

HRM considers restart of lake water sampling program

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Limnologist calls it waste of money

Halifax regional council will vote Tuesday on a recommendation to reinstate the lakes water quality sampling program in 2014-2015 as a way of protecting the municipality's water resources.

The Harbour East-Marine Drive community council approved a motion recommending the move in April.

In 2012, the city concluded a five-year baseline data collection of water quality data of the lakes in the municipality.

Upon conclusion of the program, about 71 lakes were being tested.

The water quality sampling program relates to testing for the long-term health of lakes, and is separate from the water quality testing that takes place at HRM supervised beaches.

From 2006-2011, the lakes water quality sampling program cost \$100,000 annually.

Should council approve the reinstatement for the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the estimated cost would be the same, municipal documents show.

But Dartmouth limnologist Shalom Mandaville says reinstating the program at \$100,000 a year at taxpayers' expense is a waste of money.

"What people are saying at public meetings, one of the first things people ask is we want to know the data," Mandaville said. "But if one analyzes the data clearly of 2006-2011 and compared with the data going back to the 1970s there was really not much to conclude," Mandaville said in an interview Saturday.

"So, I agree with the management in HRM that perhaps we should stay back a few years and then collect."

Because most of HRM's lakes are shallow and technicians were sampling surface water three times a year, the past sampling was like a "hit-and-miss method," Mandaville, also president of Soil & Water Conservation Society of Metro Halifax, said.

"If you take the majority of lakes, they flush around five to 10 times per year," he said. "There are lakes like Lake Fletcher in Fall River that flushes 40 times a year (because of the rainfall). So, this way of sampling will not catch the real things that are happening. So, there are many shortcomings of the data from 2006-2011."

That specific data, for example, did not reveal problems that are happening in Lakes Micmac and Banook in Dartmouth; did not tell how much oxygen there was in the sampled lakes in the summer; did not analyze bottom sediments and did not analyze the biology in the lakes.

"So the sampling they did in simple English is kindergarten, the design of the program was not done that well," Mandaville said.

"So what HRM has to question itself is why they're spending this money when it's not revealing a lot of the problems like the aquatic plants ... infestation and it does not indicate the effects of biodiversity and it also does not tell you what the source of the pollution is," Mandaville said. "So, instead of rushing off and approving it they should maybe have some sort of a consultation...maybe even have a public hearing on what the public likes to look at."

About the Author »

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