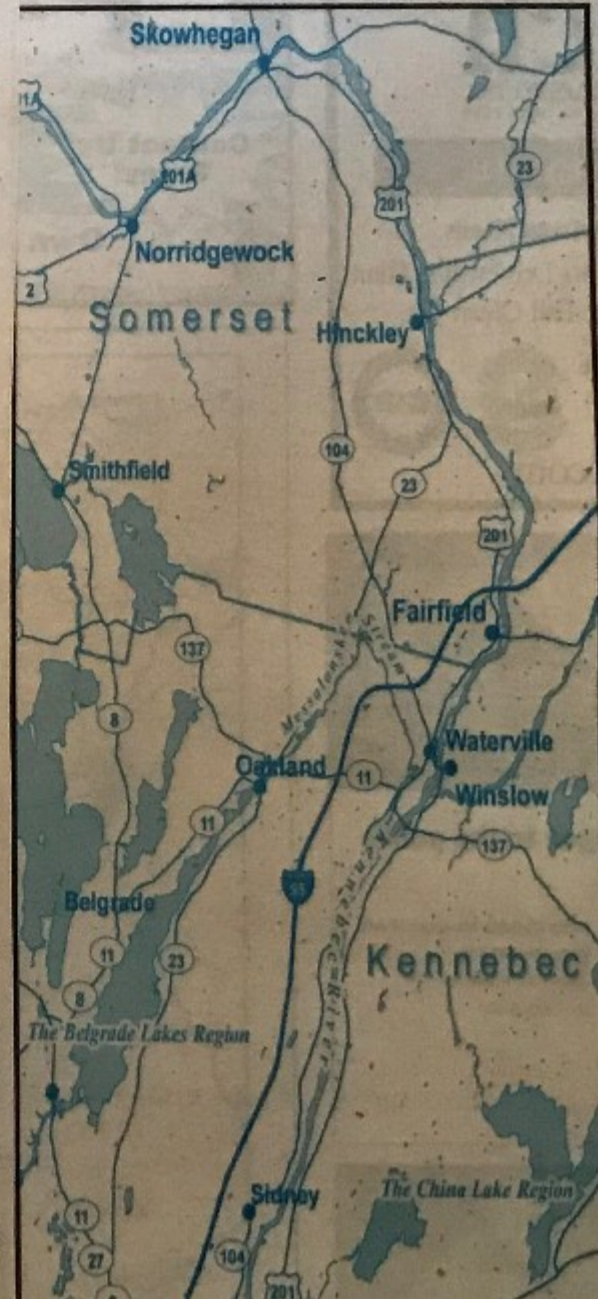


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Changing Climate, Changing Need for Vigilance, Resources to Protect Belgrade Lakes Watershed

By Laura Rose Day

A sunny, hot summer punctuated by intense storms and studies on how a changing climate impacts people and wildlife has caused many people who live, work and play on the Belgrade Lakes to ask what these changes may mean for the watershed's health, economy and recreation. In the Belgrade Lakes and nearby watersheds, 7 Lakes Alliance and many partners provide information, training and opportunities to act to protect both lands and waters.

Climate-related impacts on lake systems -- including both land and water-- are many; just a few factors can be discussed here. For instance, more frequent and intense storms increase erosion and stir up sediments on the bottom of lakes and streams, harming habitat and increasing phosphorus in the lakes. These contribute to harmful and even toxic algal blooms. More runoff requires improvements to culverts and better erosion management on roads.

Threats from invasive plants and animals also increases with warmer, longer summers. Earlier ice-out can cause longer open water seasons with ideal conditions for increased growth (more sun) of invasive plants such as variable milfoil infestations in Great Pond. Earlier and longer boating and fishing seasons can also increase the spread and introduction of invasive species. Longstanding "Memorial Day to Labor Day"

schedules for 7 Lakes Alliance's Courtesy Boat Inspection programs are no longer sufficient. Last summer, we counted about 1,500 additional boat visits at a single boat launch after the end of the 2018 inspection season -- increasing the risk of undetected invaders and requiring increased protection at increased cost.

Lands in the watershed are impacted, too, with longer warmer seasons favoring harmful and invasive organisms such as the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and plants such as Japanese knotweed. More intense storms make it more important to keep lands intact to protect water quality, especially in steep areas. The need for less impervious surface, better drainage and buffers from wind and water damage increases.

7 Lakes Alliance works with property owners, governments, lake associations and others to take on-the-ground actions to prevent or mitigate the impacts of a changing climate. We fight the spread of invasive plants by removing variable milfoil, surveying for new infestations, and preventing spread by getting citizens to adopt their shorelines to watch for invaders. Our Courtesy Boat Inspectors help keep invasive organisms from entering our waters. Our Youth Conservation Corps installs buffers and other tools to help people protect their land from erosive forces of storms and wakes.

Thorough, rigorous science remains crucial to understanding and combating potential impacts of changing climate conditions. 7 Lakes Alliance works in collaboration with Colby College to monitor water quality including oxygen, mixing of lake layers (stratification), phosphorous and algae as key elements of understanding the impacts of changing weather conditions.

All told, climate-related challenges make efforts to conserve the lands and waters of the region more time-intensive, difficult and expensive. 7 Lakes Alliance provides resources to keep people in the Belgrade Lakes watershed informed; we recently hosted a presentation by Maine's State Climatologist and co-hosted with Maine Lakes Society a climate communications workshop. Visit 7 Lakes Alliance (www.7lakesalliance.org) to learn about training, volunteer opportunities, and resources including "Early indications of climate impacts on Maine Lakes: A case study from the Belgrades", a 2019 Maine Water Conference presentation by our Water Quality Science Director Dr. Danielle Wain, board member Dr. Peter Kallin and Colby College's Dr. Whitney King. You'll also find links to excellent resources including various state agencies, Lake Stewards of Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program and much more. Learn ways to protect our economically, recreationally and ecologically valuable watershed!