Pollution at Lake Roland reported critical
Burns, Michael K
The Sun (1837-1986); May 3, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)
pg. C12

Pollution at Lake Roland reported critical

By MICHAEL K. BURNS

A study by area college students finds that Lake Roland is "seriously degraded" and faces a major crisis from excessive siltation, septic tank runoff pollution and potential algae buildup.

The report, prepared by students from Goucher College, Towson State College and the Johns Hopkins University under a $13,140 National Science Foundation grant, found:

1. A high level of nitrogen and phosphate nutrients that promote the growth of algae.

2. Heavy sedimentation, or siltation, which has changed the mean depth of the lake from 16 feet to 5 feet in the past 20 years and has dumped 50 million cubic feet of sediment into the lake.

3. A high level of domestic wastes and grease from residential septic tanks which has brought the pollution level to a "borderline situation" for recreational use.

4. Replacement of sport fish such as bass and trout with "rough" fish like carp.

"This is a crisis situation," said Dr. John W. Foerster, the Goucher biology professor who directed the 8-month study. "We can't wait for 5 or 6 years, until it is too late."

The report urges construction of sedimentation retention basins on the three main incoming streams and on major building sites, installation of proper sanitary sewers to replace septic tanks, reforestation of eroded slopes, a moratorium on large-tract building until sediment control measures are taken, and the use of chemicals to control algae growth.

Help may be on the way, Dr. Foerster notes. The Maryland Regional Planning Council supported the study, which ran from February to September last year, and will consider recommendations for the Ruxton lake.

The Ruxton-Riderwood-Lake Roland Improvement Association contributed funds for the study and is raising $100,000 for construction of sedimentation retention basins at Jones Falls, Towson Run and Roland Run. These basins are built in low-velocity areas of the streams, where silt may be deposited and then pumped from the collection pool periodically.

The Baltimore county planning office is also working on plans to build central sewage connections for the area west of Bellona avenue, Dr. Foerster added.

The study also found that people who use the park, as well as area residence, wish to preserve it as a wild area and a nature refuge, a haven from bustling Towson State, the Beltway traffic and booming housing developments.

"It is perhaps the nearest thing we have to a central park," Dr. Foerster said. "People we talked to did not want it lined with wall-to-wall tennis courts," although fishermen pressed for restocking the lake with sport fish.

Much of the recent sediment buildup has come from the expansion project at Towson State and from apartment site preparation near the intersection of Jones Fall expressway with the Beltway, the biologist said.

Heavy sedimentation has turned the lake murky, which, ironically, has controlled the level of algae by limiting the sunlight needed for growth.

"You have to clean up the sediment or you won't have any lake left," Dr. Foerster said. "But if you clean up the sediment and don't clean up the [algae] nutrients, you'll have an algae problem which will choke the lake."

"Poorly designed septic tanks," located on flood plain, are an obvious cause of waste and detergent pollution, he said.

Water samples taken from the lake last spring and summer—the "biggest problem times for a lake"—barely met state standards for recreational use. Dr. Foerster said, "It is not yet a health hazard but a borderline situation."

The big storm last August was a blessing in disguise, the Goucher professor said, because it flushed out grease and detergent foam buildups.

Dr. Foerster said the lake has lost 5 per cent of its area since it was transferred to the recreation department in 1943.

The mile-square lake served as the city water reservoir from 1865 until 1901.

Virginia Richards, a Goucher senior, served as student project director for the study.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.