2023 Water Quality Report

Beaver Lake

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Lac La Biche County
welcoming by nature.

Executive Summary

Beaver Lake is a large and attractive recreational lake located in Lac La Biche County, Alberta ("County") and is popular for a variety of recreational activities. However, there is a concern that declining water quality in the lake is limiting the opportunities of recreational activities like swimming, boating, and fishing.

The County follows a regular program to monitor water quality of lakes located within its jurisdiction. The water sampling events were conducted during the early spring and summer of 2023. The data collected includes water temperature, pH, specific conductivity, and dissolved oxygen which was collected in-situ through a multi-probe and Kemmerer sampling device. Analytical data of nitrogenous compounds, heavy metals, and other inorganic parameters was provided from ALS laboratory.

Collected water samples were analyzed by ALS laboratory. The laboratory results obtained were compared to the CCME's Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines for Protection of Aquatic Life and Protection of Agricultural Water, and Alberta Environment and Protected Areas Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018.

Trophic State Index (TSI) is a classification system designed to rate lakes based on the amount of biological activity they sustain. The concentrations of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorous) are the primary determinants of TSI. Increased concentrations of nutrients tend to result in increased plant growth, followed by an increase in subsequent trophic level. Nurnberg (1996) used parameters including Secchi depth, chlorophyll, total nitrogen, and total phosphorus concentrations in lake waters to determine the trophic state of the lakes, which is provided as Table 1 in Appendix A. TSI is a useful tool for evaluation and management of lake health and setting objectives including sport and recreational activities related to the lake. Trophic classification of Beaver Lake based on Secchi depth and nutrients is presented in Table 2 in Appendix A.

There are four classes of trophic states which include: Oligotrophic which would be the highest quality of water with low productivity, nutrients, and algae; Mesotrophic which is fair quality water with some productivity, nutrients and algae; Eutrophic which is relatively poor-quality water with high productivity, nutrients and algae; and Hypereutrophic which is the poorest quality water with excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae.

Beaver Lake would be considered Eutrophic based on the average of the four water parameters: Secchi depth, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, and total chlorophyll-a. The trophic status would be Mesotrophic based on Secchi depth, Hypereutrophic based on total nitrogen, Eutrophic based on total phosphorus, and Eutrophic based on chlorophyll-a.

Results and Discussion

In 2023, Secchi depths in Beaver Lake were measured on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023. The average seasonal Secchi depth was observed to be 2.3 m, which is similar to historical results. The low average Secchi depth means that Beaver Lake water has poor transparency due to suspended materials. Based on the Secchi depths and in accordance with the classification provided in Table 1 (Appendix A), Beaver Lake is classified as Mesotrophic (some productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

Sampling events in 2023 showed an average summer water temperature of 19.10 ˚C. Uniform temperature profiles were observed during the summer as there were no significant variation in temperatures with depth. Based on the data provided, thermal stratification was not observed in any of the summer sampling events between June 12 and August 3, 2023.

Dissolved oxygen data collected in 2023 shows that the average dissolved oxygen levels ranged from 4.2 mg/L to 6.83 mg/L. These concentrations were within proximity to the regulatory criteria for dissolved oxygen in cold water lakes for early life stages (9.5 mg/L) and for all other life stages (6.5 mg/L).

In 2023, two types of lake water samples for analyses of nutrients were collected from Beaver Lake; composite samples and Kemmerer samples (obtained from different depths using a Kemmerer device). These samples were analyzed for total nitrogen and total phosphorous.

Total nitrogen concentrations in the composite samples collected from the lake in 2023 had an average of 1.55 mg/L of total nitrogen, while the Kemmerer samples collected had an average of 1.49 mg/L; both of which exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines and were consistent with historical results. Total nitrogen concentrations from both sampling methods classify Beaver Lake as Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

Total phosphorus concentrations in the composite samples collected during the summer of 2023 had an average of 0.028 mg/L of total phosphorus, while the Kemmerer samples collected had an average of 0.040 mg/L; both of which do not exceed the applicable regulatory guidelines of 0.05 mg/L and were consistent with historical results. The average total phosphorus concentration from both sampling methods is 0.034 mg/L and would classify Beaver Lake as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

The average N:P ratios for composite and Kemmerer sampling events were 55:1 and 37:1 which is higher than the Redfield Ratio of 16:1. Therefore, the total phosphorus concentrations are considered low enough for phosphorus to be considered the main nutrient limiting growth in Beaver Lake.

Total chlorophyll-a concentrations in the composite samples collected during the summer of 2023 had an average of 13.23 µg/L, exceeding the standard of 3.5 µg/L for Oligotrophic lakes (low productivity, nutrients, and algae growth). This concentration classifies Beaver Lake as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

Routine water chemistry showed that Beaver Lake has an average pH of 8.00 in 2023 which is consistent with historical results.

Concentrations of metals analyzed from the composite and Kemmerer samples were generally below detection limits and/or below the applicable regulatory guidelines.

Beaver Lake would be considered Eutrophic based on the average of the four water parameters: Secchi depth, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, and total chlorophyll-a. The trophic status would be Mesotrophic based on Secchi depth, Hypereutrophic based on total nitrogen, Eutrophic based on total phosphorus, and Eutrophic based on chlorophyll-a.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Lac La Biche County continues to monitor the water quality of Beaver Lake on a regular basis. Continuous monitoring will help the County to determine how the lake management strategies and policies such as the Watershed Management Plan and Riparian Setback Matrix Model are impacting the lake water quality, and what the net effect on human and environmental health is.

Monitoring and sampling should continue to be conducted under a strategic plan and in a uniform manner to ensure that results produced are meaningful and are useful for establishing a correlation with the past results. This may include sampling at same period of the year each time, recording the same parameters critical to lake health, obtaining samples from the same depths, and implementing a quality assurance program for reliability of analytical results.

Nutrient loading is the main source of eutrophication in Beaver Lake which is degrading the water quality, leading to algae growth, foul smells, and a reduction in water recreation. Therefore, action must be taken to slow down the eutrophication process and improve water quality. Best management practices would include education of the public on appropriate land use including restoration and protection of riparian areas (water buffers); and strengthening laws and regulations governing land use such as municipal sewer hookups and protection of environmental reserves.

Lac La Biche County updated the Lac La Biche Watershed Management Plan, which was adopted by Council in May 2021. This plan includes specific action items based on the recommendations that were formulated while drafting the plan. Although Beaver Lake is not within the Lac La Biche watershed, the recommended action items still apply.

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Abbreviations/Acronyms Used

CCME: Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment
County: Lac La Biche County
EQGASW-AGW: Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018 for protection of Agricultural Water
EQGASW-FAL: Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018 for protection of Fresh Water Aquatic Life
QA/QC: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
Total N: Total Nitrogen
Total P: Total Phosphorous
TSI: Trophic State Index

1. INTRODUCTION

Beaver Lake is a large recreational lake popular for boating and fishing. It is located approximately 210 km northeast of the city of Edmonton. The closest population center is the hamlet of Lac La Biche which is located 5 km to the northwest of Beaver Lake. A location map of Beaver Lake is provided in Figure 1.

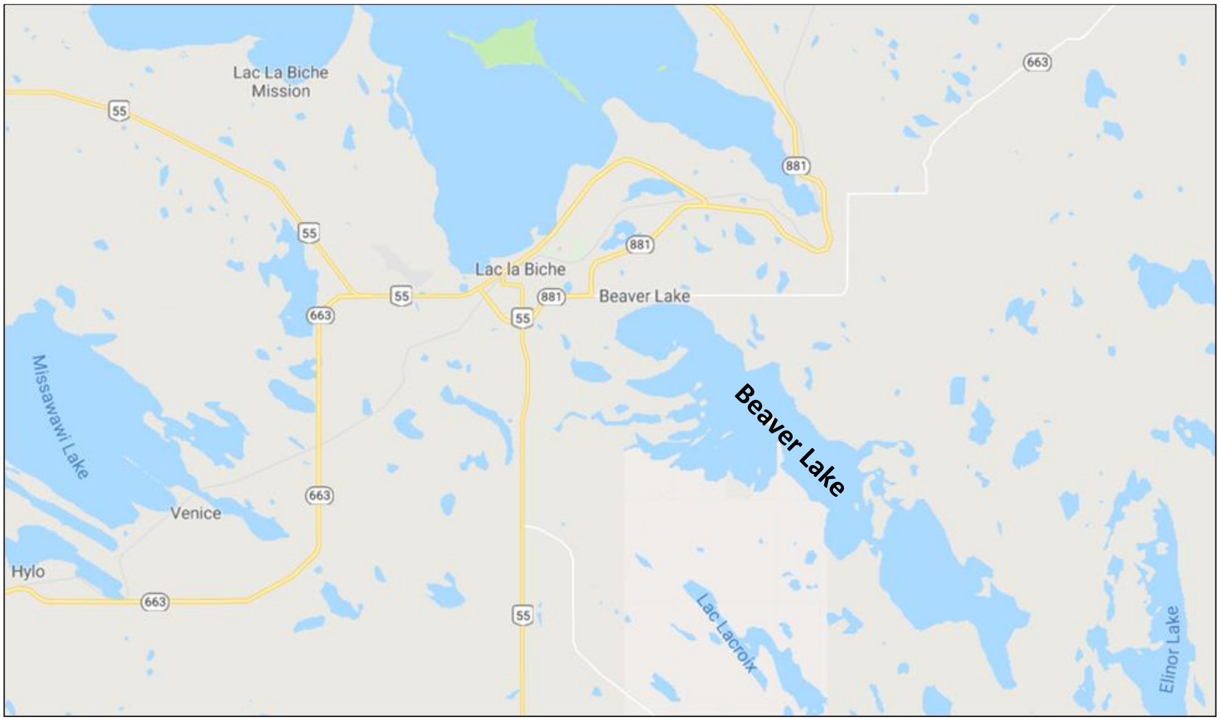

Figure 1: Location map of Beaver Lake

Beaver Lake has an irregular shaped surface area of 33.1 km^2 and is comprised of two distinct basins. The two basins are connected by a shallow and a narrow channel. The maximum depth of the lake is 15.2 m in the northwest basin and 10.7 m in the southeast basin. Beaver Lake is the headwater of the Beaver River and lies in the Beaver River Drainage Basin. The drainage basin for Beaver Lake is 290 km^2, which is roughly nine times the surface area of the lake itself. Beaver Lake receives water from two other lakes within the watershed; Elinor Lake which drains into the Southeast basin and Lac La Croix which drains into the Northwest Basin. In years of significantly high-water levels, Beaver Lake also receives water from Roseland and Normandeau Lakes. The lake's outlet creek, which is located on the west side of the north basin, flows into Outlet Lake, which further drains into the Beaver River and eventually into the Churchill River.

The main agricultural activities are livestock production and production of pasture and forage crops such as hay, oats, and barley. Numerous natural gas and oil wells are found within the County.

The main sport fish species found in the lake include Walleye (*Sander vitreus*), Yellow Perch (*Perca flavescens*), Northern Pike (*Esox lucius*) and Lake Whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*).

2. WATER QUALITY SAMPLING PROGRAM

Lac La Biche County has sampled Beaver Lake from 2003 to 2005, 2010 to 2015, and 2017 to 2023. Beaver Lake is sampled for various parameters using different techniques. Vertical profiles were taken using a multi-probe testing different depths (zones) of the lake for dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, and temperature. Composite samples are taken from 10 different locations throughout the lake, while Kemmerer sampling is used for discrete depth sampling; both the composite and Kemmerer samples are tested for nutrients such as phosphorus, nitrogen, ammonia, nitrates, nitrites, and metals. The Beaver Lake sampling program for 2023 was completed as follows:

a) Secchi Depths were measured on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023.
b) Composite samples from Beaver Lake were collected on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023. Lake water samples were analyzed for nutrients, metals, and basic water chemistry parameters by ALS laboratories. Lake water samples were also analyzed for chlorophyll-a by InnoTech Alberta laboratories.
c) Kemmerer water samples using the Kemmerer device were collected on February 7 and August 3, 2023, from depths of 0 m, 3 m, 6 m, and 9 m in February and 3 m, 6 m, and 9 m in August. These were analyzed for nutrients, metals, and basic water chemistry parameters by ALS laboratories.
d) Lake profiles were recorded to a maximum depth of 12 m using a multi-probe on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023.

2.1 Water Quality Parameters

Water samples collected for each of the sampling locations were analyzed for a variety of parameters used to characterize the chemical composition of the lake and further identify any potential concerns. The water quality parameters measured and analyzed during the 2023 program along with a brief description of each parameter and reason for monitoring are provided in the table below:

Parameters Affecting Lake Water Quality

Water Quality Parameter	Description and Reason for Measuring
Secchi Depth	Secchi depth is a measure of the transparency of water and trophic state of a lake. A Secchi disk is generally a disk of 20 cm diameter with alternating black and white quadrants. It is lowered into the lake water until it can no longer be seen. This depth of disappearance is called the Secchi depth. A low Secchi depth (<4 m) is characteristic of a mesotrophic to hypereutrophic lake with turbid water. Whereas a high Secchi depth (>4 m) is characteristic of an Oligotrophic lake with clear water.
Dissolved Oxygen	Dissolved oxygen is required by aquatic plants and animals for respiration. Survival of aquatic life such as fish, generally depends on an adequate amount of dissolved oxygen for respiration. As dissolved oxygen levels in the water drop below 5.0 mg/L, aquatic life is subjected to stress. Oxygen levels that consistently remain below 1-2 mg/L can result in the loss of large populations of fish.
Temperature	Temperature of water affects different physical, biological, and chemical characteristics of a lake and determines the behavior of many parameters responsible for water quality. The solubility of oxygen and other gases decrease as temperature increases. An increase in water temperature

	decreases the concentration of dissolved oxygen required for the survival of aquatic organisms.
Nutrients	Total nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) are principal nutrients in lake water and are representative of all forms of N and P present in the water. There are various sources of N and P both natural and anthropogenic. These nutrients are a major cause of eutrophication, decreasing dissolved oxygen concentrations and are detrimental to lake water quality.
Chlorophyll-a	Chlorophyll-a is a green pigment present in all green plants and is responsible for the absorption of light to provide energy for photosynthesis. It is associated with algae growth in a waterbody and affects the trophic status of a lake.
Metals	Metals enter the lake waters through natural (geological) and anthropogenic point and non-point sources. Certain metals such as lead and mercury, are toxic to aquatic life and can bio-accumulate in the tissues and organs of aquatic organisms, becoming a part of the food chain. This may lead to loss of aquatic life and further affect human health.

3. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The protection of water quality in Canadian lakes is a federal, provincial, and territorial responsibility. Therefore, lake waters in Alberta are regulated by federal and provincial guidelines and fall under the jurisdiction of Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME), Alberta Environment and Protected Areas , and Health Canada.

The regulatory criteria selection for lake waters in Alberta are subjected to CCME's Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines (CEQG) and EPA's Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018 (EQGASW). Protection of lake water is covered under CCME's CEQG and EPA's EQGASW chapters of water quality guidelines for Protection of Aquatic Life, Protection of Agricultural Water, and protection of Recreation and Aesthetics. In addition, Health Canada's Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality for protection of lake waters have also been considered.

The analytical and monitoring results obtained for this report were compared to the above-mentioned regulations and are hereinafter referred to as regulatory guidelines or regulatory criteria.

4. SAMPLING ANALYSIS AND MONITORING RESULTS

4.1 Secchi Depth

The Secchi disk is a common method used to measure water clarity. The water clarity of a lake can be influenced by the amount of suspended materials such as phytoplankton, zooplankton, pollen, sediments and dissolved compounds. The Secchi depth multiplied by 2 provides us with the euphotic depth of the lake. The euphotic depth is the maximum depth to which light can penetrate within a lake to facilitate growth.

In 2023, Secchi depths in Beaver Lake were measured on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023. The average seasonal Secchi depth was observed to be 2.3 m. A maximum Secchi depth of 3.2 m was recorded on June 12, 2023, while a minimum Secchi depth of 1.6 m was recorded on August 3, 2023. Overall, a decreasing temporal trend was observed in Secchi depth (Figure 2).

The low average Secchi depth of 2.3 m means that the lake water has poor transparency due to suspended materials. Based on the Secchi depths and in accordance with the classification provided in Table 1 (Appendix A), Beaver Lake is classified as Mesotrophic (some productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

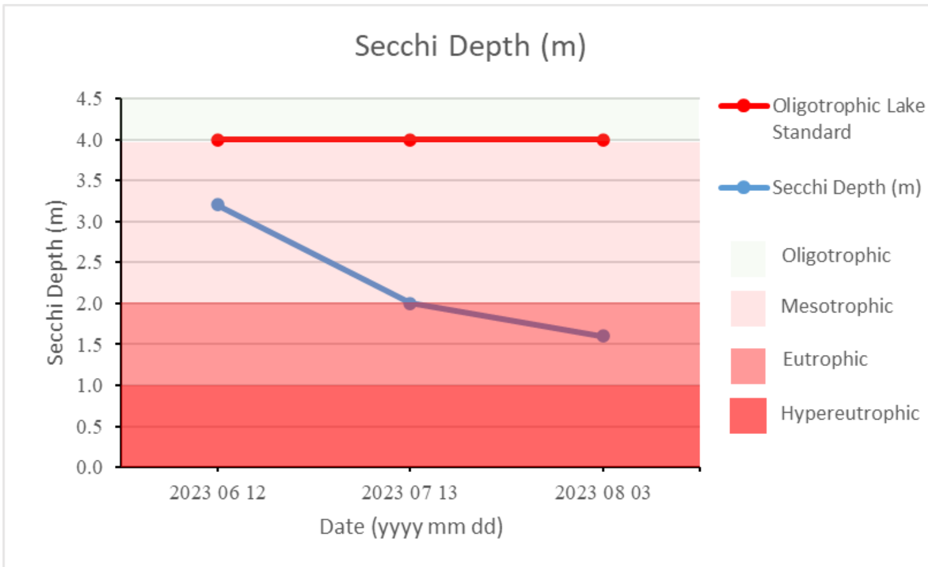

Figure 2: Secchi depths measured in Beaver Lake - 2023

4.2 Dissolved Oxygen

Dissolved oxygen is the amount of gaseous oxygen dissolved in the water and is necessary for respiration and survival of aquatic life (e.g., fish, invertebrates, bacteria, and underwater plants). Dissolved oxygen is also needed for the decomposition of organic matter in the lakes. Oxygen enters the lake water by direct absorption from the atmosphere through rapid movement of water or as a product of plant photosynthesis. Therefore, the epilimnion zone (shallow layer of water) is relatively richer in oxygen than the hypolimnion zone (deeper layer of water) which is low in oxygen due to consumption by respiration.

There are several conditions necessary for fish survival in a lake including adequate water temperatures and available dissolved oxygen for respiration. The regulatory guidelines for dissolved oxygen in cold water lakes are 9.5 mg/L for early life stages and 6.5 mg/L for all other life stages (CCME, 1999). If dissolved oxygen levels are too low, fish will move to other depths in the water column, often where temperatures are conducive to sustain aquatic life.

The amount of dissolved oxygen in lakes usually decreases under winter ice-cover primarily due to respiration by organisms (particularly bacteria) and decomposition of organic matter. In shallow lakes, oxygen depletion can proceed rapidly under ice during the winter. If dissolved oxygen drops below 3.0 mg/L during the winter, many fish and invertebrate species will not survive.

Dissolved oxygen levels in Beaver Lake were recorded to a maximum depth of 12 m using a multi-probe on February 7, June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023. A maximum concentration of 9.40 mg/L of dissolved oxygen was observed on February 7, 2023, at a depth of 1 m, which declined gradually to 0.0 mg/L at a 9 m depth.

A significant decreasing gradual spatial trend was noted in the summer measurements. During all sampling dates except August 3, 2023, dissolved oxygen reached 0 before the lakebed. On August 3, 2023, 1.42 mg/L was the lowest concentration, measured at 8.0 m (lakebed).

Dissolved oxygen data collected in 2023 shows that average dissolved oxygen levels ranged from 4.00 mg/L on July 13, 2023, to 6.83 mg/L on August 3, 2023. These concentrations were in proximity to the regulatory criteria for dissolved oxygen in cold water lakes for early life stages (9.5 mg/L) and for all other life stages (6.5 mg/L).

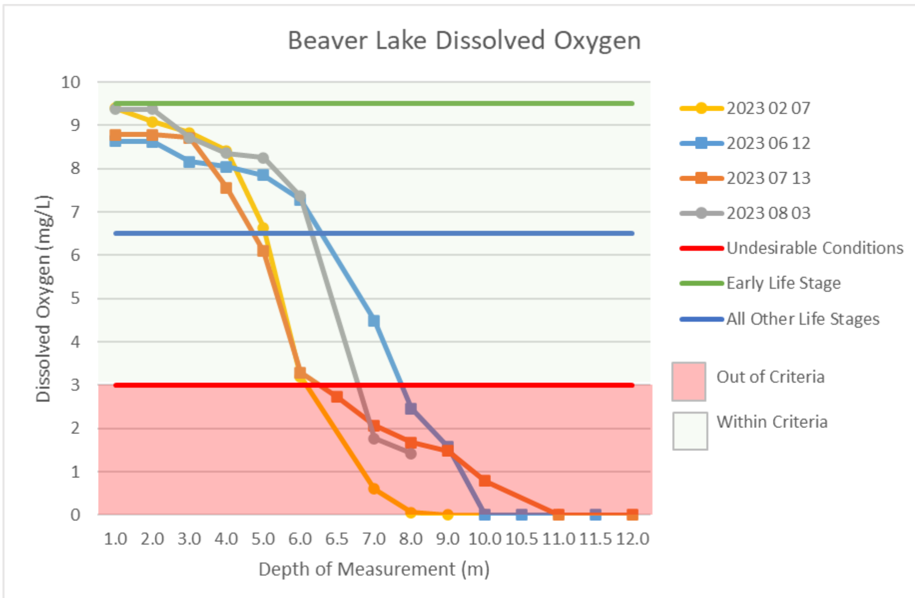

Figure 3: Dissolved oxygen in Beaver Lake – 2023

4.3 Temperature

Water temperature in a lake determines the behavior of many parameters responsible for water quality. Thermal stratification occurs within a lake with a distinct difference in temperature between the surface water (epilimnion layer) and the deeper water (hypolimnion layer) separated by a thermocline. The thermocline is identified when the water changes by more than one degree Celsius per meter. Under winter conditions, ice covers the surface water, and a thermocline is formed with the colder water at the surface and the warmer water at the bottom of the lake. Lakes without thermal stratification mix from top to bottom and this mixing allows oxygen to distribute throughout the water column preventing hypolimnetic anoxia (lack of oxygen). In the summertime, warmer surface water can facilitate cyanobacteria blooms at the lake surface (Wetzel, R. 2001).

The temperatures in Beaver Lake were recorded to a maximum depth of 12 m. Sampling events in 2023 showed an average summer water temperature of 18.86 ˚C. Uniform temperature profiles were observed during the summer as there was no significant variation in temperatures with depth. Based on the data provided, thermal stratification was not observed in any of the summer sampling events between February 7 and August 3, 2023. Results of temperatures observed at varying depths at the sampling dates are illustrated in Figure 3.

Similar trends in temperature profiles have been reported for Beaver Lake previously (ALMS 2010). Historical sampling also suggests that Beaver Lake is likely polymictic, indicating that the water from various depths of the lake mixes several times per year.

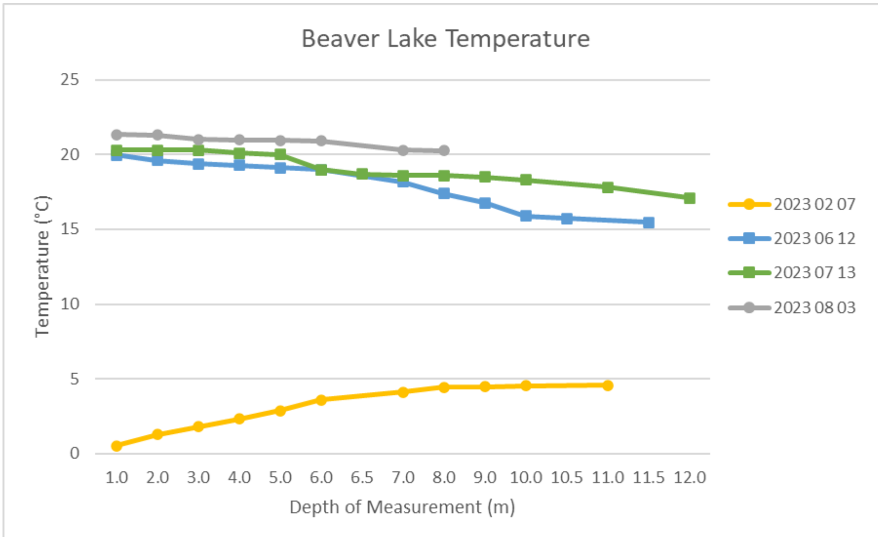

Figure 4: Temperature in Beaver Lake – 2023

4.4 Nutrients

Excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus are found in many lakes across Alberta leading to excessive growth of algae and aquatic plants. Decay of aquatic vegetation causes oxygen depletion in the water column and contributes to eutrophication. Consequently, the decreased levels of oxygen can suffocate fish and other aquatic organisms. High nutrient conditions foster algal blooms and can result in the proliferation of toxin-producing blue-green algae (e.g., cyanobacteria). The input of nutrients into aquatic systems can occur naturally, but large amounts of nutrients typically originate from indirect, non-point anthropogenic sources, including improperly treated sewage, residential use of fertilizers and agricultural operations.

In 2023, two types of lake water samples for analyses of nutrients were collected from Beaver Lake; composite samples and Kemmerer samples (obtained from different depths using a Kemmerer device). These samples were analyzed for total nitrogen and total phosphorous.

Total Nitrogen

Total nitrogen is an essential nutrient for plants and animals; however, excessive amounts of nitrogen in lake water may lead to low levels of dissolved oxygen and negatively affect water quality and health of aquatic life within the lake. Nitrogen concentrations in the water are typically measured in three forms: ammonia, nitrates, and nitrites. Total nitrogen is the sum of total Kjeldahl nitrogen (ammonia, organic and reduced nitrogen), nitrate and nitrite. Nitrogen levels in lakes are also affected by atmospheric deposition, which refers to nitrogen in the air being deposited into the water system. Nitrogen oxides (NOx) are added to atmosphere due to the burning of fossil fuels, so emissions from motor vehicles and industrial facilities can also affect nitrogen levels in aquatic environments.

Composite Samples

Composite lake water samples for analyses of total nitrogen were collected on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023. The total average nitrogen concentrations ranged from 1.34 mg/L to 1.73 mg/L during 2023. The analytical results are displayed in Figure 5.

Nitrogen concentrations in the composite samples collected from the lake in 2023 had an average of 1.55 mg/L of total nitrogen which exceeds the applicable regulatory guidelines. The average total nitrogen indicates that Beaver Lake is Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total nitrogen from composite samples.

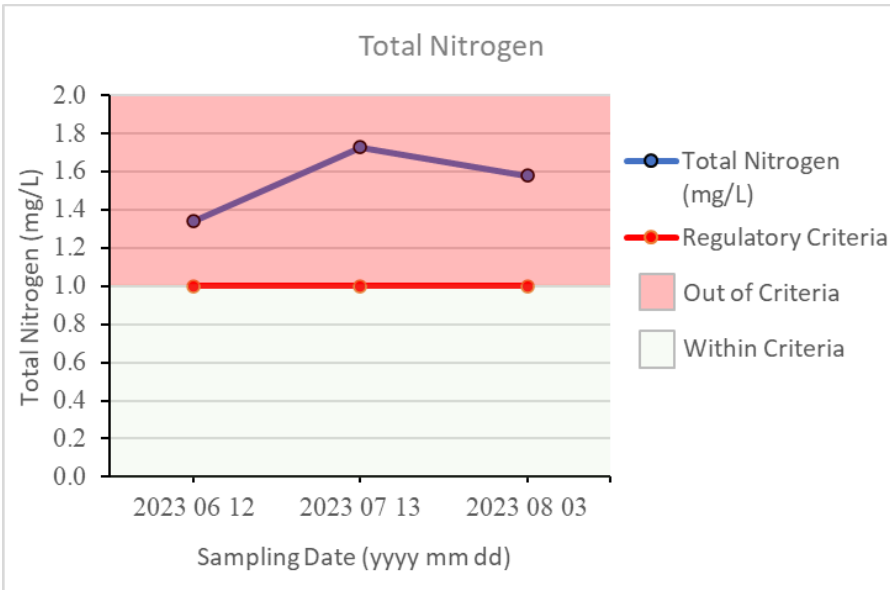

Figure 5: Total nitrogen from composite samples of Beaver Lake – 2023

Kemmerer Sampling

Kemmerer water samples are collected from different depths of the lake by using a Kemmerer device which makes it possible to obtain a sample of water from specific depths. Kemmerer samples were collected on February 7 from depths of 0 m, 3 m 6 m, and 9 m, and on August 3, 2023, from depths of 3 m, 6 m, and 9 m. These were analyzed for total nitrogen by ALS laboratories. Results of total nitrogen in Kemmerer samples collected from Beaver Lake on two different dates are illustrated in Figure 6. On February 7, 2023, total nitrogen concentration peaked at a depth of 6 m, with a concentration of 1.66 mg/L, and decreased to 1.36 mg/L at 9 m. On August 3, 2023, the total nitrogen concentration ranged from 1.88 mg/L at a depth of 3 m, to 1.37 mg/L at a depth of 9 m.

The average concentrations of total nitrogen in samples collected during February 7 and August 3, 2023, sampling events was 1.49 mg/L which exceeds the applicable regulatory guidelines. The results from the Kemmerer sampling resulted in the same trophic state classification as the composite samples which is Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total nitrogen.

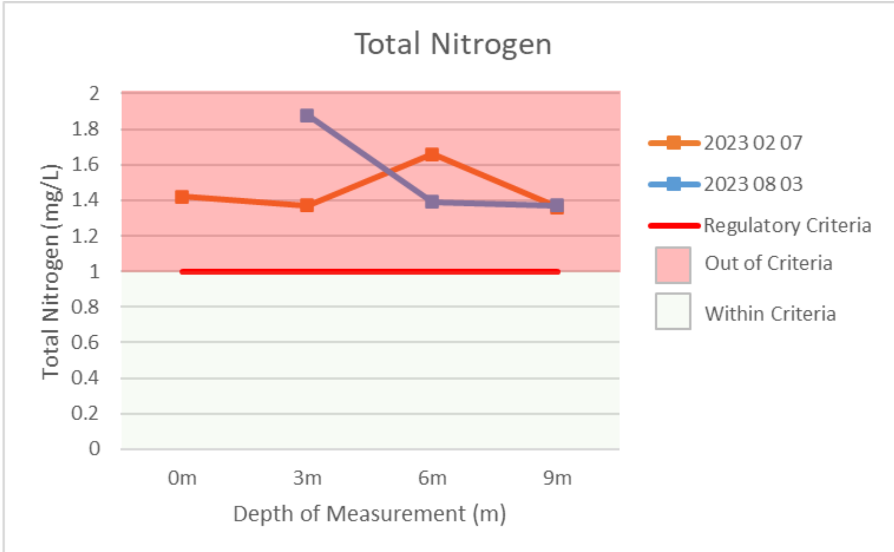

Figure 6: Total nitrogen from Kemmerer samples of Beaver Lake – 2023

Total Phosphorus

Increased phosphorus concentrations are the largest cause of degradation in water quality within lakes, causing 'dead zones', toxic algal blooms, a loss of biodiversity and increased health risks for plants, animals and humans that encounter polluted lake waters. Run-off from agriculture, human sewage and industrial practices results in increased phosphorus concentrations in lake water and lakebed sediments (Wetzel, 2001). Long-term monitoring activities following the control of phosphorus sources to lakes indicates that plants and animals do not recover from the effects of excessive phosphorous for several years.

Composite Sampling

Composite lake water samples for total phosphorus were collected on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023, from Beaver Lake. A minimum total phosphorus concentration of 0.022 mg/L was measured in a sample obtained on June 12, 2023. The highest concentration of phosphorus was 0.034 mg/L which was observed on July 13, 2023. The analytical results are illustrated below in Figure 7.

Total phosphorus concentrations in the composite samples collected during the summer of 2023 had an average of 0.028 mg/L of total phosphorus which does not exceed the applicable regulatory guidelines of 0.05 mg/L. This average total phosphorus concentration would classify Beaver Lake as Mesotrophic (some productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total phosphorus from composite samples.

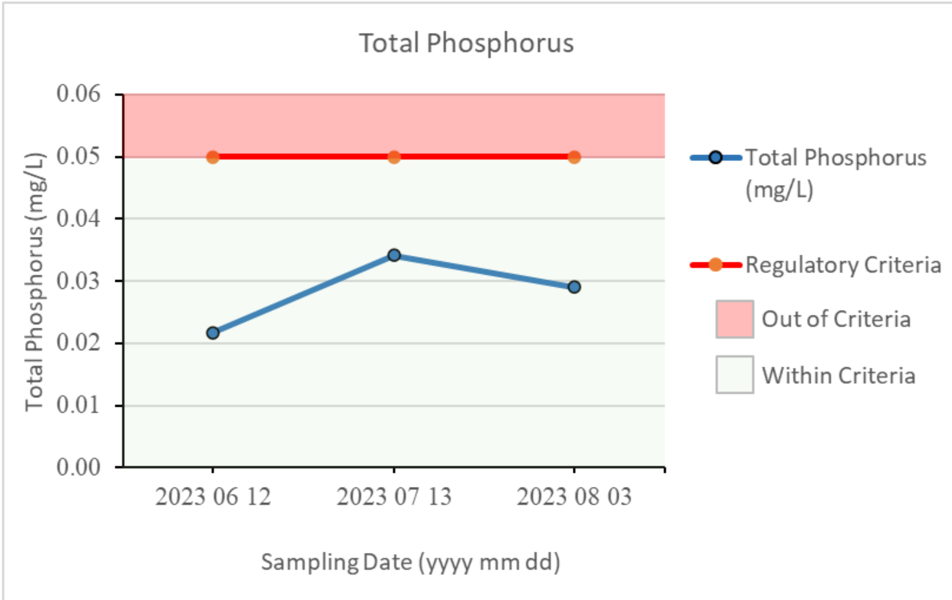

Figure 7: Total phosphorous from composite samples of Beaver Lake – 2023

Kemmerer Sampling

Kemmerer water samples using a Kemmerer sampling device were collected on February 7 from depths of 0 m, 3 m 6 m, and 9 m, and on August 3, 2023, from depths of 3 m, 6 m, and 9 m. Both samples were analyzed for total phosphorous by ALS laboratories. Total phosphorus concentrations in lake water samples collected on February 7, 2023, had an average concentration of 0.063 mg/L and was slightly higher than the average concentration of samples collected on August 3, 2023, which was 0.032 mg/L. The laboratory results are presented below in Figure 8.

Total phosphorus concentrations from the Kemmerer sampling in 2023 only exceeded the regulatory criteria on August 3, 2023, at 6 m. Concentrations from the Kemmerer sampling would result in a trophic state classification of Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total phosphorus. The average total phosphorus concentration of both Kemmerer and composite samples is 0.034 mg/L, which classifies the East Basin as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

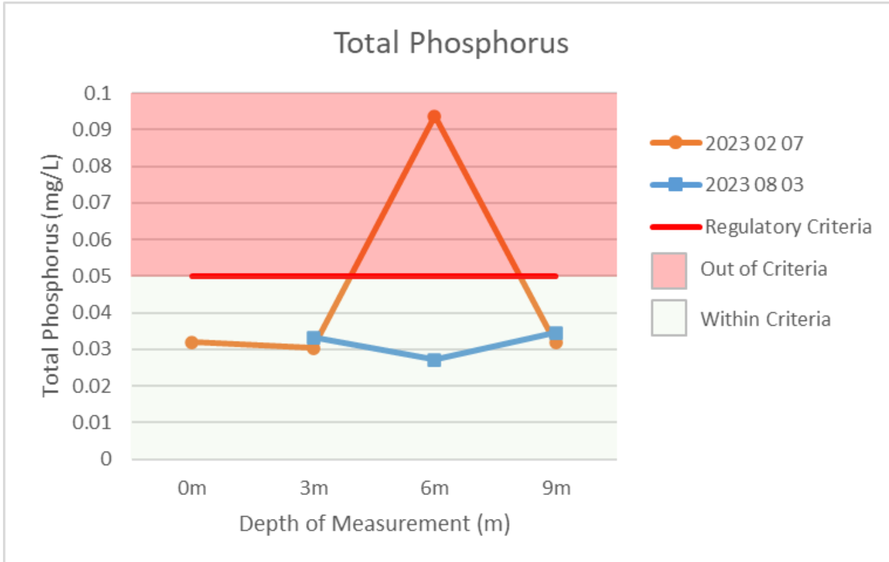

Figure 8: Total phosphorus from Kemmerer samples of Beaver Lake - 2023

N:P Ratio

The Redfield Ratio describes the optimal balance of total nitrogen to total phosphorous for aquatic plant growth, which is an optimal value of 16:1 (Teubner and Dokulil 2002). If the ratio is lower than 16:1, phosphorus is no longer considered a limiting nutrient and aquatic vegetation and cyanobacteria can use the dissolved and atmospheric nitrogen for growth by using the high amounts of phosphorus available in lake waters. If the ratio is higher than 16:1, it indicates that the phosphorus concentrations are occurring at levels much less than nitrogen and hence limit the growth within lakes.

The average N:P ratios for composite and Kemmerer sampling events in Beaver Lake were 55:1 and 37:1 respectively, which is higher than the Redfield Ratio of 16:1. Therefore, the total phosphorus concentrations are considered low enough for phosphorus to be considered the main nutrient limiting growth in Beaver Lake.

4.5 Chlorophyll-a

Chlorophyll-a is used as a measurement of algal biomass present in lake water. It is a green pigment found in plants, algae, and cyanobacteria, which allows these organisms to photosynthesize. All algae and cyanobacteria produce chlorophyll-a, hence its usage as a proxy for algal biomass. High concentrations of chlorophyll-a indicate an elevated number of algae in the lake water. Due to the presence of chlorophyll-a in cyanobacteria, the measurement can be an underestimate of algae biomass when blue green algae are present in the lake water.

Composite lake water samples for filtering and analyses of chlorophyll-a were collected on June 12, July 13, and August 3, 2023. The analytical results of these samples are presented in Figure 9 below. A minimum concentration of 3.7 µg/L was observed on June 12, 2023. The highest concentration of chlorophyll-a was observed on August 3, 2023, at 20.5 µg/L. Overall, an increasing temporal trend in chlorophyll-a was observed. Total chlorophyll-a concentrations in the samples collected during the summer of 2023 had an average of 13.27 µg/L of total chlorophyll-a, which classifies Beaver Lake as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

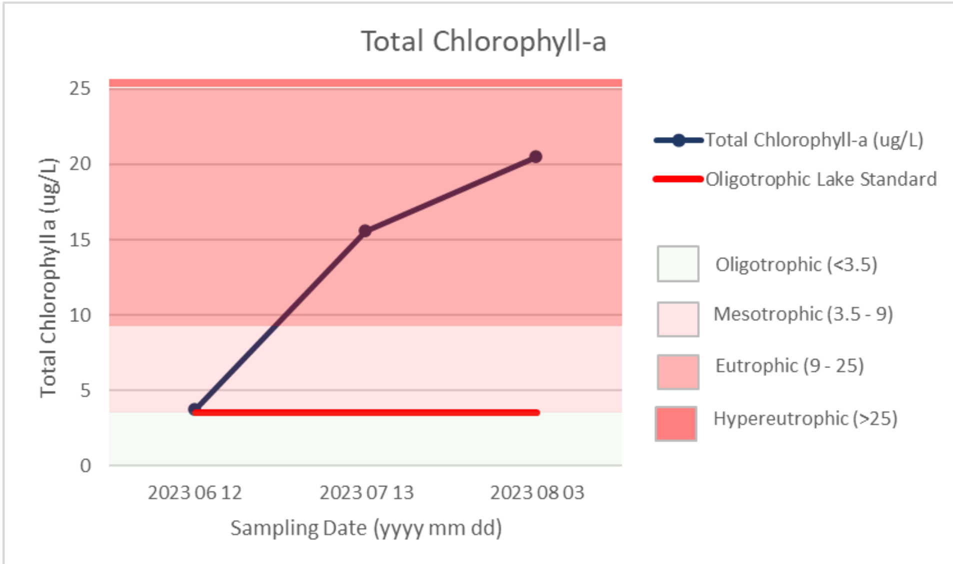

Figure 9: Total Chlorophyll-a from Composite samples of Beaver Lake - 2023

4.6 Routine Water Chemistry

Results of routine water chemistry of composite and Kemmerer samples collected from Beaver Lake are presented in Table 4.

The average measured pH of 8.00 in 2023 was consistent with historical results. The pH of water determines the solubility and biological availability of chemical constituents such as nutrients and heavy metals. The ability of a lake to neutralize these hydrogen ions is referred to as a buffering capacity. Any lake with a total alkalinity of more than 100 mg/L is considered to have high buffering capacity (Mitchell and Prepas 1990). The pH in Beaver Lake is likely buffered against change by its high alkalinity. The high alkalinity in Alberta lakes is derived from the rich calcareous glacial till over which the lakes have formed.

4.7 Metals

Metals enter the water naturally through the weathering of rocks and soil. These metals are generally non-toxic and in low concentrations. However, metals can also come from a wide variety of anthropogenic and non-point pollution sources including runoff from urban areas, wastewater discharge, improperly managed sewage treatment, industrial activities, and agricultural runoff. The analytical results of total dissolved metals in the Kemmerer and composite water samples collected from Beaver Lake are presented in Table 5.

Concentrations of all metals analyzed from the composite and Kemmerer samples were generally below detection limits and/or below the applicable regulatory guidelines.

4.8 Aquatic Invasive Species Monitoring

During the summer of 2023, Alberta Lake Management Society (ALMS) completed watermilfoil sampling in Beaver Lake. On August 22, 2023, ALMS collected a watermilfoil sample from Beaver Lake. The sample was sent to Alberta Plant Health Laboratory and was analyzed to determine if the specimen was native Northern Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum sibiricum*) or the invasive Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*). The sample from Beaver Lake was determined to be native Northern Watermilfoil.

5. HISTORICAL TREND ANALYSIS

The objective of the historical trend analysis is to provide an overview of water quality conditions in a lake with time and to evaluate the impact of watershed management practices on lake water quality.

Three parameters are significant in trend analyses for lake water quality: Secchi depth, total nitrogen, and total phosphorus; all of which are also used for trophic classification of lakes.

5.1 Secchi Depth

Historical data indicates that the Secchi depth in Beaver Lake was always less than the standard Oligotrophic (low productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) standard for Secchi depth (4.0 m) except for 2010 when Secchi depth (4.2 m) was slightly higher than the standard (Figure 10). A temporal decreasing trend in Secchi depth was observed for Beaver Lake following 2012, until 2019 to 2021, when the average Secchi depth slightly improved. Secchi depth did show an improvement in 2023 as well. However, the overall trend for Secchi depth shows a gradual deterioration of water quality. The low average Secchi depth means that the lake water has poor transparency due to suspended materials. However, the Secchi depth readings may not provide an exact measure of the water transparency due to various errors such as time of the day, sun's glare on the water, and eyesight of the observer.

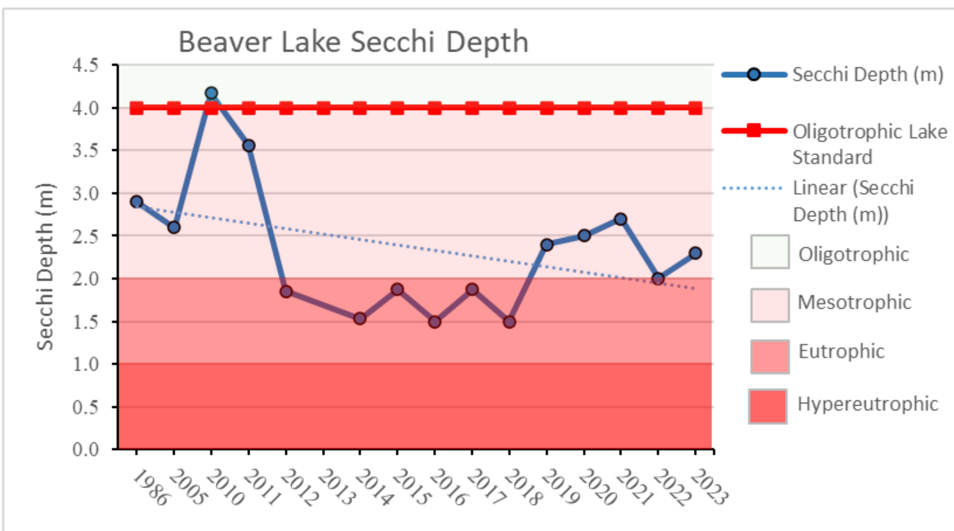

Figure 10: Historical trend for Secchi depth in Beaver Lake

5.2 Total Nitrogen

Historical data shows that total nitrogen concentrations in Beaver Lake have been historically higher than the regulatory guideline of 1.0 mg/L. A gradual increasing trend in total nitrogen has been observed from 1986 to 2023 and a sharp increase was measured in 2013. Total nitrogen concentrations have historically been classified as Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) as seen in Figure 11.

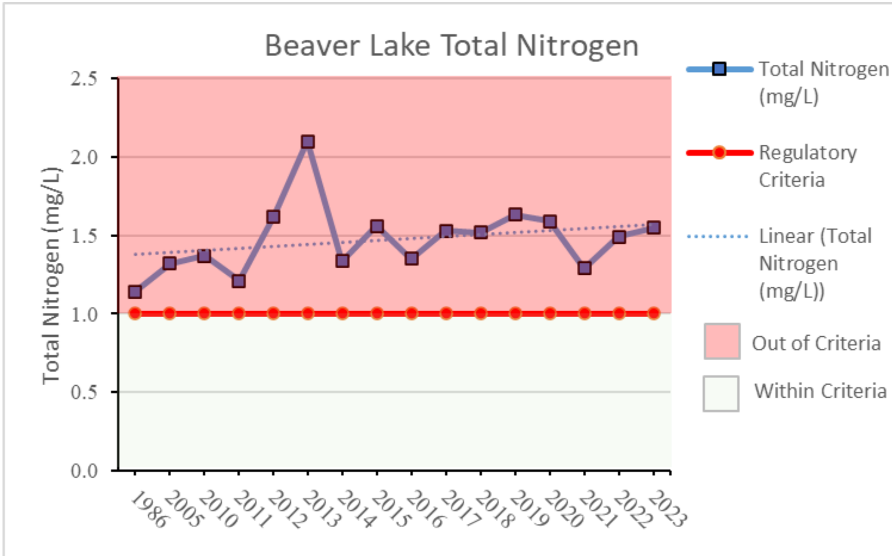

Figure 11: Historical trend for total nitrogen in Beaver Lake

5.3 Total Phosphorus

Historical data shows that total phosphorus concentrations in Beaver Lake were less than the regulatory guidelines (0.05 mg/L), except for 2012 (0.07 mg/L). Beaver Lake has begun to show an overall decreasing trend in phosphorus concentrations. Total phosphorus concentrations have historically been classified as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

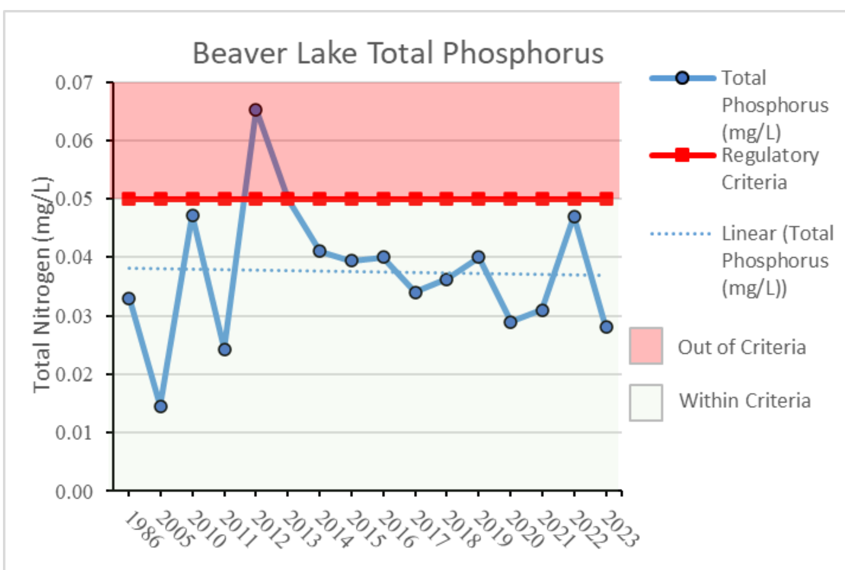

Figure 12: Historical trend for total phosphorus in Beaver Lake

6. DISCUSSION

Trophic State Index (TSI) is a classification system designed to rate lakes based on the amount of biological activity they sustain. The concentrations of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorous) are the primary determinants of TSI. Increased concentrations of nutrients tend to result in increased plant growth, followed by an increase in subsequent trophic level. Nurnberg (1996) used parameters including Secchi depth, chlorophyll, total nitrogen and total phosphorus concentrations in lake waters to determine the trophic state of the lakes, which is provided as Table 1 in Appendix A. TSI is a useful tool for evaluation and management of lake health and setting objectives including sport and recreational activities related to the lake. Trophic classification of Beaver Lake based on Secchi depth and nutrients is presented in Table 2.

There are four classes of trophic states which include: Oligotrophic which would be the highest quality of water with low productivity, nutrients, and algae; Mesotrophic which is fair quality water with some productivity, nutrients, and algae; Eutrophic which is relatively poor-quality water with high productivity, nutrients and algae; and Hypereutrophic which is the poorest quality water with excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae.

Beaver Lake would be considered Eutrophic based on the average of the four water parameters: Secchi depth, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, and total chlorophyll. The trophic status would be Mesotrophic based on Secchi depth, Hypereutrophic based on total nitrogen, Eutrophic based on total phosphorus, and Eutrophic based on chlorophyll-a.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Lac La Biche County continues to monitor the water quality of Beaver Lake on a regular basis. Continuous monitoring will help the County to determine how the lake management strategies and policies such as the Watershed Management Plan and Riparian Setback Matrix Model are impacting the lake water quality, and what the net effect on human and environmental health is.

Monitoring and sampling should continue to be conducted under a strategic plan and in a uniform manner to ensure that results produced are meaningful and are useful for establishing a correlation with the past results. This may include sampling at same period of the year each time, recording the same parameters critical to lake health, obtaining samples from the same depths, and implementing a quality assurance program for reliability of analytical results.

Nutrient loading is the main source of eutrophication in Beaver Lake which is degrading the water quality, leading to algae growth, foul smells, and a reduction in water recreation. Therefore, action must be taken to slow down the eutrophication process and improve water quality. Best management practices would include education of the public on appropriate land use including restoration and protection of riparian areas (water buffers); and strengthening laws and regulations governing land use such as municipal sewer hookups and protection of environmental reserves.

Lac La Biche County updated the Lac La Biche Watershed Management Plan, which was adopted by Council in May 2021. This plan includes specific action items based on the recommendations that were formulated while drafting the plan. Although Beaver Lake is not within the Lac La Biche watershed, the recommended action items may still apply.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1: Trophic status classification based on lake water parameters (Nurnberg 1996)

Trophic State	**Total Phosphorus** (mg/L)	**Total Nitrogen** (mg/L)	**Secchi Depth** (m)	**Total Chlorophyll a** (µg/L)
Oligotrophic	<0.01	<0.35	>4	<3.5
Mesotrophic	0.01 – 0.03	0.35 – 0.65	4 - 2	3.5 - 9
Eutrophic	0.03 – 0.10	0.65 – 1.20	2 - 1	9 - 25
Hypereutrophic	>0.1	>1.20	<1	>25

Table 2: Trophic status of Beaver Lake based on lake water parameters – 2023

Trophic State	**Secchi Depth**	**Total Nitrogen**	**Total Phosphorus**	**Total Chlorophyll a**
	(m)	-------------(mg/L) ---------------		(µg/L)
Oligotrophic	>4	<0.35	<0.01	<3.5
Mesotrophic	4 – 2	0.35 – 0.65	0.01 – 0.03	3.5 - 9
Eutrophic	2 – 1	0.65 – 1.2	0.03 – 0.1	9 - 25
Hypereutrophic	<1	>1.2	>0.1	>25
Beaver Lake 2023	2.3	1.52	0.034	13.27
Trophic State of Beaver Lake 2023	Mesotrophic	Hypereutrophic	Eutrophic	Eutrophic

Table 3: Average N:P ratios for Beaver Lake water samples in - 2023

Sampling Event	**Total Nitrogen (mg/L)**	**Total Phosphorus (mg/L)**	**N:P**
Composite Sampling	1.55	0.028	55:1
Kemmerer Sampling	1.49	0.040	37:1

Table 4: Routine water chemistry parameters in Beaver Lake composite samples – 2023

Date of Sampling	June 12, 2023	July 13, 2023	August 3, 2023
	mg/L		
pH	8.04	8.21	8.24
Temperature (°C)	17.98	19.05	20.88
Ammonia, Total (as N)	0.0222	0.0211	0.0382
Nitrate (as N)	<0.020	<0.020	<0.020
Nitrite (as N)	<0.010	<0.010	<0.010
Nitrate and Nitrite (as N)	<0.0300	<0.0300	<0.0300

* Based on average pH and temperature of 8.00 and 19.10 °C of Beaver Lake in 2023
1: CCME C Guidelines, de-minimis criteria for Protection of Aquatic Life and Agricultural Water Uses
2 - Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018
a: CCME Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines for water for the Protection of Aquatic Life
b: CCME Guidelines for Protection of Agricultural Water Uses (Irrigation and Livestock pathways included)

Table 5: Total dissolved metals in Kemmerer samples from Beaver Lake – 2023

Date of Sampling	Kemmerer Sampling (9 m depth) February 7, 2023	Kemmerer Sampling (12 m depth) August 17, 2023	Criteria[1]	Criteria[2]
Parameters	-------------(mg/L)--------------			
Aluminum (Al)-Total	0.0032	0.0066	0.1[a]	0.1
Arsenic (As)-Total	0.00126	0.00172	0.005[a]	0.005
Barium (Ba)-Total	0.0576	0.0443	NS	NS
Beryllium (Be)-Total	<0.000020	<0.000020	100[b]	NS
Boron (B)-Total	0.041	0.033	1.5[a]	1.5
Cadmium (Cd)-Total	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	0.00009[a]	0.00033
Chromium (Cr)-Total	<0.00050	<0.00050	NS	NS
Cobalt (Co)-Total	<0.00010	<0.00010	0.05[a]	0.0012
Copper (Cu)-Total	0.00186	<0.00050	0.0040[a]	0.022
Iron (Fe)-Total	0.012	0.053	0.3[a]	0.3
Lead (Pb)-Total	0.000802	<0.000050	0.007[a]	0.007
Lithium (Li)-Total	0.0112	0.0097	2.5[b]	NS
Manganese (Mn)-Total	0.0252	0.223	0.2[b]	NS
Mercury (Hg)-Total	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	0.000026[a]	NS
Molybdenum (Mo)-Total	0.000378	0.000421	0.073[a]	0.073
Nickel (Ni)-Total	<0.00050	0.00087	0.150[a]	0.11
Selenium (Se)-Total	<0.000050	0.000053	0.001[a]	NS
Silver (Ag)-Total	<0.000010	<0.000010	0.00025[a]	0.00025
Thallium (Tl)-Total	<0.000010	<0.000010	0.0008[a]	0.0008
Tin (Sn)-Total	0.0001	<0.00010	NS	NS
Titanium (Ti)-Total	<0.00030	<0.00030	NS	NS
Uranium (U)-Total	0.000065	0.00005	0.01[b]	0.015
Vanadium (V)-Total	<0.00050	<0.00050	0.1[b]	NS
Zinc (Zn)-Total	0.0031	<0.0030	0.007[a]	0.03

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Table 6: Historical data of routine water chemistry in for Beaver Lake

	Year															
Parameter	**1986**	**2005**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
pH	8.50	8.50	8.66	8.47	8.92	6.92	8.66	9.10	8.65	8.77	8.56	8.30	8.76	7.87	8.4	8
Secchi Depth (m)	2.90	2.60	4.17	3.56	1.85		1.53	1.88	1.50	1.88	1.50	2.40	2.50	2.70	2.00	2.30
Total Nitrogen (mg/L)	1.14	1.32	1.37	1.21	1.62	2.1	1.337	1.558	1.35	1.53	1.52	1.63	1.59	1.29	1.49	1.55
Total Phosphorus (mg/L)	0.033	0.145	0.047	0.024	0.065	0.050	0.041	0.039	0.040	0.034	0.036	0.040	0.029	0.031	0.047	0.028
Nitrate/Nitrite (mg/L)	0.0056	0.0018	0.0810	<0.071	<0.071		0.0	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.0300	<0.0300
Ammonia (mg/L)	0.0030	0.0331	0.0270	<0.050	<0.050	0.196	0.095	0.099	0.070	0.070	0.064	<0.050	<0.050	<0.05	0.01497	0.0272
Specific Conductivity (µS/cm)	409	462	508	500	529	600	554	491	559	493	757	526	887	729	1126	604.5

Table 7: Historical data of total dissolved metals in Beaver Lake

Dissolved Metals	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Criteria[1]	Criteria[2]
	-------------------(mg/L) -----------------						
Aluminum (Al)	0.0094	<0.0675	0.0069	0.0072	0.0049	0.1[a]	0.1
Arsenic (As)	0.00207	0.00179	0.00192	0.002085	0.00149	0.005[a]	0.005
Barium (Ba)	0.0597	0.06445	0.058	0.06555	0.05095	NS	NS
Beryllium (Be)-Total	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	0.000021	<0.000020	100[b]	NS
Boron (B)	0.086	0.092	0.09	0.0945	0.037	1.5[a]	1.5
Cadmium (Cd)	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	0.0000155	0.0000131	<0.0000050	0.00009[a]	0.00033
Chromium (Cr)	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00050	<0.00050	NS	NS
Cobalt (Co)-Total	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	0.05[a]	0.0012
Copper (Cu)	<0.00050	<0.00050	<0.00050	0.001405	0.00186	0.0040[a]	0.022
Iron (Fe)	0.016	0.018	0.015	0.011	0.0325	0.3[a]	0.3
Lead (Pb)	0.000060	<0.000635	<0.000050	0.000138	0.000802	0.007[a]	0.007
Lithium (Li)-Total	0.0403	0.0408	0.0404	0.0443	0.01045	2.5[b]	NS
Manganese (Mn)	0.0768	0.1522	0.0469	0.12485	0.1241	0.2[b]	NS
Mercury (Hg)	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	0.000026[a]	NS
Molybdenum (Mo)-Total	0.000109	0.0001765	0.000186	0.0001985	0.0003995	0.073[a]	0.073
Nickel (Ni)	<0.00050	<0.00050	<0.00050	<0.00050	0.00087	0.150[a]	0.11
Selenium (Se)	<0.000050	<0.000050	<0.000050	0.000063	0.000053	0.001[a]	NS
Silver (Ag)	<0.000010	<0.000010	<0.000010	<0.000010	<0.000010	0.00025[a]	0.00025
Thallium (Tl)-Total	<0.000010	<0.000010	0.000011	0.000025	<0.000010	0.0008[a]	0.0008
Tin (Sn)-Total	0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	<0.00010	0.0001	0.0[a]	NS
Titanium (Ti)-Total	0.00033	<0.00030	<0.00030	0.0006	<0.00030	0.0[a]	NS
Uranium (U)	0.000162	0.0001835	0.000191	0.0002215	0.0000575	0.01[b]	0.015
Vanadium (V)-Total	0.00113	<0.00050	<0.00050	0.000925	<0.00050	0.1[b]	NS
Zinc (Zn)	<0.0030	0.0065	0.0056	0.00315	0.0031	0.007[a]	0.03

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