

Sallie and I have spent the past week in Maine at a cottage that overlooks a beautiful bay. The early-1900s cottage sits on a small island cove lined with natural boulder walls. We can see lobster trap buoys bobbing in the water right in front of the house. I have spent a lot of time watching the strong tides come and go.

At high tide, the cove shore is covered with floating layers of yellowish mats of seaweed. Further inspection of the seaweed reveals vibrant plants that I am sure sustain all sorts of animal life.

At low tide, that seaweed and most of the seaweed mats fall on the sandy and rock-laden floor while some continue to float and bob in the water. At this low tide point, the seaweed looks very differently, as if it is dead and rotting. Some may contend it is a distracting cover hiding the beauty of those fantastic boulders adorning the shore.

While homeowners around this unique shoreline have chairs and tables next to the boulders and shore, they have no docks, boats, or other human devices on the shore. Boats, for instance, are moored at a small island marina at the neighborhood entrance.

I suspect, for compelling cause, the State of Maine has robust regulations about what can and cannot be done to the shoreline. Maine is a tourist destination where people like me flock to devour lobster, clams, oysters, and all kinds of fish. The last thing the people of Maine want to see is this linchpin of their economy compromised by bad environmental and conservation policies.

I suspect a few residents might want to clear their property of those mats of seaweed with herbicides and algaecides, but strict state regulations prohibit their use except in rare circumstances and under the control of a licensed professional. Certainly, routine spraying of these chemicals by residents would not be allowed, especially since there are lobster traps and oyster beds nearby. Those independent Mainers want to promote and market their seafood as the best and cleanest in the world.

I am always the mayor on duty, so when I got a call from an 828 number late Friday afternoon, I, of course, answered it. On the line was a young man from a company that uses chemicals to remove weeds and plants from lakes and ponds. He told me he had spoken with some residents at Mirror Lake or maybe Lake Sequoyah about his company removing areas of weeds in the lakes. He asked whether the town had ordinances about such activities.

My response was that, since these two lakes are critical to our watershed and drinking water, I certainly had concerns. The state may even view some of these weed areas as wetlands. I referred him to our town manager for more definite information. I also gave Josh Ward a heads up that he should expect a call about this proposed activity. Josh informed

me that we should expect such operations to go through a review and approval process with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. That information relieved some of my concerns. But since those bodies of water are part of our drinking water network, any chemicals applied around or in those waters must be done with extreme care. Our water department constantly provides water samples from these bodies for state testing. The last thing we want to see is any significant trace of herbicides or toxic chemicals in the water supply. I am sure folks in Maine share similar views.

Our code enforcement officer monitors and will make sure any such activities are licensed and under the purview of state authorities.

I bring this up because I have an ongoing concern that we all must protect the watershed on the Highlands Plateau, just as I have witnessed in Maine this past week. If a homeowner has a stream, pond, or any kind of impoundment on their property, state regulations apply to any chemical application, alteration, or modification to that waterway.

Now I know some of my libertarian friends may retort, here goes that mayor again trying to tell us what we can do with our property. But on the other hand, property owners should not be allowed to do things on their property that affect or jeopardize other people's property rights or compromise public health and safety.

I hope, as a community, we can all agree that we must be good stewards of this unique land and environment. Regarding the removal of aquatic growth in our lakes, town staff will carefully monitor the situation. As we dredge Mirror Lake, the issue of algae and weeds will also be a concern.