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Fight Against Lake Hopatcong Algae Blooms Continues with 'Biochar' Bags

By FRED J. AUN

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ROXBURY, NJ – Several Lake Hopatcong inlets are the sites for an experiment that could help control harmful algal blooms (HABs), the green bacterial growths that shut down the lake last summer.

Workers from Princeton Hydro installed, at four places, tethered flotation bags containing “Biochar,” a material that might help remove dissolved phosphorous from water near the shoreline. Too much phosphorous is a major cause of HABs, according to biologists.

The Biochar bags were placed July 2 at the Lake Winona outlet, the Lake Forest Yacht Club, Lakeside Avenue and Holiday Avenue (near Ingram Cove) in Hopatcong and the Edith Decker School outlet in Mount Arlington, according to Lake Hopatcong Commission Administrator Colleen Lyons.

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The Biochar installations are being funded by [a \\$500,000 state grant](#) that also paid for Princeton Hydro’s [recent dispersal of Phoslock, a different type of HAB-battling material, in Landing Cove](#) in Roxbury.

“Biochar is a woody material that has a high affinity for a variety of pollutants including phosphorus,” said Lyons in a letter to local officials. “Biochar can be placed in flotation balls or cages and tethered along a beach area or where an inlet enters the lake. This product has been shown to remove dissolved phosphorus directly from nearshore waters in turn limiting algal growth.”

She noted that Biochar is a relatively inexpensive “and has the added benefit of compost once its capacity to a phosphorus is exhausted.” Lyons said the phosphorus is held within the Biochar and won’t leach back out.

"Instead, when Biochar is used as a compost/mulch, plant roots grow into the material and uptake phosphorus directly," she said.

She noted Princeton Hydro will soon be installing additional Biochar "socks" at some local ponds, including Duck Pond in Roxbury and Memorial Pond in Mount Arlington.

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