

The THOMPSON LAKE

# OBSERVER

Spring 2005

Issue No. 139



*Scientist at work on Thompson: Scott Williams is shown bringing his zooplankton net to the lake surface. After he flushes the microscopic specimens from the net into a container, the specimens will be anaesthetized, preserved, and analyzed. The process, repeated three times during each sampling visit, gives biologists valuable information about the health of the lake. (Photo, Scott Williams).*

## TLEA LAUNCHES WEED WATCHERS PROGRAM

Thomson Lake has had an invasive plant called *variable milfoil* in its waters for over twenty years now. Maine's Department of Environmental Protection identifies eleven plants as invasive. Fortunately, variable milfoil is one of the tamest of the eleven. Since variable milfoil first came to Thomson Lake, it has spread to several locations, mostly still water coves with shallow muddy bottoms. It spreads by a method called fragmentation. When a motor boat crosses over the plant, the propeller chops up the milfoil stem. From there it floats with the wind current to a new location. Luckily, most of Thomson Lake shoreline is not ideal for variable milfoil propagation. In the twenty years variable milfoil has been in the lake, people have seen it expand in some areas while in other areas it has actually receded.

Three years ago the University of Maine mapped out the locations where this plant had become established. But Mother Nature has a way of changing everything. Just when we thought certain lakes in Maine had struck a balance with variable milfoil, things changed. Little Sebago Lake also has this nuisance plant in its waters for years. And Little Sebago residents thought that it had been limited to just a few areas. But then a few years ago residents started to notice the milfoil areas had started to expand rapidly. The state biologists did a DNA analysis of some samples to determine the cause of such a rapid expansion. Their analysis showed that this variable milfoil had hybridized with one of several native species of milfoil to produce a much more prolific form of the plant. The growth rate is so rapid that Little Sebago Lake Association is now preparing to spend **tens of thousands** of dollars on an eradication program. Last year Cushman Pond Lake Association in the Lovell area spent approximately \$50,000 for variable milfoil eradication. The results of their efforts are still pending.

In order to monitor Thomson's current variable milfoil situation and to watch for the threat of any new invasive plant, TLEA is launching an important new program: "Weed Watchers." If you like to kayak or canoe along Thomson Lake shores and have an interest in protecting the lake, then with a little bit of training and with an underwater viewing device (provided by TLEA), you can help ensure the future health of the lake. There will be training on plant identification and invasive plant habitat. You will have the option to select the day(s) during the summer to monitor certain sectors of the lake. The Weed Watcher program will be headed up by the TLEA Environmental Committee Director, Scott Bernardy. To volunteer for the program or to get more information you may call Scott at (207) 878-5380 or email him at [drbinme@banet.net](mailto:drbinme@banet.net). If you cherish the clear waters of our lake, your actions can help to preserve the integrity of the lake for years to come.

## TLEA SUMMER JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Got time on your hands this summer? Better yet, got a teenager with time on his or her hands, looking for a chance to spend some time at the lake, and get paid for it, too? Here's help! TLEA is looking for a few good people to help fill the following summer jobs.

### 1. Youth Conservation Corps

- 8 weeks, 30 hours per week
- Members perform manual labor constructing erosion control projects within the Thompson Lake Watershed
- Minimum age requirement: 16 years
- Important environmental control service may count for Community Service credit
- Salary depends on related experience

### 2. Courtesy Boat Inspectors

- Part-time positions, 4-6 hours on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, from Memorial Day Weekend, May 27, through Labor Day, Sept. 5
- A chance to sit by the Lake, meeting and educating people at a public boat ramp every weekend this summer – and receive pay for doing so.
- Students, retirees, and Moms and Dads are welcome to apply
- You must have your own transportation and be at least 16 years old.

**For an application or more information, call Joe Kiley, YCC Coordinator, at 743-0014, or Jim Bishop, YCC Steering Committee, at 539-4445.**

## EROSION CONTROL PROJECTS NEEDED!

If you live in the Thompson Lake watershed and think you may have an erosion problem involving your lawn, driveway, camp road, beach, or anything else, consider getting the assistance of the Youth Conservation Corps, which is set up to fix exactly this kind of problem. They'll supply expert advice, design work, and remedial labor **at no cost to you**. They're also old hands at maneuvering through the red tape of the permitting process. The property owner pays only for materials purchased.

The YCC is proudly sponsored by the TLEA and is endorsed by such state environmental groups as the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. **For more information, contact Joe Kiley, YCC Coordinator, at 743-0014, or Jim Bishop at 539-4445.**

## TOURING THE LAKE VIA VIDEO, 1985

Twenty years ago this spring, biologist Scott Williams shot over six hours of videotape of the Thompson Lake shoreline. His boat tour started at the Robinson Manufacturing mill in Oxford, continued up the west shore to the marina at the Heath in Casco, and then followed down the east shore back to Oxford's Pismo Beach. Today, Scott's video history is interesting to watch. Because it records a well-documented baseline, it also provides valuable insight to the natural and developmental history of the lake.

It was just about 1985 that people first began to take notice of Maine's new laws restricting cutting and construction within 75 feet of the high water mark on lakes and streams. Founded in 1979, TLEA began intensive efforts to educate shoreland owners about their responsibility to maintain both the environmental and aesthetic value of the lake. Indeed, Scott's 20-year old video shows evidence that some property owners had practiced what they'd heard preached by TLEA about buffer plantings, the dangers of non-point source pollution, and the need to divert groundwater away from the lake. On the other hand, when Scott zooms the camera onto one of the many trouble spots on the lake, you can actually hear this exasperated biologist sigh.

Today we still have occasional problems with people who sneak around at night, or after the majority have headed south for the winter. These few unenlightened souls still cut trees, add sand to their man-made beaches, or pour concrete steps down into the water. There are still a few who insist on using lots of fertilizer to produce a rich, green lawn cascading to the water's edge. A few still have ignored the examples set by the Youth Conservation Corps, who for the last three years have produced practical demonstrations of how to make diversion strips and plant buffers. Still, twenty years after Scott's exasperated sigh, most of the landowners in the watershed are acting as responsible stewards of Thompson Lake.

The work of TLEA, the YCC, and each landowner has made a huge difference. To all of them, I say "BRAVO!"

Jane Fahey



*Nobody ever drowned in his own sweat.*

*Ann Landers*

## **MORE IMPROVEMENTS SEEN AHEAD FOR ROUTE 121**

Time and time again we've learned that whenever the lake and a driveway, road, or highway come together, there's big potential for erosion of sediments, namely phosphorus, into the lake. TLEA directors in the last two years have called the Maine Department of Transportation's attention to one of the worst stretches, State Highway 121 as it runs between the village of Oxford and the "center" of Otisfield.

In the late fall of 2003, MDOT approved TLEA's application for a Surface Water Quality Protection Project (SWQPP) just south of "the Landing," a boat launching site on Route 121 in Oxford. Unfortunately, personnel changes in the DOT delayed implementation of this project.

Meanwhile, TLEA kept up its pressure on other road-lake intersections not far from the Landing. We expressed concern over the hazardous and environmentally bad site at the Greeley Brook Causeway. This site was included in the previous SWQPP application. This application met with success. Last summer MDOT responded by installing a new state-of-the-art guardrail system at the causeway.

Recently Zachary Henderson, Environmental Consultant for MDOT, has told TLEA directors that this spring and summer DOT will begin designing an improvement project for the Landing area. Henderson stated that this project will depend on such conditions as federal sign-offs. TLEA expects to participate in the planning process. Stay tuned!



*Holly Troy caught this scene last fall while crossing the Greeley Brook Causeway in Oxford.*

## **PLEASE USE THIS ENVELOPE TO PAY YOUR DUES!**

Once a year, usually in the spring, the *Thompson Lake Observer* goes out to all the households on our “long list,” the list of all known property owners around the lake. If you’ve never been a member, we hope the articles in this issue will give you a good idea of what the TLEA is all about. According to our By-Laws, “The Mission of the Thompson Lake Environmental Association is to preserve the natural beauty, water quality, and biological diversity of Thompson Lake. The TLEA will promote conservation practices through education and through monitoring and management of Thompson Lake and its watershed. TLEA may also promote water safety through education.”

We’re enclosing a TLEA membership envelope as your special invitation to join the Thompson Lake Environmental Association (TLEA) for 2005.

The Membership Committee

## **PLEASE DISCARD THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE IF YOU’VE ALREADY PAID YOUR 2005 DUES!**

Every year we receive duplicate dues from several members. Our policy in recent years has been to accept such duplicate dues as additional contributions, acknowledging receipt without comment. Because this is a bulk mailing, every *Observer* contains a dues envelope; otherwise we could arrange to send envelopes only to those who have not yet paid.

Fortunately, it’s easy to find out whether or not you’ve already paid your dues. Check the label for the number after your name; it indicates the last year in which you’ve sent in your check. If it says “05” you’ve already done so and certainly don’t need to pay again. Thanks for helping us out!

## **Who Said This?**

Recently we came across this familiar-sounding quotation. Does anyone know its source? We are only guessing it was Calvin Coolidge, perhaps remembering the famous photo of him seated with black stovepipe hat and formal dress in a war canoe being paddled by Penobscot Indians. We hope someone will enlighten us.

*“Befriend many, trust few, and always paddle your own canoe.”*

## LAKE DAY PLANNING SHIFTS TO HIGH GEAR

TLEA's Education Committee members have had a busy spring working out a myriad of details for this year's Lake Day, scheduled for Wednesday, May 25, at Agassiz Village in Poland. Students from these schools will attend: Oxford Elementary and Madison Avenue, both in Oxford; Hebron Station School, Hebron; and Otisfield Community School in Otisfield. If you, like most parents, have had trouble organizing one day's activities just for your own two or three kids, think of the logistical problems of transporting and engaging the interest of 120 lively kids in an outdoor setting. Fortunately, teacher-organizer Sandy Roderick has had years of experience doing just this. Each year her own enthusiasm for the environment and for learning spreads to the children and adults. Lake Day is always a success.

As in past years, students participating will spend one day at Madison Avenue School doing some important preparation. This year this will occur on May 13, under the watchful eye of Principal Jane Fahey, who happens to be a TLEA director. Once again the kids will be making special T-shirts to wear on Lake Day. This year's version is shown below.



## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF CUTTING ICE

Responding to last issue's photo of ice cutting on Thompson in 1942, Connie Schwarzkopf has sent us some recollections of her own childhood on the lake in the years 1940 to 1955. The photo, she wrote, filled in an unknown in her own long experience with lake ice. "Particularly interesting was the ice saw. It looks about six feet long and tapered at the bottom tip. Were the oxen pulling another cutting blade, or did they simply drag stocks of ice blocks?"

Connie continues: "Twice a week all summer long, July to September, my father used to climb into the old wooden ice barn, up an attached ladder near the center door, to pull out a large, heavy ice block which he then set in the top of our ice box at camp. He used black ice tongs to put the ice into the car trunk. Our camp was isolated then, the last one on sandy Johnson Hill Road from the old West Poland post office, before a mile of pristine forest leading to Agassiz Village.

"Early in the summer . . . the top of the ice pile was buried under thick white sawdust packed to the level of the eaves. By late August the top of the ice level had sunk to ten or fifteen feet below the top of the door. The sawdust was dark brown and wet from the high heat in an old uninsulated barn, and you could see through the cracks between the vertical boards. By September you could walk in to get ice without climbing the ladder."

This is a scene many of us born after 1920 or 1930 can relate to. Connie concludes by saying that she thought her family paid the owner of the ice barn, whom she remembers as a Mr. Fernald. We'd be happy to share more such memories with *Observer* readers.

## STATE OF THE LAKE, 2004

At the March 18 meeting of TLEA's Board of Directors, Scott Williams presented a power point overview of the water quality of the lake. He made several key points. Thompson remains one of Maine's clearest lakes. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection rates it as "outstanding." On the other hand, Thompson is also rated "most at risk" because of development pressure and the slow turnover rate of the water in the lake. Thompson is also vulnerable to the problems caused by development of the large watershed surrounding the lake.

More specifically, Scott said that the 2004 monitoring showed the lake to be clearer last summer than the historical average, with a clarity range of 8.2 to 10.4 meters. He found the phosphorus and chlorophyll levels good, as was the color. Oxygenation was at acceptable levels at all depths. He commented that none of the readings were as good as they were during the summer of 2003 when record highs were recorded. In 2004, however, the region experienced very wet conditions, in contrast to the previous summers' drought. Another

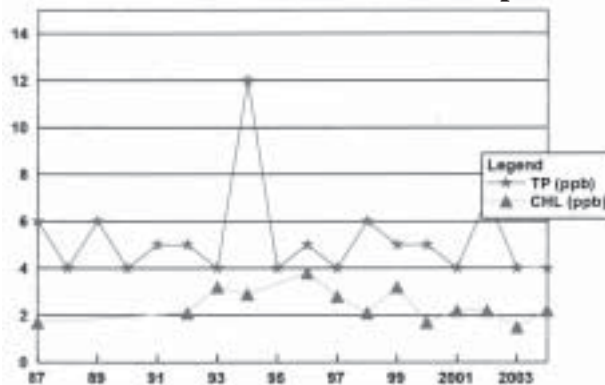
interesting point was that tests at Damariscotta Lake revealed findings similar to Thompson's.

Most of Scott's test readings are taken at the deepest spot in the lake, near Hayes Point, because this is where any water quality problems would first surface. Scott feels the Heath should be considered a totally separate body of water. He suggested that ongoing development of that area will probably have an adverse impact on water quality. Test results from the Heath are significantly different than those conducted on the lake.

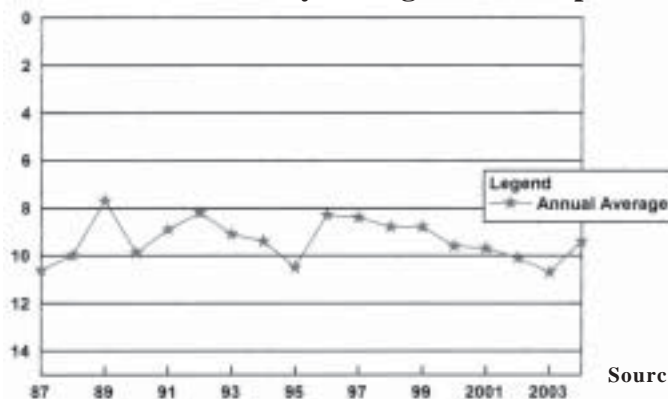
The state labs have not yet sent Scott the test results from the zooplankton studies (see cover photo). Scott thanked Bob Tracy and Bob Cotton for assistance with testing.

Scott concluded by emphasizing, as he has many times before, that when the water quality of a lake declines, it is most difficult to restore that quality. Therefore, he said, the work done by TLEA is critical to the continued good health of Thompson.

### Thompson Lake Concentrations for Total Phosphorus and Chlorophyll-a



### Annual Water Clarity Averages for Thompson Lake



Source: Scott Williams

## THOMPSON LAKE PROPERTY VALUES FLY HIGH

It's spring, at last – time to enjoy the birds singing, the flowers blooming, and the ice and snow melting off Thompson Lake. And time for folks to open up their cottages and return to their homes on the lake.

As spring approached, Belanger Realty in Poland became interested in the sales of the cottages and homes on the Lake. Terry Belanger Pomerleau put together for us a chart of the changes over the past five years. We think you'll find these facts and figures interesting and informative. The chart is based on Belanger's sales of properties with waterfront of at least fifty feet.

### RESIDENTIAL

Year	LO	Selling Range HI	MED	Units Sold	Average Days on Market
2000	\$ 70,000	\$425,000	\$197,710	21	110
2001	\$189,000	\$395,000	\$290,080	10	79
2002	\$145,000	\$465,000	\$248,933	15	70
2003	\$135,000	\$650,000	\$369,460	15	100
2004*	\$225,000	\$695,000	\$389,325	10	52

### LAND

2000	-0-				
2001	\$125,000	\$172,000	\$148,500	2	10
2002	\$311,000	\$390,000	\$350,500	2	160
2003	\$249,900	\$265,000	\$257,450	2	235
2004*	\$139,900	\$250,000	\$188,300	3	83

As you can see, with few exceptions, the median prices of residential property have climbed steady, and the number of houses sold has held steady. The average number of days each house remains on the market is unpredictable at best, and shows no discernible trend. However, the sale of land seems to be another story. Although the units sold appear to be steady, the median sales price seems to vary as does the days on the market. Please note these figures include only sales recorded in the multi-listing service. Our figures do not include private sales and therefore may be somewhat subjective.

\* Information through November 1, 2004

## ROADS TO RUIN?

[This article by Maggie Shannon is excerpted, with permission, from “For the Sake of Maine Lakes,” the Newspaper of the Maine Congress of Lake Associations, Winter 2005.]

Driving through fields and woods to the lake, don't we all keep an eye cocked for glimpses of light between the trees, searching the flash of blue that signals journey's end? We may, in fact, be so focused on our destination we notice the road beneath our wheels only enough to remain on it and avoid wildlife and the occasional puddle.

Whoa! It's time for all of us to stop and examine these familiar routes. Mild mannered as they may seem, camp roads are *Maine's Lake Enemy #1*. Experts estimate camp roads contribute 60% and 85% of all nutrient loading in our watersheds! Nutrient loading is technical talk for too much soil getting into our waters, enriching them and fast-forwarding lakes into decline.

For solutions, COLA recommends the following steps:

1. Form a Road Association.
2. Use DEP-certified Road Contractors. (Available at [www.maine.gov/dep/blwq](http://www.maine.gov/dep/blwq).)
3. Get a copy of DEP's Camp Road Maintenance Manual, available at TLEA.
4. Research the services available from your local Soil and Water Conservation District.
5. Be aware that as of July 2005 chronic erosion sites in At-risk Watersheds, including Thompson, will be illegal.



*Undaunted by two feet of fresh snow, two fishermaen venture on to the ice. (Photo Bob Tracey)*

**Visit our website at:  
[home.gwi.net/~tlea](http://home.gwi.net/~tlea)**

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