

LIVING

LIFE AND DEATH ON THE LAKE

Clearcutting, growth, global warming — how much can Lake Simcoe take?

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

On summer Sundays, the local cottagers share Willow Beach with daytripping families from Toronto.

A short walk away, and nearly where Kennedy Road reaches its northern end at Lake Simcoe, is a lot with an old brick schoolhouse.

York Region plans to put a new filtration plant here, drawing water from the deepest part of the lake.

Scheduled to be up and running by December 2002, the plant will have a membrane filtration system and an activated carbon polishing system for removing bad tastes and odours.

But the Willow Beach installation will not be bringing water to the cottages — at least, not yet.

The new plant is meant to supply the urban area of Sutton and many future serviced developments in the Town of Georgina, which has 38,000 residents now but expects 73,000 within 25 years.

Recently, Barrie, which draws all its water from Simcoe, has grown as explosively as one of the algae blooms that can plague the lake in mid-summer.

Yet on the surface, Simcoe looks fine.

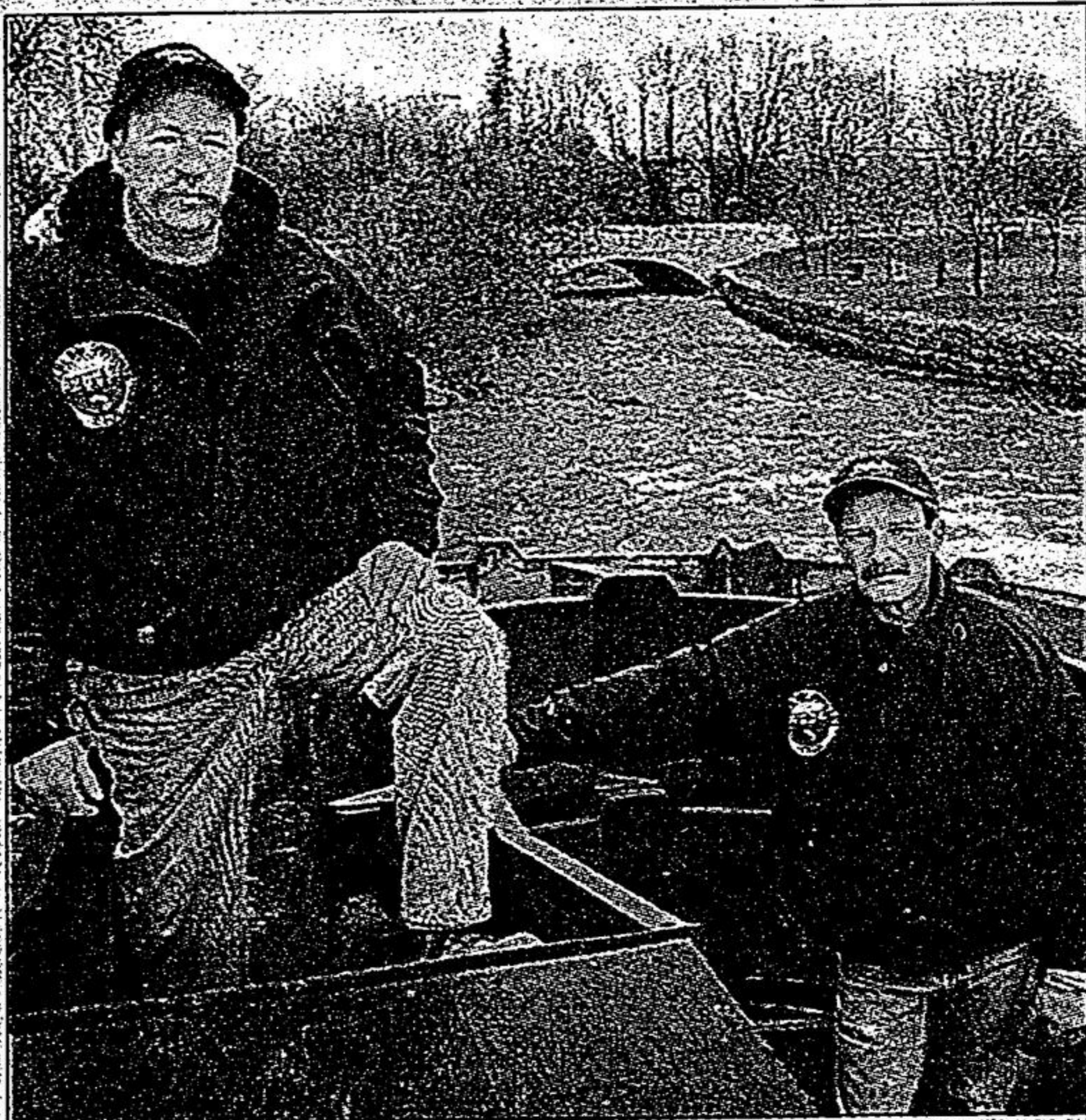
Not far away, worried Georgian Bay cottagers watch as Lake Huron sits far beyond their docks, 50 centimetres below average depth and possibly headed for record-setting low levels this summer.

But on Simcoe, boating season on the Trent-Severn Waterway will start May 19 with the lake at navigation levels near normal.

Soon the marinas will fill with boats, the beaches with swimmers. Simcoe is still an excellent place to catch a bass; it's a huge tourist draw worth many millions to the region each year.

At home in Jackson's Point, Peter Sibbald Brown argued the lake's fullness in a year of water scarcity is deceptive, hiding its troubled health.

"It's a mirage," said Sibbald Brown, a member of the environmental advocacy group Lake



STAFF PHOTOS/ROB ALARY

Above: Pefferlaw Anglers Club members Dan Allison (left) and Brian Guildford check out the new fish spawning system installed to restore Lake Simcoe's walleye population. Photo at left: To help with the initiative, the province has posted No fishing signs near the restoration project.

Watch.

Smaller and more fragile than Lake Ontario, Simcoe is vulnerable to over-development, he added, and no one has ever figured out if there are limits to what the lake can take.

If, sometime in the future, its water can no longer be cleansed enough to drink, "there will be a huge rude awakening," Sibbald Brown predicted.

The lake's decline has been seen for decades. Algae blooms, which appeared in the 1970s as aquatic weeds, started growing thickly along the shoreline and coldwater fish species, notably whitefish and lake trout, started to disappear.

The persistent and increasing plant growth, removing the oxygen coldwater fish need, was sparked

by excess phosphorus entering the lake. Some of that phosphorus was natural, but much of it came from fertilizer on farms or lawns washing into local rivers, streambank erosion or treated sewage and septic.

Even today, the Holland River, running through urban Aurora and Newmarket, then East Gwillimbury and Georgina, and finally the area's nutrient-rich agricultural hub in the Holland Marsh, remains the greatest source of Simcoe's phosphorus problem.

The lake has also lost much of its natural shoreline — "80 per cent of it is artificial and dead," Sibbald Brown charged — and the rivers feeding it have been altered.

In the 30 years following 1952, the length of what were considered coldwater streams in the

Holland Marsh shrank by 77 per cent and 81 per cent of "marginal" coldwater streams disappeared, York Region's State of the Environment report stated last year.

By the 1990s, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority pegged Simcoe's phosphorus intake at 100 tonnes a year — 25 tonnes more than a self-sustaining coldwater fishery could stand — and responded with grant programs aimed at fixing trouble spots.

But in its first term, Ontario's Tory government slashed funds for conservation authorities. Even though farmers have lined up for the remedial projects, paying half the cost, the LSRCA doesn't have money to do them all.

Some landowners have to wait three or four years, said Mike Walters, the authority's environmental services manager.

Zebra mussels reached the lake in the 1990s, making water clearer but allowing the weeds to grow at greater depths. "We're seeing much more weed growth," Walters reported, particularly at Cook's Bay in Georgina where it is "just phenomenal."

Estimating it will take \$12 million to clean up the Holland Marsh and other phosphorus hotspots, Walters said the authority has rethought how it should spend its scarce funds and hopes to launch a new strategy, a "total water quality program for the lake," next month.

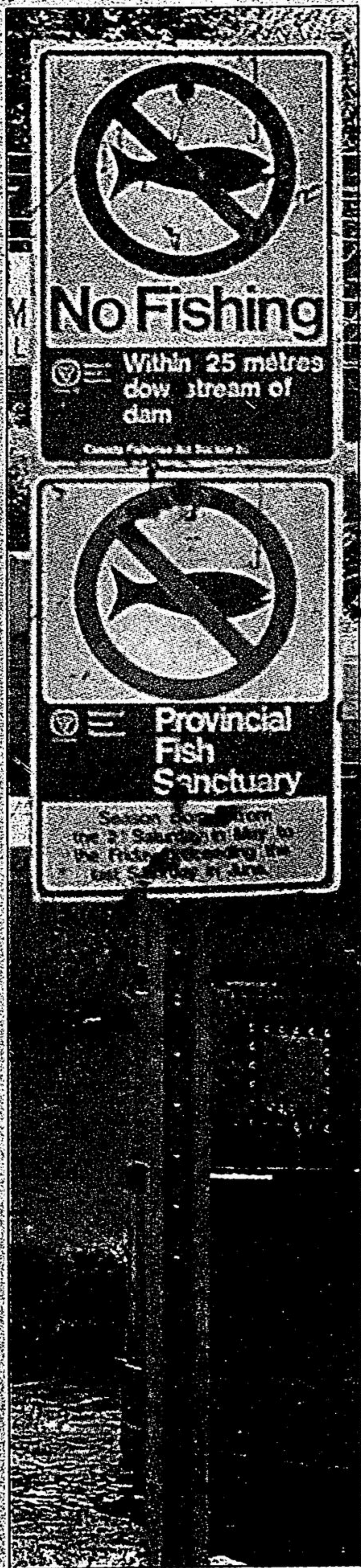
This month, it plans on issuing a detailed state of health report for the East Holland River system, including opportunities for improvement.

The river, fortunately, has had a number of allies. This weekend, volunteers were to gather at Newmarket's municipal offices for an annual trash cleanup, the town's 21st.

Plans for the Nokiidaa trail, a citizen-led initiative linking Aurora and Holland Landing, include \$204,000 to install protective

See NORTHERN, page 21.

This is the final instalment in a three-part series on the state of water in York Region



Red Eyes? Dry, Itchy, Burning, Watery Eyes? Sensitive to Contact Lens Wearing?

Natural tears within our eyes make our eyes comfortable and healthy by lubricating the inside lining of the eyes and by preventing eye infections. Lack of tears, on the other hand, can cause red eyes, dry, itchy, burning, sensitive and watery eyes.

Common causes of dry eyes are dry environments (both heating in winter as well as air conditioning in summer), excessive tear loss from drainage ducts, contact lenses, aging and certain medications including vasoconstrictor eye drops (like Visine that "take the red out").

Treatment options include temporary (10-20 minutes) relief with artificial

tears or permanent treatment relief with tear duct closure. Excessive use of artificial tears can dry the eyes instead of lubricate them by diluting the natural oils and lubricants within tears.

Permanent Tear Duct Closure is a safe, non surgical, pain-free and quick procedure that leads to long-lasting relief from red, irritated and dry eyes. This treatment is generally available only from eye doctors who have specialized training in the procedure.

If you have red eyes or suffer from dry, itchy, irritated and burning eyes, call our optometry practice today for your professional evaluation of the cause and all treatment

options available to you including permanent tear duct closure.

Dr. H.H. Walji (Hons. BSc, MSc, OD, FIOS) Optometrist 471-EYES (3937), 6633 Highway #7, Markham

Website: www.DrWalji.com Email: DrWalji@DrWalji.com

