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'Chocolate' water irks residents

By AMY PUGSLEY FRASER City Hall Reporter | 6:59 AM

Construction run-off from a new housing development is causing big trouble in Little Sackville River.

"Basically it looks like chocolate milk," Damon Conrad of the Sackville Rivers Association said of the water after an incident last week.

Over the last couple of months, the group has noticed the river is unusually dark after heavy rain.

"Basically it rains during the night and in the morning it's quite brown," Mr. Conrad said Thursday.

However, things really got bad after a rainstorm a week ago resulted in "very heavy siltation" in the river.

"We had quite a few calls from local residents as well as one of our directors who happened to be on the lake that morning."

So association members went on a field trip, following the river through its tributaries. They came across a housing construction site near Jackladder Drive in Millwood, where they found a crew pumping out an excavation site.

"The pump was sitting up on a big dirt pile basically blowing dirty water directly into the street," Mr. Conrad said.

From there, the water gushed into a storm drain that led to Stoney Brook and then to Little Sackville River.

"So, considering the concentration of the silt that was coming out of that stormwater pipe, we figured that was probably basically the majority of the siltation that was ending up in the Little Sackville," Mr. Conrad said.

The effect on fish can be imagined, said Mr. Conrad, who has a degree in environmental engineering.

"When the river is heavy with silt, it's so thick they have a problem making it through the watercourse. They literally can't see, and they can't feed."

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Potter Stewart

Eventually, the sediment will settle out until it reaches the bottom of the lake and coats it, he said.

The silt damages anything that lives on the bottom, he said, including fish food and fish eggs.

"Basically, this blanket just covers everything and it could potentially kill anything on the bottom."

Coun. Bob Harvey (Lower Sackville) says he also has observed drastic lake discolourations of late.

"I've noticed after every heavy rain, it's chocolate brown," he said.

"Now, some of this is natural but some of it comes from development construction sites."

It shouldn't be happening, he said.

"There are measures in place whereby this should be prevented and they (the developer) certainly should be using them."

These include things like diversion ditches, temporary settlement ponds, diverting dirty water away from a lake and covering areas with straw.

Ben Young, chief operating officer for Ramar Realty, didn't want to go into detail Thursday on any measures his company is taking.

"We are working through with HRM to make sure we meet all the requirements," he said.

An Environment Department spokeswoman said Thursday a complaint has been lodged concerning run-off into the Stoney Brook tributary and Little Sackville River.

"An investigation is ongoing and we're working with the contractor," Jacqueline May said Thursday.

It looks like a one-time event, she said.

"It's not an ongoing daily problem. But we're working with them to figure out what happened and to prevent it from happening again."

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