



## Friends and Neighbors,

Now that the July 4th holiday is behind us, I wanted to share a quick update on the health of Hitchcock Lake and what we can all do to protect and preserve it.

### **1. Beach Closure**

As many of you know, the Health District temporarily closed Mattatuck Beach from June 25–27 due to high *E. coli* levels. *E. coli* bacteria are a sign of fecal contamination and can come from human and animal waste. The standard for closing a swimming area is 240 units/100 ml; a sample on June 24 showed 1,400 units, but just two days later it dropped to 10 units.

This dramatic change – without heavy rain – plus the presence of a flock of geese near the beach, suggests that goose droppings may have caused the spike. The Town tests *E. coli* levels at Mattatuck Beach because it's public, but unfortunately, we don't have funding to test other areas of the lake.

### **2. Weed Treatment**

Our weed treatment program targets **Curly Leaf Pondweed**, an invasive species, and helps manage native plants so they don't interfere with boating or swimming. Lakes need some plant life to stay healthy, but too much creates problems.

Thanks to Dr. George Knoecklein, a limnologist we brought on in 2023, we've made real progress. In fact, we've reduced the number of herbicide treatments from three to two per season. In April, we focused on Curly Leaf Pondweed to stop its growth before it produces turions (seeds) that will reproduce in future years. The amount of Curly Leaf Pondweed in the lake is much less than several years ago.

This summer we've seen a rise in **Slender Leaf Pondweed**, a native plant. The lake was treated on July 7 to manage this growth. Another native, **Tape Grass**, is found in shallow areas. Although this plant can become a nuisance, Dr. Knoecklein has recommended against widespread treatment for Tape Grass. If it's becoming a nuisance around your dock, you can safely rake out some of the plants.

If Slender Leaf Pondweed continues to be an issue in mid-August, please let us know where you're seeing it. We may consider a third treatment if needed, even though it's outside our current budget.

### **3. Water Quality and Algae**

Like all lakes, Hitchcock is slowly aging – a process called **eutrophication** – as sediment and nutrients (like phosphorus) build up. This fuels weed and algae growth and makes the lake

shallower over time. Eutrophication is accelerated by human activities such as runoff from roads, washing cars, fertilizing lawns, dumping grass cuttings and leaves in the lake, and not picking up after your dog.

Phosphorus is the key nutrient driving this growth. Our goal is to keep in-lake phosphorus below 15 parts per billion (ppb), but recent testing shows levels between 30–46 ppb. This has led to more **cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)**, especially in the south basin, causing cloudier water.

We've avoided large-scale algaecide treatments because they're expensive (\$3,000 per basin), offer only short-term relief, and can leave copper in lake sediments. Later this year, we'll explore long-term treatments like **Alum** or **Phoslock**, which bind phosphorus safely and are even used in drinking water reservoirs. We'll need water and sediment testing first to determine the best approach.

#### **4. How YOU Can Help**

- **Join the HLIA** – Your dues directly fund lake protection efforts.
- **Don't fertilize your lawn** (or use only phosphorus-free fertilizer).
- **Avoid washing your car on your driveway** – soap and oils run off into the lake.
- **Pick up after your dog** and don't leave trash near the water.
- **Don't dump grass** and leaves in or near the lake.
- **Volunteer** to help keep our lake clean.

We all share in the care of this beautiful lake. No one else will do it for us. Thank you for doing your part to keep Hitchcock Lake healthy.

If you have questions or want to get involved, please reach out: Contact me at [markrsussman@gmail.com](mailto:markrsussman@gmail.com) or 860-573-9151.

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