



Algae covered water, slimy shoreline rocks and uncontrollable weed growth, are all the results of water with high nutrient levels. The increased amounts of nutrients, such as phosphorous, in the water is creating a problem for the Rideau Lakes System.

The phosphorous problem is the result of a chain of events which all contribute to the diminishing quality of the water. The phosphorous stimulates growth in the weed growth in the lake. When the plant matter dies it decomposes. The decomposition process takes oxygen from the water, which leaves less water for the fish in the lake. Therefore, we can see two major effects of the phosphorous rich lake; firstly increased weed growth which takes away from the appearance and recreational use of the lake and secondly the fish population is threatened by the lack of oxygen in the water. A final effect is that the entire lake eutrophication process, which is the natural process of a lake filling itself in to the land is rapidly used up. Thus humans are disrupting nature's delicate balance.

The increased quantities of phosphorous in the lake is the result of several factors. Agricultural runoff from the farmer's fertilizer rich fields, the use of soaps and detergents in households and the failure of septic systems that work effectively all contribute to the phosphorous loading problem in the Rideau Lake. However, like most problems with a number of causes, there are a number of solutions to ease the strain on the lake environment.

The principal way that phosphorous enters the lake system is through septic tank systems. The sewage which consists of household cleaning products and human waste enters the septic system and then is dispersed through tile bed. However, the phosphorous found in this sewage eventually gets back to the water tables and so around the

lake gets into the lake system. To combat this process a number of steps may be taken by the concerned cottager.

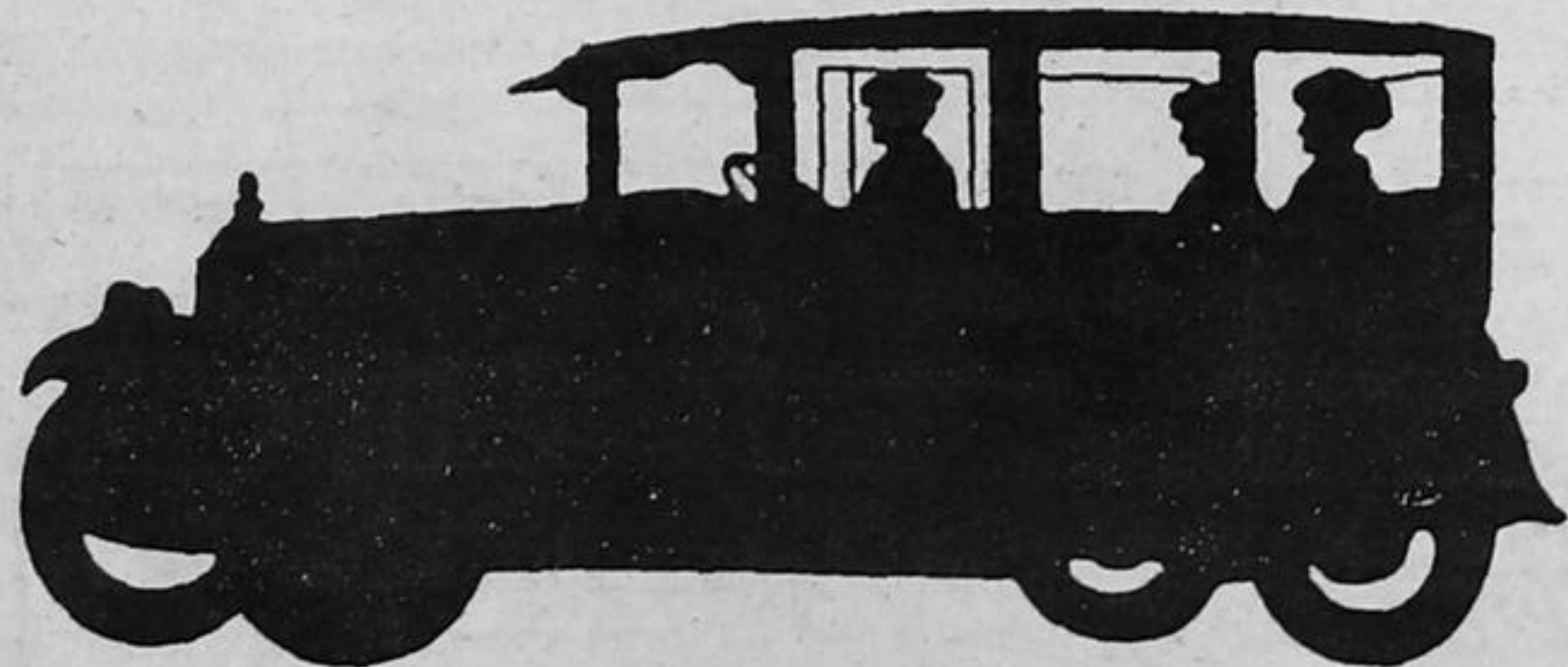
Using only phosphate free products is an easy way to limit the amount phosphorous that goes into the environment. Phosphate free products such as shampoos, conditioners, floor cleaners, window cleaners and dishwashing soaps are available and priced competitively with regular products. Beware to check the label carefully as often the phosphate-reduced products are still quite high in their phosphate levels.

The other more major change that a concerned individual could make is to use a composting toilet. These toilets use very little, if any, water and so put no strain on your septic systems. The modern composting toilets of today are very efficient and compost human waste 100 times more quickly than a septic tank. A smaller drawer is removed no more than twice a year and contains the composted waste which is completely odourless and unoffensive. The usual question people ask about the composting toilets is if there is any smell. There is absolutely no smell and in fact due to a natural vacuum in the composting toilet there is less smell than a conventional full flush toilet!

The Big Rideau Lake Association storefront/office at the Scovil Store in Portland has both composting toilets and phosphate free products on display and for sale. Stop by or call 272-3629 for more information.

As one can see some of the solutions presented require a lifestyle change while some take only minimal effort. Perhaps, the best way to decide how much you will do for the lake is to ask yourself the simple questions of what you would do if someone was trying to take the Rideau Lake away from you. In a way, increased phosphorous levels are taking the lake away from the people bit by bit. Please do your part to make sure the lake stays healthy.

John J.L. Gibb-Carsley
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