

MEDIA RELEASE

13 October 2020 – For Immediate Release

Shuswap Watershed Council declares algal bloom over; offers presentations on water quality

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) has confirmed that the algal bloom that affected Shuswap Lake at Salmon Arm Bay, Tappen Bay, Canoe, and Herald this summer has ended.

“Monitoring the algal bloom was ongoing up until the end of September,” said Erin Vieira, the SWC’s program manager.

“There were a few different organizations involved in monitoring the bloom, all of whom are partners in the SWC,” Vieira explained. The City of Salmon Arm visually monitored the bloom at Canoe on a daily basis, Interior Health Authority and First Nations Health Authority tested water samples for the presence of microcystin toxin which can sometimes be associated with a blue-green algal bloom, and the Columbia Shuswap Regional District and BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy collected and analysed water samples for phytoplankton taxonomy (various species of algae) and density.

All monitoring results indicate the algal bloom has finally ended.

“The last of monitoring results came in last week,” said Vieira. “The levels of chlorophyll *a*, which is an indication of how much plant life is in the water, are back within the normal ranges. Additionally, the Secchi Disk depth measurements are higher which means the water is clearer than it was earlier in the year.”

Water monitoring results for microcystin have been negative for several weeks, indicating that it hasn’t been detected in water samples. The last sample was collected on September 30th 2020.

“All of these factors - the chlorophyll *a* measurements, the water clarity, the visual improvements in water quality, and the negative microcystin results - provide the basis for determining that the bloom has ended,” summarized Vieira.

The algal bloom was first observed in mid June. It dissipated for a few weeks and then re-bloomed in July and persisted into September. A [media release by the Shuswap Watershed Council in August](#) explained that the unprecedented bloom was likely due to a combination of factors including heavy rains in spring



and early summer, high water levels in the Salmon River and smaller creeks such as Tappen and White Creeks, saturated soils adjacent to the river and a flush of nutrients from those soils, sunlight, and shallow calm water in Salmon Arm Bay; additionally, a [public service announcement from Interior Health](#) urged beach-goers to be cautious around thick algal blooms.

Vieira re-iterated that the bloom was continuously monitored by authorities to ensure it didn't pose an immediate risk to swimmers and beach-goers, despite the fact that some types of blue-green algae - also known as cyanobacteria, which can produce a toxin called microcystin - were identified as being present at some points within the bloom period.

"Although the bloom was unsightly, at no point did monitoring indicate the water was unsafe for swimming or drinking for those with intakes on the lake," Vieira said.

Residents are reminded not to drink or cook using untreated water directly from lakes, ponds or rivers. Boiling water will not remove blue-green algae toxins from the water. Additionally, beach-goers and swimmers should not go into a lake where a bloom is present. Pets should also be kept out waterbodies where there are algal blooms. Additional information on blue-green algae is available at HealthLink BC, <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/blue-green-algae>.

Given the algal bloom this summer as well as other impacts to the watershed including invasive species, the SWC is offering virtual presentations to community organizations this fall to facilitate information sharing and robust community conversations. It welcomes the opportunity to meet and have discussions on water quality and related issues. To sign up for a virtual presentation, please contact the SWC c/o Fraser Basin Council by emailing Erin Vieira at evieira@fraserbasin.bc.ca.

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About: The Shuswap Watershed Council is a watershed-based partnership organization that works on water quality and safe recreation in the Shuswap.

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