

DNREC gives Rehoboth lakes an 'A'

By SOLA3 Board of Directors | Sep 07, 2013

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Save Our Lakes Alliance would like to respond to two letters to the editor that appeared in the Cape Gazette criticizing improvements that have been made to Lake Gerar and Silver Lake.

On Aug. 12, 2013, James Chaconas of Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Division of Wetlands and Subaqueous Lands, visited both sites and graded them with an "A" for meeting the goals and objectives to improve shoreline stability and water quality, reduce pollutants, and increase and support the diversity of plant life, animal life and habitat. Each project was designed, constructed and maintained with Green Technology Best Management Practices for Storm Water Management and Coastal Restoration projects, as defined by DNREC.

These goals and objectives were developed shortly after SOLA3 organized in 2004, when we were contacted by owners of property along and near Lake Gerar to ask for our help in improving the unhealthy environment of the lake. The lake's water had become eutrophic, There were frequent fish kills, algae was rampant, storm-water and runoff polluted the water, the lake emitted noxious odors, and there was an over-population of resident Canada geese (each can produce one to two pounds of fecal matter a day) that marred the shoreline and polluted the water. Realtors complained that they were unable to rent properties near the lake because of these conditions.

SOLA3 then organized a meeting with then-DNREC Secretary John Hughes, Rehoboth officials and residents to discuss how to restore Lake Gerar. As a result of this meeting, the City of Rehoboth undertook an environmental enhancement and restoration program that was funded by grants from the State of Delaware and the USDA. Envirotech Environmental Consulting Inc. was contracted to design, implement and maintain a comprehensive plan to return Lake Gerar to a functional, fresh-water ecosystem with improved aesthetic and environmental value.

A key element of the restoration is the 10-foot wide vegetative buffer of plants. While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, they are not weeds. They are native, non-invasive plants recommended by "Plants for a Livable Delaware" that produce a stunning array of color and textures throughout the year. The buffer has stabilized the shoreline. It filters pollutants and sediments entering the lake and provides habitat for wildlife. Butterflies and birds thrive in their new surroundings. The monofilament that was installed discourages the Canada geese from landing, so that they are no longer a nuisance. Storm drains are fitted with filters that lessen the amount of pollution in the lake. The water is now transparent. Lake Gerar is listed on a number of Web sites as a prime fishing spot for bass and carp. This is evident by the number of children and adults that enjoy their fishing experience daily. And there have been no fish kills since the restoration.

In 2009 our board walked the public perimeter of Silver Lake to assess various conditions around the lake. We observed 425 feet of shoreline erosion that began at Penn Street and continued along East Lake Drive. Several dead trees had already fallen into the lake. The erosion extended under the road, causing it to crumble and sink, resulting in a hazardous safety issue. Since this area is owned by the City of Rehoboth, we alerted City Manager Greg Ferrese to these serious problems.

The city applied for and received cost-share grant assistance from the Sussex Conservation District, in cooperation with DNREC, to remedy the problems. The criterion for receiving this grant requires that "vegetative shoreline stabilization" be used to control erosion. DNREC states in its grants application: **"Over the years, stone (rip-rap), timber structures (bulkheads), and numerous other methods have been used to reduce shoreline erosion. Unfortunately, many of these best-intended practices can cause other problems-additional loss of habitat, chemical leaching, redirection of wave energy, and lack of visual appeal."**

So, clearly, a natural riparian buffer is also DNREC's preferred stabilization practice. A grant was also obtained from DELDOT to replace the old road with a new road that will be protected from erosion by the shoreline stabilization.

Envirotech Environmental Consulting Inc. was contracted to restore the shoreline. Soil was dredged from other parts of the lake to create a shoreline and biolags were placed in front of this material. Native vegetation was planted in the new soil and biolags to establish permanent stabilization and create a wetland environment. The project was successful and the shore and road are stabilized. During heavy rain and storms this area will often flood but when the water recedes, it returns to its former state. SOLA3 and the City of Rehoboth shared the cost of maintaining the new shoreline for the first two years. The city has recently renewed the maintenance contract.

The number of lakefront property owners who are installing natural riparian buffers is increasing. They find it less expensive than installing rip rap or bulkheads and the buffer provides lasting beauty throughout the seasons. DNREC is encouraging these installations by offering cost-share assistance for shoreline stabilization. If the property is eligible, the DNREC grant will pay 50 percent of the actual cost of the project, not to exceed \$5,000. Contact DNREC at 302-739-9943 for more information.

Concerns about an increase in unwanted wildlife have little to do with natural buffers but more to do with urban and suburban sprawl that provide abundant food in an environment free of predators. As a result, Rehoboth joins many areas that have become unwilling hosts to an explosion in the deer population that invade home gardens, roaming raccoons, red fox and coyotes that are a menace.

The improvements at Lake Gerar and Silver Lake may not meet everyone's aesthetic values, but the intended environmental goals have been accomplished and verified by DNREC with a grade "A". While there is more to be done to improve our lakes, it is gratifying that all the time and resources put into these projects have produced the intended results.

**SOLA3 Board of Directors
Rehoboth Beach**