

Testimony regarding H31 : House Environment and Energy Committee, 3/16/2023

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Lake Carmi Camper's Association and the Franklin Watershed Committee are concerned that H 31, as written, will delay or prohibit the use of an alum treatment in Lake Carmi. We do not support this bill.

Our family has been fishing and swimming at Lake Carmi since 1980 and in 1991 were fortunate enough to buy a camp. We drank the water from the lake since testing showed it was acceptable drinking water.

As the lake degraded over time we first had a shallow well dug and then went to a more expensive drilled well for a source of safe drinking water. So we began by drinking the lake water but last summer we were afraid to even go in the water. We were even worried about breathing the air during the almost continuous cyanobacteria blooms and actually left the lake early several times. We are fortunate to have our winter home in Middlesex so we can leave the lake when it is blooming, but others have no other place to go and must breathe the toxic air hoping no dangerous health effects occur.

In 2017 the lake had a terrible cyanobacteria bloom and in 2018 the legislature determined that Lake Carmi was a Lake in Crisis, and it is the only lake with that designation.

Since then there has been much activity to clean up the lake using an all-in approach. One of these is that camp owners improved septic systems. They also reduced shoreline erosion on their properties by following the Lake Wise program and increased the use of port-a-potties during large gatherings.

The Franklin Watershed Committee oversaw the volunteer monitoring of streams and

coordinating with state agencies throughout the watershed identifying needed improvements to reduce phosphorus entering the lake.

The Agency of Natural Resources arranged for the design and installation of an aeration system along with the UVM monitoring platform in the lake, groundwater research including drilling test wells, and an advanced wastewater facility at the Lake Carmi State Park.

The Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Marketing worked with the farming community helping them implement agricultural practices to reduce phosphorus from entering the lake. Some of these were changing to no-till fields, injection of manure, cover cropping and intercropping,

The Town of Franklin covered the costs of the electricity to run the aeration system along with accessing grants to purchase and run a weed harvester which removes milfoil from the lake and reduces the phosphorus levels.

The Agency of Transportation assisted in improving roads and culverts to reduce runoff. Despite all of these efforts, 2022 had the highest phosphorus levels in Lake Carmi ever reported. These were driven by internal phosphorus loading of the lake which led to almost continuous cyanobacteria blooms and reduced use of the lake, state park, town beach, and camps.

Due to all of the work done in the Lake Carmi watershed, DEC has determined that the amount of new phosphorus entering the lake has been sufficiently reduced so that the lake might now qualify for an alum treatment which would fix the legacy phosphorus into the sediment and therefore reduce or hopefully eliminate the toxic cyanobacterial blooms.

We are almost over the finish line of a multi-year, multi-agency and multi-organizational effort. The Vermont Clean Water Board has approved money for the study for an alum treatment. We are distressed to learn that H31 would prohibit the use of alum which we have been told is the next step toward the successful completion of years of efforts by citizens and governmental agencies to improve the health of Lake Carmi.

We have leaned heavily on experts at DEC to determine an approach to the lake that will improve water quality. If the moratorium happens, it will hamstring our continued work and will allow for potentially two or more years of unacceptable water quality at the lake. Lake Carmi, the state's only Lake in Crisis, and the people of Vermont deserve every option to be on the table for us to reduce the risk of an unhealthy situation which we are all having to live with. Our lake is suffering, our community is suffering and we do not support H31 which, if passed, would limit the options on the table to improve water quality at the lake.

We look forward to a time when Lake Carmi is no longer a Lake in Crisis and it meets the requirements of the Clean Water Act of 2015 to be a drinkable, swimmable and fishable lake.

We look forward to a time when this Lake in Crisis has been transformed into a body of water for which Vermont can be proud.

We ask you to vote NO on H 31.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernest Englehardt
Member, Lake Carmi Board of Directors