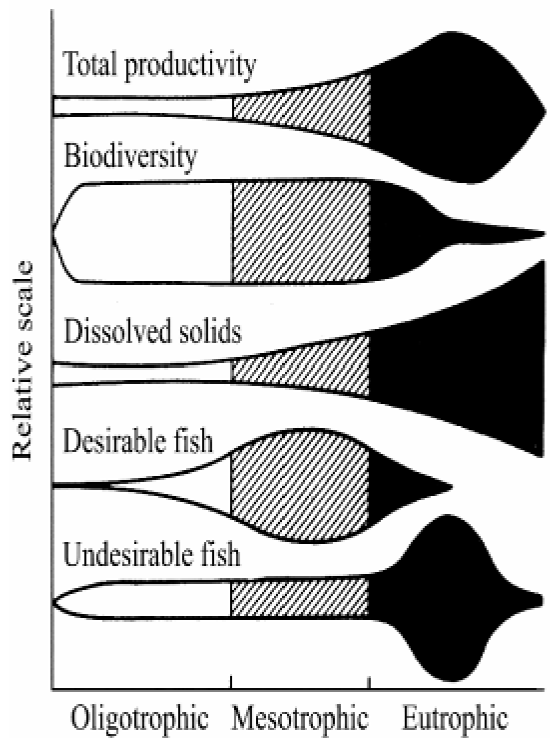

Figure B: Suggested changes in various lake characteristics with eutrophication. From "Ecological Effects of Wastewater", 1980.

Table A - Trophic status classification based on lake water characteristics.

Trophic state	Total Phosphorus (µg•L^{-1})	Total Nitrogen (µg•L^{-1})	Chlorophyll a (µg•L^{-1})	Secchi Depth (m)
Oligotrophic	< 10	< 350	< 3.5	> 4
Mesotrophic	10 – 30	350 - 650	3.5 - 9	4 - 2
Eutrophic	30 – 100	650 - 1200	9 - 25	2 - 1
Hypereutrophic	> 100	> 1200	> 25	< 1