

Watershed Wisdom – A Laker’s Dozen

Last weekend I was a speaker at the Maine Congress of Lake Associations (Maine COLA) annual meeting, which took place at Colby College (full disclosure: I was also elected to their board of directors at this meeting). It was great to attend a meeting attended by so many people (~200) who care enough about Maine lakes to give up a beautiful summer day to come together to try to voice concerns about and learn about ways of protecting, preserving, and improving water quality. Maine COLA plays an invaluable role in bringing Maine “lake people,” regulators, and scientists together to talk about issues of concern and figure out how to increase the protection of Maine lakes. They have lobbied strongly for legislative action such as the new “No-phosphorous” fertilizer law that went into effect earlier this year and a recent act (LD 2249) entitled “An Act to Improve Lake Water Quality,” that will, among other things, require DEP-certified erosion control contractors to perform all earthwork in the shoreland zone. They also do a lot of education and outreach about things ordinary people can do to help the lakes. Here is a pretty good list they have compiled, reproduced with their permission. They have a lot of good information and links at their web site: (www.mainecola.org). Hopefully my columns so far have given you a good understanding of why all these recommendations are important.

A Laker’s Dozen:

1. **Always check boat, trailer and equipment for plant fragments** before launch and after take-out.
2. **Respect Shoreland Zone Regulations.** Before making any change on your land, check with your town to see what’s permitted and what’s not in the shoreland: 250’ of the lake and 75’ of streams.
3. **Control storm water run-off** from buildings, paths, driveways and road. Check your property on a rainy day and fix run-off sites by planting vegetation or constructing swales to direct water flow away from the lake.
4. **Cultivate a wooded buffer.** Trees, shrubs and grasses slow the flow and filter soil and pollutants from rainwater before they end up in the lake.
5. **Limit lawn size,** mow less often, and don’t rake duff within 75 feet of shore.
6. **Limit fertilizer,** herbicide and pesticide use. Long lasting residues in these chemicals can turn lakes green and harm aquatic life.
7. **Don’t stress the septic system.** Inspect the system yearly. Pump the tank regularly. Systems 20 years and older should be inspected by a specialist. Use phosphorus-free cleaners, and detergents. Stagger laundry loads. Minimize water use. Don’t put grease or toxics down the drain.
8. **Construct docks and floats with lake-friendly materials.** Choose cedar, cypress, plastic, or aluminum over wood that’s pressure-treated with arsenic.

9. **Dogs, humans and boats should never be washed in the lake!**

10. **Observe headway speed within 200 feet of shore.** Boating in shallow water disturbs fish habitat and stirs up sediment.

11. When you replace a boat motor, **choose a clean 4-stroke engine.**

12. **Preserve wildlife habitat on land and underwater.** Lake shallows and shorelands are home to many native species and nurseries for young.

13. **Support your local lake association and Maine COLA.**

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