



DRIFTWORDS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BIG RIDEAU LAKE ASSOCIATION (BRLA)
SERVING THE RIDEAU SINCE 1911 • POONAMALIE TO NARROWS LOCK
– SUMMER 2008 –

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FROM THE BOARD ROOM: DOUG ARRAND, BRLA PRESIDENT [PRESIDENT@BRLA.ON.CA](mailto:president@brla.on.ca)

It's been another great summer on Big Rideau Lake, and another busy summer for the Big Rideau Lake Association.

Once again, our activities centred on Cow Island, that jewel in the Big Rideau that's available for the use of all BRLA Members.

Sailing Camp, Day Camp, Swimming, Environmental activities – all of these point to how the BRLA is moving to make Cow Island a model property for environmentally responsible living on the lake.

We've reported in the past about the EcoScapes environmental assessment (a copy of which is available on the BRLA web site). This summer, we moved ahead with a number of the recommendations there, lead by the Environment Committee under its new Chair, Peter Copestake. The Committee has invested time and energy in bioengineering solutions to stabilize the shoreline. Less intrusive and expensive than riprap, we hope that these new plantings and the no-mow shoreline zone we'll implement next year will keep the shoreline from further erosion.

As always with any property it's a series of compromises. Making sure we don't plant trees where we shoot fireworks, or land sailboats. Ensuring that we still have places for kids to run and play. These mirror the choices we make on our own properties. We hope you'll come out to Cow and see what we're up to. Better yet, get involved! Help ensure the future of your lake.



*Fireworks over Cow Island.
Photo: Doug Arrand*

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DRIFTWORDS – SUMMER 2008

MARINE SAFETY REPORT DANIEL (TOBY) SPRY MARINESAFETY@BRLA.ON.CA

All boaters on Big Rideau Lake and The Lower Rideau Lake are or should be aware of the White Shoal Markers which dot our lakes. These markers are built, maintained and put in by the BRLA by volunteers. We have over 100 situated around the lakes.

The markers have been registered with the Coast Guard and the Federal Department of Transport under the “Private Aids to Navigation” regulations, and appear on new charts and GPS chips.

Cottagers and Boaters are asked to keep a watch out for any damaged markers or abuse of the markers. If you see anyone fishing, with their boat tied to a marker, we ask that you politely ask they refrain from this practice. If you see any that are “off station” or need repair, please contact the BRLA office.

The BRLA has started a refurbishing program to ensure that the markers are as visible as possible. The cost and or the replacement of the markers are the responsibility of the BRLA. New markers are built by volunteers at a cost of around \$150.00 each. We have been fortunate that members of the BRLA have generously donated some of the material required. This year Taggart Construction Limited donated around 40 feet of PVC piping.

We are also reviewing our liability for these markers. Under the Private Aids to Navigation Regulations we have a responsibility to ensure that the markers are on location and in sound condition. We will be in touch with the Rideau Canal Authority and the CCG with BRLA policy as to when the markers will be placed in the lake and when they will be hauled for the winter. We anticipate that the timings will correspond with the opening and closing of the Canal system.

ANOTHER GREAT SUMMER ON COW ISLAND COWISLAND@BRLA.ON.CA

It might have been a wet summer but that didn't dampen the enthusiasm of day campers on Cow Island. Day Camp is a great way for kids to meet others on the lake, and build ties that last a lifetime. Thanks again to Lindsay Cameron, our head counsellor, Nikki Stoudt, assistant, and Rianne Munroe, counsellor in training.



Toby's boat Chester can often be seen out checking shoal markers – with Toby aboard too.

Photo: Toby Spry

As the Board member responsible for “Marine Safety” I have, in 2007, inspected every marker on the lake. I will be doing the same this year in August. If you see a small “Lobster” trawler called “Chester” poking around, please do not be dismayed. If you have suggestions, concerns or want to make a donation towards the maintenance of these valuable aids please contact me through the BRLA office or email me at rideaulaketrawlers@hotmail.com.

In closing I would like to remind all those who use boats that September 2009 is the final date before all boat users in Canada are required to have a Pleasure Craft Operators Card. This is for ALL ages and ALL boats. Please get a copy of the requirements from your local marina or check out the Canada Shipping Act on the web.



*Yes, there really was a bit of sunshine this summer!
Cow Island Campers after a swim. Photo: Doug Arrand*



*Rigging Boats on Cow Island. They were Laser Picos.
Photo: Ellen Isok*



*A little land-side theory before heading out.
Photo: Ellen Isok*

BRLA STARTED THE SUMMER SAILING J. TRANT EMAIL: SAILING@BRLA.ON.CA

Once again, BRLA hosted the Ontario Sailing Association BOOM Program for a week of sailing lessons on Cow Island. This year, because the program is in very high demand, we started right out of the gate. Sixteen sailors – a sold out crowd – met daily on Cow Island between June 30 and July 4, 2008.

The BOOM Program provides instructors and boats for a flat fee. We look after local registration, and pro-

vide a teaching facility (Cow Island) along with somewhere for the instructors to stay (with us, on Grindstone Island again). With a sold-out course, we made a small surplus, which will be directed towards other sailing-related activities.

Thanks everyone who helped out, both with logistics and with supervision during the course of the week.

We're watching for the BOOM program announcements and booking dates for 2009, and will let everyone know as soon as possible what the dates will be for next summer!

BRLA AQUATIC REGATTA - A FUN WET DAY! REGATTA@BRLA.ON.CA

*Thanks to the Evans Family
for once again organizing
the BRLA Aquatic Regatta
on Cow Island.*

*Congratulations to the
Dunlop Family, who took
home the trophy. Any
challengers for next year?
Mark the Saturday morning
of the August Long Weekend
in your calendars.*



*Photos: J. Trant and Beth Evans. See the BRLA Web site for more photos of our activities
http://www.brla.on.ca/photos/photograph_album_index.htm*

DRIFTWORDS – SUMMER 2008

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

PETER COPESTAKE, ENVIRONMENT@BRLA.ON.CA

ALGAE IN BIG RIDEAU LAKE

On July 3, 2008 algae samples from the Big Rideau Lake were taken along the shore of a private property.

These were sent to the Government of Ontario Ministry of the Environment for analysis.

Two of the five July 3, 2008 Big Rideau Lake samples (sample 02 and 05) contained a large amount of filamentous green algae. They were: Mougeotia, Spirogyra and Oedogonium. The algae normally live in shallow bays among aquatic plants, or are attached to rocks. They do not produce toxins. The mat shown on the photograph was probably dislodged during a stormy weather, and floated close to the dock.

Several green algae filaments were also found in samples 01, 03 and 04. There were no cyanobacteria present.

This is good news for us. We do not have toxic blue green algae (or Cyanophyta) blooms occurring. But we must remain vigilant. Creating a buffer zone along



the shoreline is the best thing we each can do to reduce algae growth in the Big Rideau.

Remember:

- ☛ *Do not mow your lawn to the water's edge. Leave a buffer of vegetation.*
- ☛ *Do not fertilize a waterfront lawn. You're just feeding the algae.*

PHOSPHATES 101

JUDITH ROBERTSON *(see more on household environmental choices on pages 10-11.)*

Phosphates have been a main detergent ingredient. They serve as a "builder" to help remove dirt and to minimize soap scum, especially important in areas with "hard" water containing calcium and magnesium ions. Phosphates were a key contributor to the pollution crisis that led to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement signed by the U.S. and Canada in 1972. It and later regulations limited phosphate content in laundry detergents to 5% (they had been as much as 80%), but did not put restrictions on other products.

Why ignore dishwasher detergents? Most people didn't have dishwashers in 1972. In 2008, that has changed greatly in permanent residences and many cottages. If you consider that more than 50% of the dwellings on Otty Lake are permanent residences now, it is safe to assume that dishwashers and phosphates may be part of the mystery of the rapid increase in weed growth we have seen. The federal government's proposal to reduce the phosphates in dishwasher detergent (0.5% by 2010, www.ec.gc.ca) reinforces the idea of a strong connection between phosphates and weed growth.

In making the announcement, the environment minister used the algae blooms last summer in Quebec and Manitoba as evidence of the problem. In fact, Canada is behind the times. Many U.S. States banned phosphates in dishwasher detergents in the 1990s.

INFORMATION FOR PRIVATE LANDOWNERS WITH CORMORANT PROBLEMS

FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act has specific provisions which enable private landowners to protect their property from cormorants. Under Subsection 31(1) an individual who believes on reasonable grounds that cormorants are damaging or are about to damage their property may harass, capture or kill the cormorants on their property (Note: this does not include destroying, taking or possessing nests and eggs).

- More than the mere presence of cormorants is required for the protection of property provisions to apply.
- The onus is on the private landowner to provide proof of “reasonable grounds” under Subsection 31(1) of the FWCA. The destruction of trees and vegetation on private property may constitute reasonable grounds to harass, capture or kill cormorants.
- Under Subsection 31(2) of the FWCA, the Minister of Natural Resources (or his delegate) may authorize a landowner to use an agent to act on their behalf to harass, capture or kill cormorants on their privately owned land.
- Control/harassment must be limited to the boundaries of the individual’s property.
- Landowner control/harassment is limited to the extent that is necessary to protect their property.
- No unnecessary suffering may come to cormorants during control/harassment. Dispatch of adult nesting cormorants can deprive hatchlings of sustenance and shelter and cause undue suffering. Private landowners who choose to exercise their rights to protect private property must only do so at a time and in a manner that will not cause unnecessary suffering to adults and young.
- Under Subsection 7(1) of the FWCA, a person may not destroy, take or possess the nest or eggs of cormorants on either Crown or private land without authorization from the Ministry of Natural Resources
- It is the responsibility of the private landowner to ensure that they follow all relevant legal requirements when taking actions under the protection of property provision of the FWCA. For more information, private landowners should contact their local MNR office.

It is important for private landowners to recognize the following points when dealing with cormorant-related problems:

- Cormorants are colonial nesters (i.e., they like to nest together in large groups).
- Each situation and nesting colony is different. Some methods will be very effective at one site, but ineffective at another site. Landowners should adapt to the approaches that work best for their property.
- Some private landowners have been successful in getting cormorants to abandon roosting or nesting sites using varying combinations of the following techniques.

1) Take action in the early spring (late March – April).

If harassed early in the spring, cormorants will often move on to another nesting location. Do not wait for nesting to begin. Cormorants will not abandon a site easily once egg laying and incubation begins.

2) Active harassment is often necessary

Cormorants are habitual and intelligent birds. Experience has shown that they do not generally show long-term response to periodic or passive harassment (i.e., visual and auditory repellents, etc.). Consistent active harassment is often necessary to move cormorants once a colony is established (i.e., nest removal, roost flushing, culling, etc.). It may be necessary to maintain harassment for 1-2 weeks or more.

3) Remove old nests

Cormorants tend to return to locations where nest structures can be utilized again. The removal of nests after the nesting season will likely reduce the number of cormorants that return. Nest can be removed by poking old nests out of trees with long poles or branches supporting nests may be cut down.

4) Harass both day and night, if possible.

While it is easy to harass cormorants during the daylight hours, harassment is probably most effective if done at night. If cormorants return to your island or property at dusk, they have not broken the bond with that area.

For more information, please contact your local Ministry of Natural Resources office.



*Cormorants on the Shoals off Cow Island.
Photo: J. Trant*

RIDEAU LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL FOUNDATION (RLEF)

UPDATE: DAVID BEARMAN, PRESIDENT

The Annual General Meeting of the Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation was held on Grindstone Island on August 23, 2008.

David Bearman, Chairman of the RLEF Board, reported that the Foundation had just completed its most successful annual fund raising drive of the past decade – with over 100 donors and over \$10,000 in donations. David urged the members to continue to come forward with large, exciting, and bold ideas for projects that promote the environment of the Rideau Lakes so that the RLEF Board will have clear fundraising objectives. In return, he promised that the Board will strive to raise funds to cover such large-scale and long-term plans that the members develop, citing as an example to multi-year plan to turn Cow Island into a model environmental site which has been developed by the BRLA and will be realized over the next several years with assistance from the RLEF.

In addition, members heard recommendations from the Board on revisions to the RLEF mission objectives and by-laws to keep them in line with actual operations, and approved sending these on to the Charities Commission.

Members elected a new Board of Directors for 2008/2009. Don Rasmussen and Wendy Stewart will represent the Upper Rideau Lake Association and David Bearman, Henry Copestake and George Lamont will represent the Big Rideau Lake Association. In addition, Doug Arrand (President of BRLA) and Peter Copestake (Chair, Environmental Committee BRLA) will serve on the RLEF Board by virtue of their offices.

Following the AGM, the new Board met briefly, electing David Bearman Chairman, Don Rasmussen Vice-Chair and Secretary, and Henry Copestake Treasurer for the year 2008/09. The next meeting of the Board will take place on October 5, 2008, Members and other interested parties are invited to submit ideas and applications for funding to rlf@brla.on.ca

A social reception for RLEF and BRLA officers, volunteers, and major donors followed, on one of the loveliest days of the year, bringing a fun end to another successful summer of activity for the Foundation and the two lake associations it primarily serves.

SUPPORT THE RIDEAU LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL FOUNDATION!

Your donations to the RLEF are tax deductible. They can be made on-line through the BRLA website at <http://brla.on.ca/rlf/> where your donation is handled by Canada Helps. Or you may send a cheque to RLEF, P.O. Box 93, Portland ON K0G 1V0.

Please give generously on-line at <http://www.brla.on.ca/rlf/>

“SUMMER SOUNDS”

AN ANNUAL FUNDRAISER FOR COW ISLAND

A GREAT SUCCESS!



We'll have full financial details on this fundraiser in the next DriftWords.



Thanks to Joyce and Peter Cowan for organizing another great afternoon on Cow Island!

HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS WANTED

Our 100th anniversary in 2011, so we're gathering digital copies of historic photographs of the lake and its landmarks. If you have photographs that you would like to share with us please email brla@brla.on.ca. Or add them to our flickr group at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/brla/>



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DON'T SPREAD THIS INVASIVE SPECIES!

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WWW.INSPECTION.CA**



BRLA BOARD: JULY 2008 - JUNE 2009

BRLA Board Members serve 2-year, renewable terms, to a maximum of 3 consecutive terms. New members, and the President, are elected at each Annual General Meeting. The Board then elects its officers.

Get to know the people working on your behalf.

THE EXECUTIVE



President: Doug Arrand
email: president@brla.on.ca
Terms: 2003-4, 2005-6, 2007-8

I am a retired secondary school and adult education teacher, who retired in 2000 after having spent 33 years in the profession in Ottawa. I have always been a community volunteer and, after having enjoyed our cottage on this great lake for 26 years which included membership in the BRLA, I made the decision to offer my services as a member of the Cow Island Committee and the Recreation Committee. I did this because I wanted to see the children and members once again enjoy this magnificent island property owned by the members of the BRLA. That offer led to serving on the Board of Directors these past 4 years and I've not regretted the decision for one minute. It's been an exciting period in the Association's history and I have worked with some great fellow directors and dedicated members.

Vice President: Ed Brigden
email: vp@brla.on.ca
Terms: 2003-4, 2005-6, 2007-8



Having been introduced to the Rideau Canal System and Portland area in the mid 1970's. We are located on the north shore of Briton Bay and have spent our time since then either boating or enjoying our summers on the dock, maintaining the cottage, docks, decks and Sharon's flowers. I became involved with the BRLA initially during the Three Buoys Houseboat Rental days and having served a couple

of terms on the board moved on. I was subsequently invited to re-join the Board on two additional occasions and have been on the board approximately 10 to 12 years. My areas of interest are what the BRLA is really all about: water quality, fish habitat, boating safety and shoal markers, recreation and of course the financial stability of our organization.



Treasurer: Barbara Keays
email: treasurer@brla.on.ca
Terms: 2008-9

My husband Harry and I acquired our first home on Big Rideau Lake in 1991, which we used in the summer and on weekends year round. In 2004 we moved to a larger property near Portland and built a new house which we now call "home". I retired last year from being the Accounting Manager of an Ottawa retirement home for over 18 years. We enjoy our Big Rideau Lake lifestyle far more than a city lifestyle. I hope that BRLA can increase its membership and provide lake front residents with ideas as to how they can make the lake a better place for all of its residents, especially wildlife.



Secretary: Melanie Sterling
email: secretary@brla.on.ca
Terms: 2007-8

Melanie joined the board last year as secretary and has been pleased to be a part of the volunteer organization. Melanie has been cottaging on the Big Rideau since 1992 and owns a cottage on Briton Bay with her husband John. Melanie is a mom to two boys (ages 8 and 5) who have been taking part in sailing lessons and daycamp on the lake for the last two years. Melanie works as a Business Development Associate with a Municipal Software company out of B.C. and is a certified fitness instructor teaching at Goodlife clubs in Ottawa. Melanie and her family can be found most weekends at the cottage enjoying the water, boating and taking part in many of the social/recreational activities offered on the lake. Melanie is particularly interested in recreation, the environment and preservation of the lake.



Communications: DriftWords (newsletter) and Web Site:

Jennifer Trant

email: driftwords@brla.on.ca or webmaster@brla.on.ca

Terms: 2003-4, 2005-6, 2007-8

I joined the BRLA Board in 2003 to help with the Web site, and took over editing of DriftWords in 2005. Thanks to high-speed wireless Internet, I can spend a long summer (May – October) on Grindstone Island with my husband, David Bearman, and our chow, Slate. Together we look after a significant piece of Rideau history and environment, and manage a consulting company that develops digital strategies for cultural heritage organizations and runs international conferences. I'm interested in preserving natural and historical heritage, and developing sustainable communities.



Environment: Peter Copestake

email: environment@brla.on.ca

Terms: 2008-9

For almost 40 years Peter and his family have been cottaging on Big Rideau, both Cordwood Island and more recently at the north end of Long Island. Peter has enjoyed his frequent “retreats” to the lake in all seasons, to enjoy the peaceful, clean and natural beauty of the place. An ardent environmentalist, with an undergraduate degree in Limnology from Queen's University, Peter has assumed the Chair of the environment committee on the BRLA Board. “I am looking forward to working with the BRLA community on the Environment Committee in preserving, and where possible improving, the natural ecosystems, geophysical settings and flora and fauna of our marvellous Lake” says Peter. Look for the big 1962 vintage mahogany catamaran sailboat on the lake and you'll find Peter.



Lake Safety: Daniel (Toby) Spry

email: lakesafety@brla.on.ca

Terms: 2007-8

I have been on the Big Rideau Lake off and on since 1972. We originally we were boaters and kept our 1937 sail boat at Len's Cove on a mooring can. The first cement docks came later. As all boaters know, “footitis” is a contagious disease which forced us to move to the St. Lawrence for a number of years. We returned in 2000 on a cottage hunting expedition. I was educated in the UK and Canada, attending

numerous schools and collages. I have experience in management of not for profit and commercial businesses as well as extensive travel and overseas service. I have recently retired after a career as the CEO of a leading charitable emergency medical services organization in Ottawa and some other shorter careers including the Canadian Forces, Thompson Newspapers and a pharmacy firm, to mention a few. I am involved with a number of other organizations and boards and am at present a member of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary.



Membership: Heather Heins

email: membership@brla.on.ca

Terms: 2007-2008

Heather Heins has been a real estate sales representative selling real estate in the Ottawa and Rideau Lakes for the past 23 years. Heather has also has a good knowledge of the construction industry being involved in new home, condominium and renovation projects. She also owned and operated a restaurant on the Big Rideau Lake for 6 years. Heather presently owns a boat rental company in Portland. She has lived on the water year round in the village of Portland for the 13 years, Her interests are to increase memberships and awareness of the kind of activities and the accomplishments of the Rideau Lake Association.



Recreation and Cow Island: Doug Arrand

email: recreation@brla.on.ca

See above.

Representing Adam Lake: Volunteer Needed!



BRLA maintains a liaison with the Adam Lake Association, and a reduced membership rate for dual members. Could you be that person?

Government Affairs: Volunteers Needed!



BRLA monitors developments around the lake. We need your help in liaising with the townships and counties!

BRLA BOARD: JULY 2008 - JUNE 2009



Director at Large: Carol Harris
Terms: 2008-9

Carol and her family have boated on Big Rideau Lake since the 1970's. They bought property on the North Shore many years ago and on retirement in 1996, built a permanent home on Big Rideau North Shore Road. A large happy face adorns their swim dock. Their children and grandchildren have been involved for many years in the BRLA day camps and sailing camps, on Cow Island. When she retired, Carol became an active volunteer and has been past board Chair of the Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Community Care Access Center (CCAC). Presently, she is on the board of the South East CCAC and represents the CCAC sector, on the Collaborative Governance Development Team of the South East Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). Carol's interest is in preserving and promoting all that the Big Rideau Lake offers present and future generations.



Director at Large: Peter Merkley
Terms: 2007-8

I grew up on cottaging on the lake – first when my family rented a cottage on Hudson Bay and then when my parents bought on Briton Bay. My wife and I bought our own cottage in 1985 on the North Shore. We were very fortunate that our children also have had the opportunity to enjoy cottage life from the beginning – and fortunate that they still love spending time at “Rose n’ Gayle” (the name of our cottage). I enjoy meeting other people who are interested in making the Big Rideau Lake a better place.



Director at Large: Doug Good
Terms: 2006-7, 2008-9

Doug was the BRLA's rep to the IPM, and is interested in the BRLA's history.

DISHWASHER DETERGENTS - WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY - MORE FROM JUDITH ROBERTSON

The good news? Phosphate-free detergents are easier to find, with more choices available. All Perth grocery stores carry at least some environmentally safe cleaning products and President's Choice just announced a new phosphate-free dish washing detergent. Each detergent/machine/water combination will have different results, so be prepared to experiment until you find one that works for you. Generally, powders and tablets work better than liquids or gels and a rinse agent is required. If your water is hard, you may need a water softener to get good results.

Below is a short list that Judith tried along with the rating by Consumer's Report in 2007 (www.consumerreports.org). Tell us your recommendations and we will share them in our next newsletter.

Ecover – 67/100, rated “excellent” - \$0.21/load. Highest rated of non-phosphate detergents. Tablets scored better than powder. (Judith uses this one.)

Seventh Generation – 60/100, rated “excellent” - \$0.16/load. (Didn't work for Judith.)

Wave (Earth Friendly) – 43/100, rated “fair” - \$0.16. (Not tried by Judith.)

Nature Clean – not rated by CR. (Judith used it with good results.)

President's Choice – not rated by CR, but it scored 5/5 in a recent consumer rating in the Globe and Mail. *[Editor's Note: this is what we use on Grindstone Island]*

PHOSPHATE CONNECTION REPRINTED FROM CAPTAIN OTTY'S LOG THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OTTY LAKE ASSOCIATION.

JUDITH ROBERTSON

Do you have a dishwasher at the lake? I confess I do. My husband does the cooking, so I'm the leader of a reluctant cleanup crew. That system works pretty well in the city, but breaks down at the cottage. Friends, guests, extended family and still more family mean that I can be washing dishes long after the party is over. So, after the umpteenth grumble, my husband bought a dishwasher.

That was only the beginning. I am on the board of the OLA after all – what would people say? More to the point, we're third generation Otty Lakers and hope there will be more after us. Would this "convenience" hurt the long-term health of the lake? We've all heard that you need to space your loads of laundry so the, ahem, "solids" are not flushed out of the septic system before they are broken down by bacterial action. Would a dishwasher pose the same problem?

Well, depending on the size of your septic tank and whether there is a shower or laundry going on at the same time, you could pump too much water through your system and impair its ability to work properly.

My husband was way ahead of me. (Did I mention that he's an engineer?). A little investigation showed that dishwashers use less water than you think, even less than washing by hand! Who knew? Researchers estimate that washing by hand uses anywhere from 34L to 91L of water per meal, whereas North American dishwashers range from 23L to 38L of water per load. In our case, there was little risk of multiple sources of waste water combining to swamp the system (one bathroom, no washing machine). Even so, we decided to err on the side of caution and choose a European model that uses only 5L of water per load. Yes, it was more expensive, but it seemed to be the prudent choice and there was a huge bonus in how quiet the machine is. You cannot hear it at all.

The next issue – which detergent to use? Regular dishwasher detergents, like my former favourite, Cascade, are loaded with phosphates and bleach. We know that

bleach is bad for the crucial bacterial action in the septic system. We also know that phosphates in fertilizer are a huge environmental faux pas next to a lake. While septic systems are designed to allow the soil and plants to take up the phosphorus we naturally excrete, high concentrations from detergents combined with poor soil conditions and close proximity to open water can easily overwhelm the system and lead to contamination.

We concluded that we would have to use a no phosphate, no chlorine detergent. (Did I mention that my husband is a chemical engineer?) That started a very frustrating consumer search. Many of the products labelled "eco" just don't work and there's a limit to how much crud you'll put up with in the name of the environment. The first one left a white film over the dishes and glasses that could only be removed by a vinegar bath. The second was better, but still not great. After consulting the manual, which suggested increasing the dose of rinse agent (use a biodegradable one), and persistent trial and error, I found a couple that work pretty well (see box for names). My one lingering complaint is that my white, plastic cutting boards are now stained without the bleach. Oh well, it still beats hand washing.

If your water is particularly "hard", you might consider investing in a water softener to get good results. It is common for hard water to reduce the efficacy of any soap or detergent, and well water in this area is usually very hard. While no one knows whether there is a direct link between an increase in dishwashers and the weed growth in Otty Lake, it is safe to assume that high phosphate detergents don't help. Why should we wait until 2010 for the new regulations to kick in? It's such an easy thing to do – you just buy a different product! Wouldn't it be a great experiment if everyone on the lake stopped using phosphates this year to see if it made a difference? If I do it and you do it and your friends do it, we could be well on our way!



Big Rideau Lake. Photo: J. Trant

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