

EDITORIAL.

Local Bans on Phosphates Should Be Considered

In 1971, the Lake George Mirror reported that the Lake George Association was opening "a low-key but intensive campaign" to rid Lake George of pollution from phosphates in detergents and cleansers. That same year, the New York State legislature enacted a law requiring detergent manufacturers to eliminate phosphorous from their products by 1973. The LGA's campaign was intended to spark a grass roots movement to elicit support for bans on all phosphates. Almost forty years later, the LGA, as well as The Fund for Lake George and the Lake George Waterkeeper, are still campaigning to reduce the amount of phosphorus reaching Lake George. All three organizations support, in principle at least, legislation now before the Senate and the Assembly that would significantly reduce phosphates in dishwashing detergents and fertilizers. Despite the enactment of the 1971 legislation, phosphorus remains a source of pollution in Lake George. According to The Fund for Lake George, Lake George accumulates 300% more phosphorus than it can process naturally. Phosphorus-rich waters steadily lose water clarity as microscopic algal life is stimulated. Greater plant growth creates more decayed matter on the lake bottom. As matter accumulates, the aquatic system changes. Phosphorus rich waters also suit invasive aquatic species, such as Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM), which require high levels of nutrients. High levels of phosphorus also contribute to creation each summer of a "dead zone" on Lake George where oxygen levels are depleted due to high nutrient levels, making large parts of the lake unable to support fish life. "Lake George has been experiencing a slow, steady decline in water quality. Land use changes and poor land use practices on just 5% of the land areas around the lake have changed the lake's water quality," says The Fund for Lake George. If the new bill fails to pass the state legislature, The Fund and the Waterkeeper have suggested that the Lake George Park Commission consider enacting a local ban on phosphates. That was done recently in Westchester County, where the county board of legislators prohibited the sale of lawn fertilizers containing phosphates after January 2011. The law also restricts the use of any fertilizer within 20 feet of a body of water unless there is a vegetative buffer at least 10 feet wide. Westchester officials acted because pollution from phosphorus is degrading the New York City watershed, which supplies water to more than 85 percent of Westchester residents. Lake George is a source of drinking water as well, and equally worthy of protection. Local bans on phosphorus should be pursued if state efforts fall short. Forty years is long enough to wait.