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Pollution discovered in Little Sackville River threatens watershed, humans/3

Toxic contamination and the purposeful destruction of trees in recent weeks are threatening a pocket of parkland along the Little Sackville River near Lower Sackville's Hallmark subdivision.

Topics : [Sackville Rivers Association](#) , [Water Research Associates](#) , [Little Sackville River](#) , [Lower Sackville](#) , [Nova Scotia](#)

SACKVILLE

By Yvette d'Entremont - The Weekly News

Toxic contamination and the purposeful destruction of trees in recent weeks are threatening a pocket of parkland along the Little Sackville River near Lower Sackville's Hallmark subdivision.

On May 23, local environmentalists and residents participated in a neighbourhood garbage cleanup at the site. Larry Bell, a volunteer with the Sackville Rivers Association and CEO of Sackville-based Water Research Associates, described the area as "one of the prettiest areas you'd ever want to see."

He said the association wants to increase public awareness about the problems at the site, which include toxic contamination and the presence of an algae hazardous to aquatic life.

"The contamination problem comes from four commercial entities on Sackville Drive, and I'm not willing to name them because we've been getting a lot of co-operation since we informed them about what's going on," Bell said. "This problem has been building up for the last 20 years without them knowing. It happens to be an area heavily used by local people, particularly children, and if young people get messing around in there they could get deadly sick from a combination of contaminants."

Sebastien Marquis, a botanist and Sackville Rivers Association volunteer, also discovered a particularly noxious and unusual algae in the river while walking in the area with his son last fall.

"This is only the second place in Nova Scotia where this is known to have occurred, and we're not sure how this species of algae got to the area," Bell said. "It's white instead of the usual colour, is very bushy and breeds like there's no tomorrow ... It's quite deadly (to aquatic life) and you can't treat it chemically."

The algae is inhaled or eaten by fish, which then suffer infected gills and die. The only way to destroy the substance is to collect it and dispose of it at a medical incineration facility. Bell said efforts to contain the algae and rid the area of it entirely will take time, but they're hopeful it can be eradicated with the co-operation of residents, people using the park, and local businesses.

Had the algae gone undetected, Bell predicts it would have spilled into the Little Sackville River and eventually made its way into Bedford Basin where it would have been "impossible" to control.

Another issue compounding problems at the site is that at least 29 trees have been cut down by vandals in the last month, many of those over the last two weeks. If the heavy leaf cover provided by the trees is impacted, Bell said the resulting light and heat will negatively impact the area's ecosystem.

Some of the destroyed trees were used to create a bridge across the river between Hallmark and its neighbouring subdivision and to construct a large lean-to shelter, but many appear to have been cut down for no reason. Bell said a handful of the destroyed trees were unique cedars thought to have been extinct in Nova Scotia for 15 years.

"Add to that some unscrupulous construction guys are using one end of the site to dump construction debris," Bell said. "It's the most lovely area you ever saw in your life and we're fighting real hard to keep it intact."

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