



Lac La Biche County  
welcoming by nature.

# 2019 Water Quality Report

## Lac La Biche Lake - East Basin

Lac La Biche County, Alberta

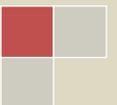


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## Executive Summary

Lac La Biche Lake (“LLB Lake”) is a large and scenic lake located in Lac La Biche County, Alberta (“County”) and is valued 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 such as swimming, boating and fishing. For the purpose of this report, Lac La Biche Lake has been split up into two Basins (East and West) due to the size and physical attributes of the lake.

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 2019. 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. Water samples for microbial parameters were analyzed by PROVLAB of Alberta Health Services.

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 Parks’ 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 East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake based on Secchi depth and nutrients is presented in Table 2.

For the purpose of this report, the parameters used to determine the trophic state will only include Secchi depth, total nitrogen and total phosphorus. Chlorophyll will not be used to determine the trophic state. Chlorophyll 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. Chlorophyll concentration is measured as part of the County’s monitoring program. However, the measurement can be an underestimate of algae biomass when blue-green algae are present. It is also difficult to have consistent measurements of Chlorophyll as there can be large variances in concentrations due to anomalies such as temperature and weather conditions such as precipitation and wind. Therefore, it is difficult to report Chlorophyll concentrations and make recommendations based on the results. Based on this information, Chlorophyll is not reported in this document.

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.

The East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake would be considered Hypereutrophic based on the average of the three water parameters Secchi depth, total nitrogen and total phosphorus. The trophic status would be

Mesotrophic based on Secchi depth, Hypereutrophic based on total nitrogen, and Hypereutrophic based on total phosphorus.

## Results and Discussion

In 2019, Secchi depths in the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake were measured on March 13, July 17, August 14 and August 22, 2019. The average seasonal Secchi depth was observed to be 2.2 m which is consistent with historical results. The low average Secchi depth means that the East Basin has poor transparency due to suspended materials. Based on the Secchi depths and in accordance with the classification provided in Table 1 (Appendix A), the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake is classified as Mesotrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

Dissolved oxygen data collected in 2019 shows that the average dissolved oxygen levels ranged from 5.65 mg/L to 8.25 mg/L. 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).

Sampling events in 2019 showed an average water temperature of 14.04 °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 March 13 and August 22, 2019.

In 2019, three types of lake water samples for analyses of nutrients were collected from East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake; composite samples, Kemmerer samples (obtained from different depths using a Kemmerer device), and inflow/outflow samples. These samples were analyzed for total nitrogen and total phosphorus.

Total nitrogen concentrations in the composite samples collected from the East Basin in 2019 had an average of 3.15 mg/L of total nitrogen, while the Kemmerer samples collected had an average of 2.83 mg/L of total nitrogen; and the inflow/outflow samples ranged from 0.68 mg/L to 9.31 mg/L of total nitrogen. Both the composite and Kemmerer samples total nitrogen concentrations exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines of 1.0 mg/L and were slightly higher than historical results. The average total nitrogen concentrations from composite and Kemmerer sampling classify the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake as Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

Total phosphorus concentrations in the composite samples collected during the summer of 2019 had an average of 0.16 mg/L of total phosphorus, while the Kemmerer samples collected had an average of 0.19 mg/L; and the inflow/outflow samples ranged from 0.072 mg/L to 1.61 mg/L total phosphorus. Both the composite and Kemmerer samples of total phosphorus exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines of 0.05 mg/L and were consistent with historical results. The average total phosphorus concentrations from composite and Kemmerer sampling classify the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake as Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth).

The average N:P ratios for composite and Kemmerer sampling events were 20:1 and 15:1 which is very close to the Redfield Ratio of 16:1. Therefore, the total phosphorus may not be considered a limiting nutrient in the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake.

Routine water chemistry showed that East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake has an average pH of 7.97 in 2019 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.

In the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake, the beaches at Golden Sands and McArthur Place were tested for *Enterococcus* on June 11, June 18, June 25, July 3, July 9, July 16, July 23, July 30, August 6, August 13,

and August 20, 2019. McArthur Place data regarding *Enterococcus* shows that two samples collected on July 23 and July 30, 2018 exceeded the regulatory guidelines with counts of 400 cfu/100 mL and 530 cfu/100 mL. Golden Sands data regarding *Enterococcus* shows that two samples collected on July 30 and August 7, 2018 exceeded the regulatory guidelines with counts of 290 cfu/100 mL and 240 cfu/100 mL. Additional sampling for *Enterococcus* at these locations resulted in concentrations which were within the applicable guidelines.

The East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake would be considered Hypereutrophic based on the average of the three water parameters Secchi depth, total nitrogen and total phosphorus. The trophic status would be Mesotrophic based on Secchi depth, Hypereutrophic based on total nitrogen, and Hypereutrophic based on total phosphorus.

**Recommendations:**

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

A strategic monitoring plan should be developed by the County to ensure that sampling is carried out in a consistent manner for all lakes that are sampled each year. This would include sampling each lake the same number of times per year with a uniform sampling procedure; and implementing a quality assurance program for both the multi-probe and water chemistry analysis to ensure that data used to evaluate the lake water quality are accurate and reliable. By maintaining consistency in sampling programs, the County will be able to monitor changes occurring in lake water quality, and hence assist the County in developing policies and management practices to ensure the optimum health of the lake.

Nutrient loading is the main source of eutrophication in Lac La Biche 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 watershed protection and waste and recycling management; 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.

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## List of Abbreviations 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
- EQGASW-RA: Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018 for Recreation and Aesthetics
- LLB Lake: Lac La Biche Lake
- QA/QC: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
- Total N: Total Nitrogen
- Total P: Total Phosphorous
- TSI: Trophic State Index

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lac La Biche Lake is a large recreational lake popular for many recreational activities. It is approximately 215 km northeast of the city of Edmonton and shares its name with the hamlet of Lac La Biche which is on the southeast shore. A location map of the lake is presented in Figure 1.

LLB Lake has always been popular for a vast variety of recreational activities such as swimming, boating and fishing. However, there is a concern that declining water quality in the lake is limiting the opportunities for these activities. LLB Lake covers an area of 234 km<sup>2</sup> with a watershed of 4040 km<sup>2</sup> within the Athabasca River drainage Basin and comprises of two large Basins (East Basin and West Basin) divided by a peninsula and two large islands. The mean depth of Lac La Biche Lake is 8.4 m, with a maximum of 21.3 m.

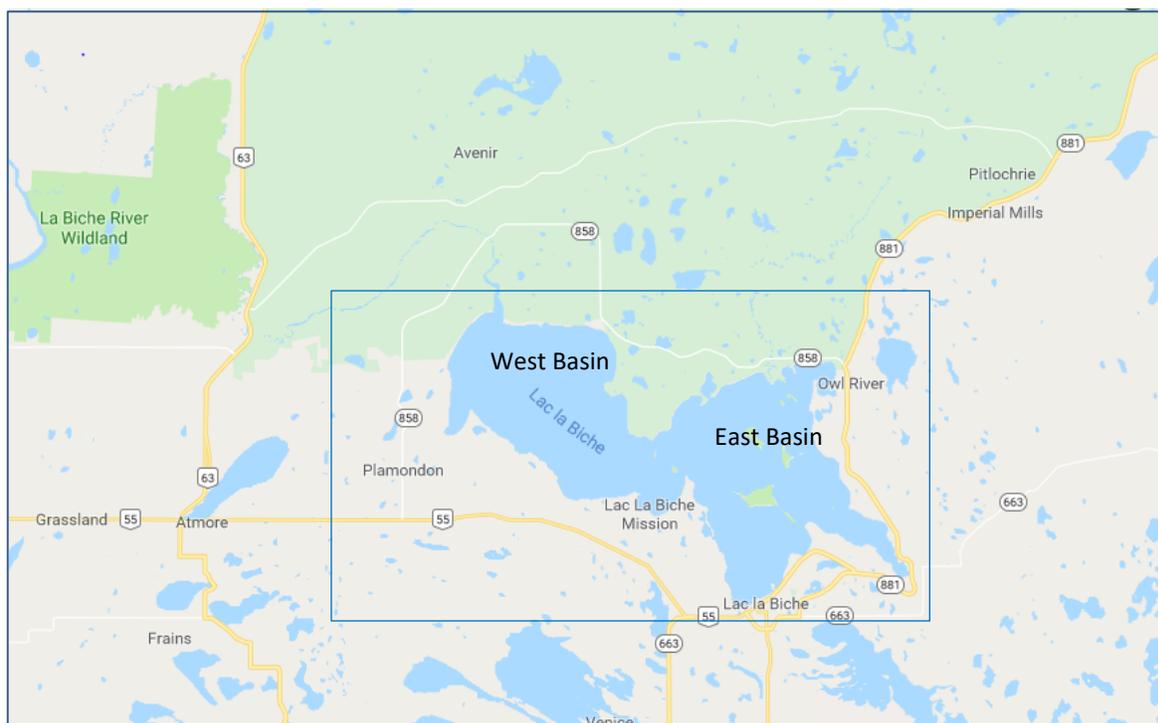


Figure 1: Location map of Lac La Biche Lake

There are several small unnamed creeks located around the lake that flow into the East and West Basins. The main inflows into LLB Lake are Owl River, Red Deer Brook, Plamondon Creek and one unnamed creek which flows into the bay near the Lac La Biche Mission. All of these major inflows are located in the East Basin except for Plamondon Creek which is located in the West Basin. The only outflow for the lake is the La Biche River, which is located on the northwest shore of the West Basin.

Agriculture in the Lac La Biche Lake watershed began in late 19th century, while the hamlet of Lac La Biche began to grow in mid-20th century. Sewage from the hamlet began to be discharged into LLB Lake in 1951 with the first waste treatment plant. However, in 1983 the sewage was diverted to Field Lake which is upstream of Lac la Biche. Subsequent studies show that much of the sewage still drained back to Lac la Biche Lake via Red Deer Brook. Therefore, the treatment plant was upgraded in 1989 but continued to discharge into Field Lake. Residents of the area increasingly complained about water quality, particularly the surface algal blooms which decreased the water clarity (Schindler et al, 2008). Lac La Biche Lake has been historically exploited for fisheries. Some species have already collapsed and

now the Lake is under stringent regulations. As of August 1, 2014, all lakes in Alberta are closed to commercial fishing.

## 2. WATER QUALITY SAMPLING PROGRAM

Lac La Biche Lake has been sampled by Lac La Biche County consistently every year since 2006. Due to the differences in water quality, shoreline morphology and depth, LLB Lake is sampled as two separate Basins and results are reported separately. LLB Lake East Basin sampling program for 2019 was completed as follows:

- a) Secchi Depths were measured on March 13, July 17, August 14, and August 22, 2019;
- b) Lake profiles of the East Basin were recorded to a maximum depth of 9.5 m using multi-probe on March 13, July 17, August 14, and August 22, 2019;
- c) Composite samples from the East Basin were collected on July 17, August 14, and August 22, 2019. These samples were analyzed for nutrients, metals and basic water chemistry parameters by ALS laboratories;
- d) Kemmerer water samples were collected March 14, and August 15 from depths of 3, 6, and 9 m, and were analyzed for nutrients, metals and basic water chemistry parameters by ALS laboratories.
- e) Inflow and outflow samples were collected on May 29, July 4, July 25 and August 8, 2019; and were analyzed for nutrients, metals and basic water chemistry parameters.
- f) Monitoring of *Enterococcus* bacteria was conducted at popular swimming locations through a partnership between Lac La Biche County and Alberta Health Services. The beach locations sampled during 2019 in the East Basin were Golden Sands and McArthur Park. These beaches were sampled on June 11, June 18, June 25, July 3, July 9, July 16, July 23, July 30, August 6, August 13, and August 20, 2019.

### 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 2019 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 (<4m) is characteristic of a mesotrophic to hypereutrophic lake with turbid water. Whereas a high Secchi depth (>4m) 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.
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.
<i>Enterococcus</i>	<i>Enterococcus</i> bacteria is an indicator for the sanitary quality of water. The presence of these microbes indicate contamination from excreta of warm-blooded animals including humans and may pose serious and immediate health risks.

### 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 Parks (AEP), and Health Canada.

The regulatory criteria selection for lake waters in Alberta are subjected to CCME's Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines (CEQG) and AEP's Environmental Quality Guidelines for Alberta Surface Waters 2018 (EQGASW). Protection of lake water is covered under CCME's CEQG and AEP'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. 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.

During 2019, Secchi depths in the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake were measured on March 13, July 17, August 14 and August 22, 2019. The measured Secchi depth ranged from a maximum of 6 m on March 13, 2019 to a minimum of 0.75 m on August 14, 2019. Secchi depths are plotted in Figure 2. A declining trend in Secchi depth was observed in 2019 (Figure 2).

The low average Secchi depth of 2.2 m means that the lake water has poor transparency due to suspended materials. Based on the average Secchi depth of 2.2 m, East Basin is classified as Eutrophic in accordance to the Table 1 provided in Appendix A.

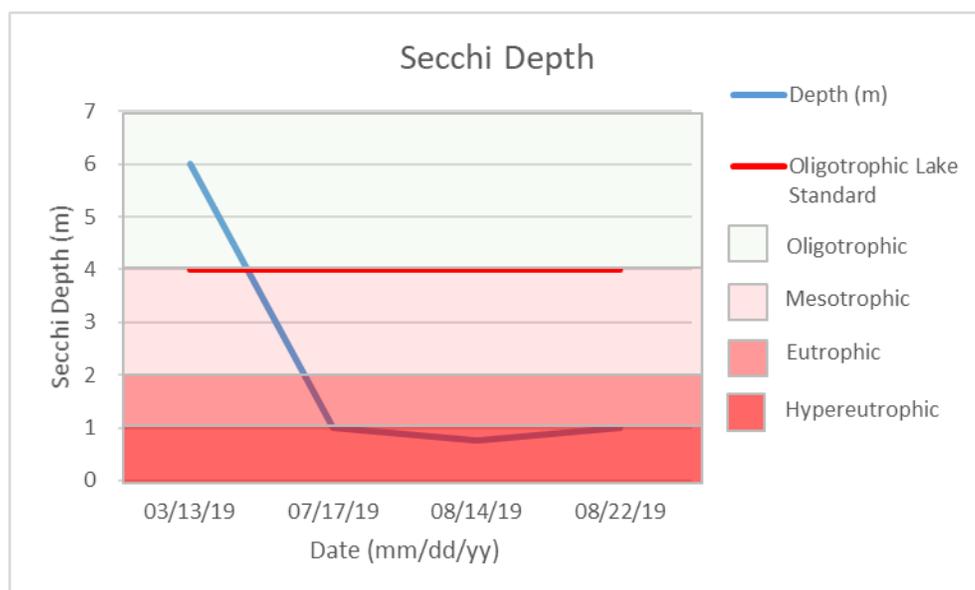


Figure 2: Secchi depths measured in East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake – 2019

### 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 the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake were recorded to a maximum depth of 9.5 m using multi-probe on March 13, July 17, August 14, and August 22, 2019. A maximum dissolved oxygen concentration of 14.01 mg/L was observed on July 17, 2019 at a depth of 1 m depth which declined to 0.04 mg/L at the lake bed (Figure 4). Average dissolved oxygen measurements over the sampling period was 6.66 mg/L.

In 2019, the dissolved oxygen data from East Basin indicated that the average dissolved oxygen levels for all sampling events ranged from 0.04 mg/L to 14.01 mg/L and within proximity to the regulatory criteria for dissolved oxygen in cold water lakes (9.5 mg/L for early life stages and 6.5 mg/L for all other life stages).

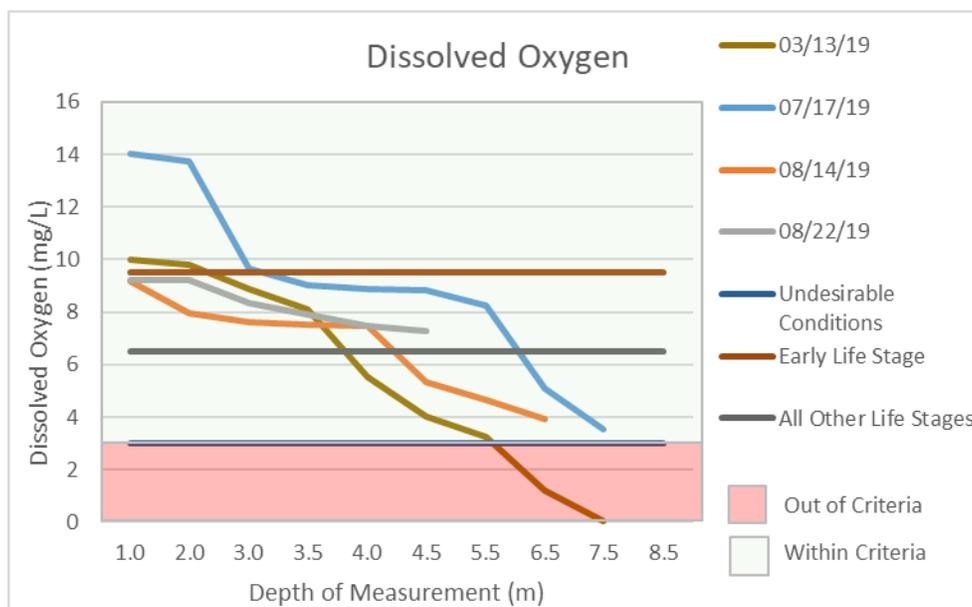


Figure 3: Dissolved oxygen in East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake - 2019

### 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 summer time, warmer surface water can facilitate cyanobacteria blooms at the lake surface (Wetzel, R. 2001).

The East Basin temperatures were recorded to a maximum depth of 9.5 m on March 13, July 17, August 14, and August 22, 2019. Results of temperatures observed on different dates and depths are illustrated in Figure 4. A minimum temperature of 0.616 °C was observed on March 13, 2019 at a 1 m depth, which increased to a temperature of 3.686 °C at a 7.5 m depth.

Sampling events in the summer of 2019 showed an average temperature of 14.04 °C in the East Basin of LLB Lake. Uniform temperature profiles were observed as temperatures over depth did not vary significantly.

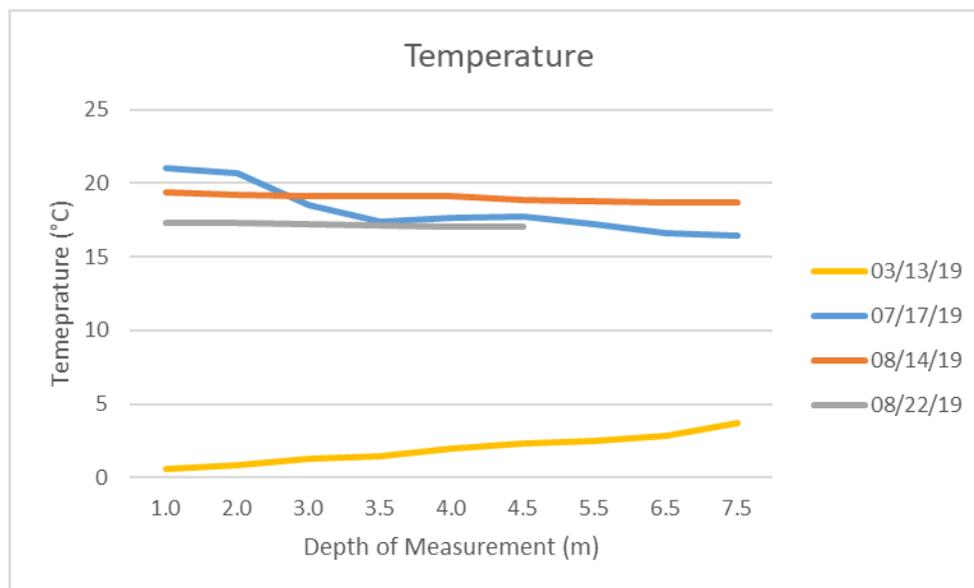


Figure 4: Temperature profile for East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake - 2019

#### 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 2019, three types of lake water samples for analysis of nutrients were collected from the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake; composite samples; Kemmerer Samples (obtained from different depths using a Kemmerer device); and inflow and outflow samples from various streams in the East Basin.

##### 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

(NO<sub>x</sub>) 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 July 17, and August 14, 2019. The analytical results of these samples are presented in Figure 5 below. As indicated, the minimum total nitrogen concentration of 2.15 mg/L was noted in sample collected on August 15, 2019 and the maximum concentration of 4.15 mg/L was observed in a sample collected on July 17, 2019.

Nitrogen concentrations in the composite samples collected from the lake in 2019 had an average of 3.15 mg/L of total nitrogen which exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines. The average total nitrogen indicates that the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake is Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total nitrogen from composite samples.

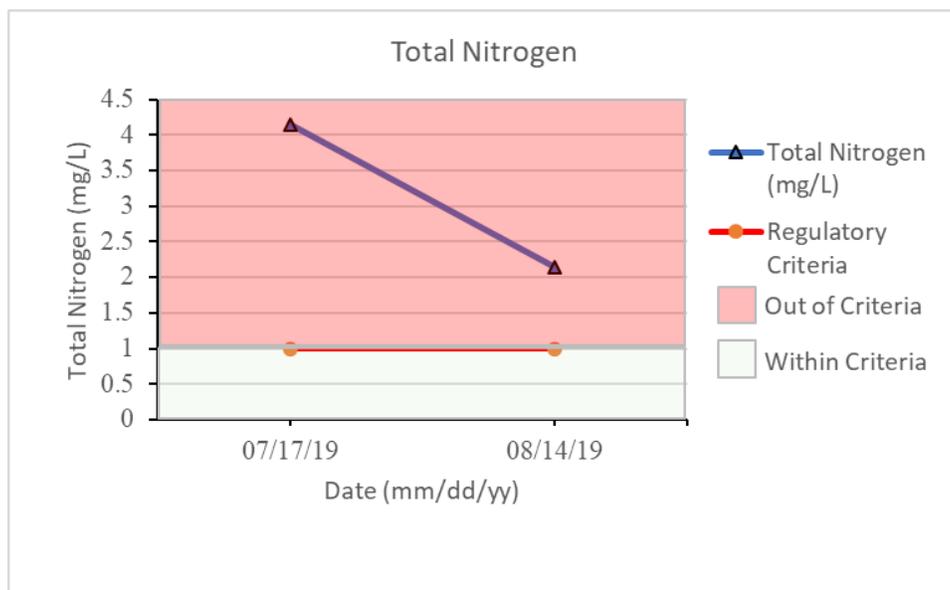


Figure 5: Total nitrogen from composite samples in East Basin of LLB Lake – 2019

**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 from the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake on March 13, from depths of 3 m, 6 m, and 9m and on August 14, 2019 from depths of 3 m, 6 m, and 9 m. These samples were analyzed for total nitrogen by ALS laboratories. The analytical results of these samples presented in Figure 6.

Total nitrogen concentrations in the samples collected on both days exceeded the regulatory guidelines. The average total nitrogen from all Kemmerer samples is 2.83 mg/L. The results from the Kemmerer sampling resulted in the same trophic classification as the composite samples. Therefore, results in the trophic state classification of Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total nitrogen.

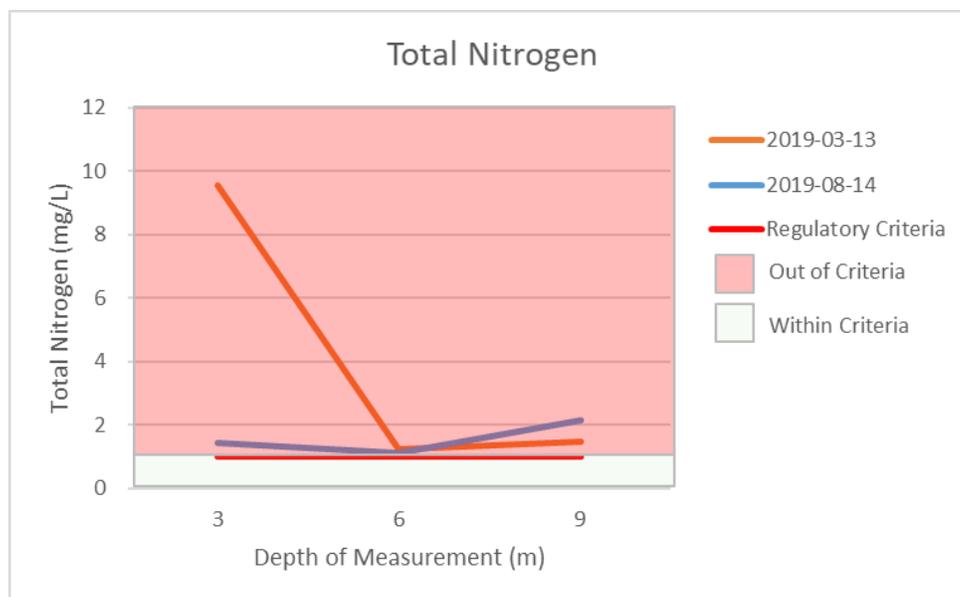


Figure 6: Total nitrogen from Kemmerer samples in East Basin of LLB Lake - 2019

***Inflow and Outflow Sampling***

The inflows and outflows for Lac La Biche Lake had samples collected on May 28, July 2, July 25, and August 8, 2019. The results of total nitrogen in these samples are illustrated in Figure 7. As indicated below (Figure 7) the total nitrogen concentrations in all inflow samples, except Owl River, exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines (1.0 mg/L).

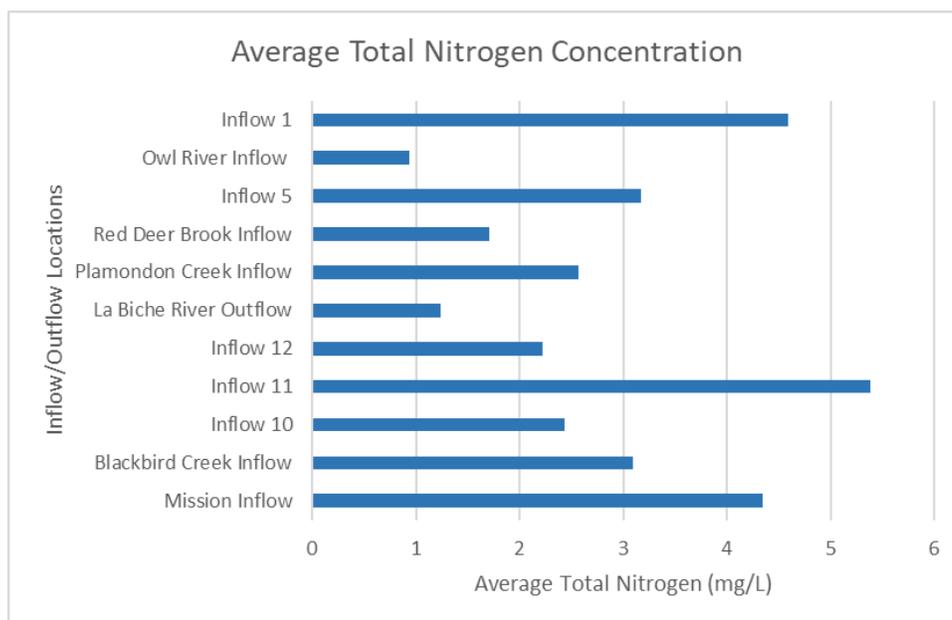


Figure 7: Inflow and outflow total nitrogen concentration for Lac La Biche Lake - 2019

### Total Phosphorous

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 lake bed 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 phosphorous analysis were collected on July 17 and August 14 in 2019 from the East Basin in Lac La Biche Lake. The analytical results are presented in Figure 8.

Total phosphorous was 0.097 mg/L in sample collected on July 17, 2019 which increased to 0.226 mg/L on August 15, 2019. Total phosphorous concentrations of all composite samples collected during 2019 exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines (0.050 mg/L) with an average of 0.16 mg/L total phosphorus. This average total phosphorus concentration classifies the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake as Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total phosphorus from composite samples.

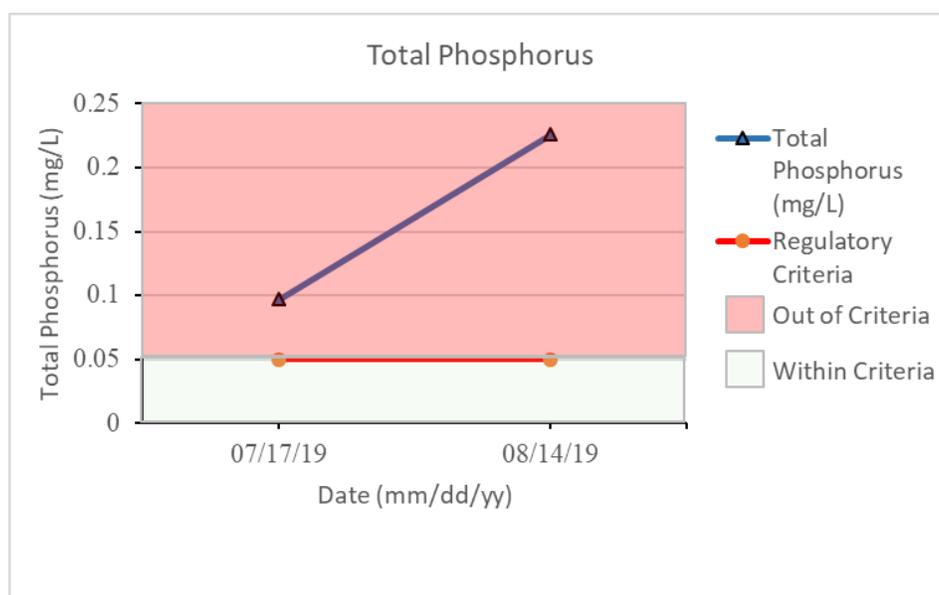


Figure 8: Total phosphorus from composite samples in East Basin of LLB Lake – 2019

### Kemmerer Sampling

Kemmerer water samples using Kemmerer sampling device were collected on March 13 and August 14, 2019 from depths of 3 m, 6 m, and 9 m and were analyzed for total phosphorous by ALS laboratories. The laboratory results are presented in Figure 9.

The total phosphorus concentration in lake water samples collected on August 14, 2019 were higher than the samples collected on March 13, 2019 at all depths. Total phosphorous concentrations in the samples collected on August 14 increased with lake depth. However, March 5 steadily decreased

through each depth. Total phosphorous in all samples collected March 5 and August 14 exceeded the applicable regulatory guidelines with an average total phosphorus concentration of 0.19 mg/L. 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 phosphorus.

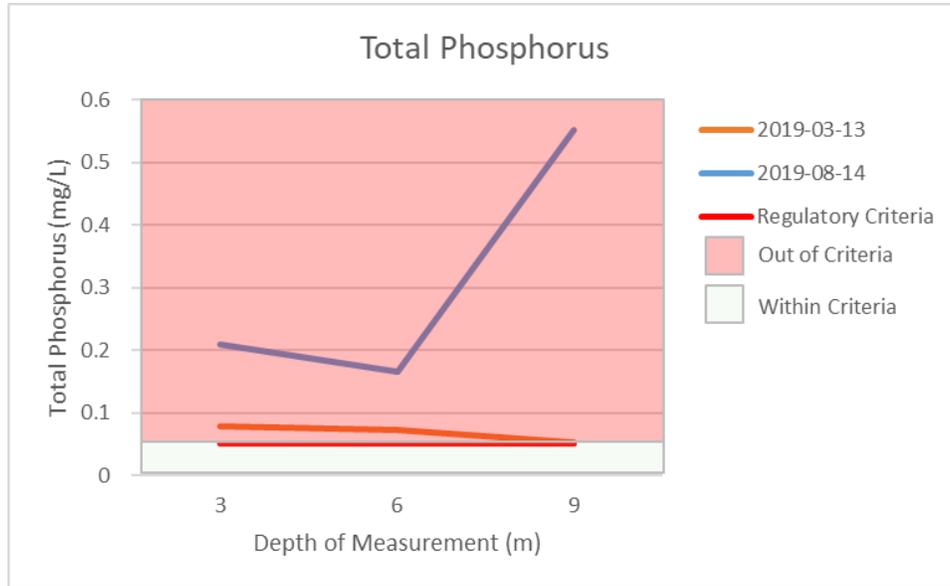


Figure 9: Total phosphorus from Kemmerer samples in East Basin of LLB Lake - 2019

***Inflow and Outflow Sampling***

The inflows and outflow for Lac La Biche Lake were collected on May 28, July 2, July 25, and August 8, 2019. Data regarding inflow total phosphorus concentrations is illustrated in Figure 10 below.

Total phosphorus concentrations in all of the inflow and outflow samples exceeded the applicable regulatory guideline 0.050 mg/L for total phosphorus concentration.

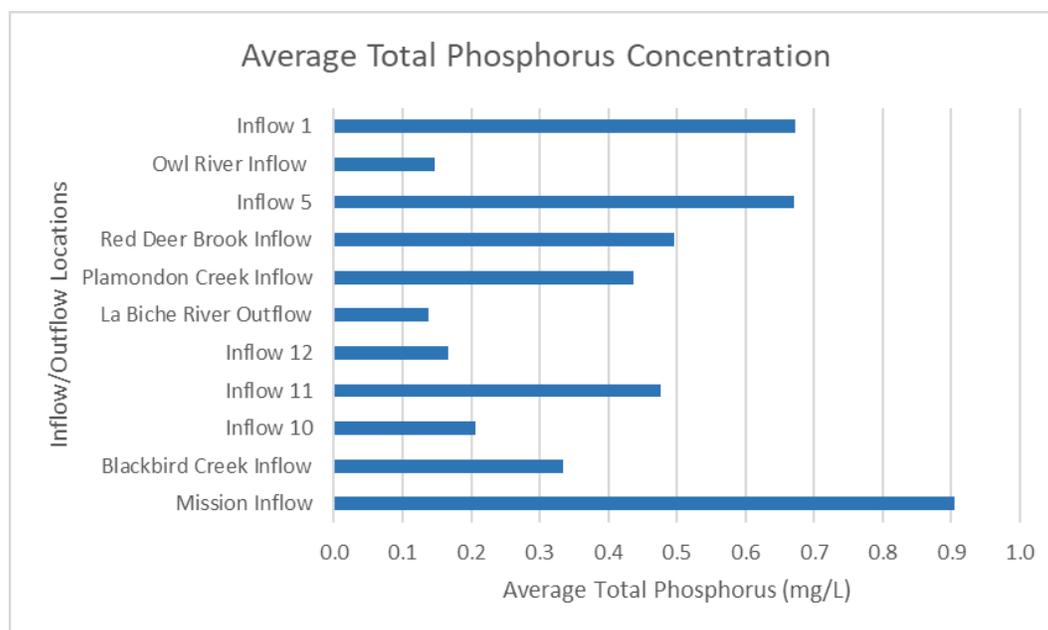


Figure 10: Inflow and outflow total phosphorous concentration for Lac La Biche Lake - 2019

#### ***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 limits the growth within lakes.

The average N:P ratios for composite and Kemmerer sampling events in the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake were 20:1 to 15:1, which very close to the Redfield Ratio of 16:1. Therefore, the total phosphorus may not be considered a limiting nutrient.

#### **4.5 Routine Water Chemistry**

Results of routine water chemistry of composite, Kemmerer, and inflow/outflow water samples collected from the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake are presented in Table 5 in Appendix A.

The average measured pH for East Basin was 7.97 which was consistent with the average of past years. 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 Lac La Biche 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.

#### **4.6 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 total dissolved metals from the composite, Kemmerer and inflow/outflow samples collected from the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake in 2019, were generally below detection limits and did not exceed the applicable regulatory guidelines (Table 6, Appendix A).

#### 4.7 Bacteriological Beach Sampling

Previously in Alberta, the water quality of recreational beaches had been evaluated using fecal indicator bacteria, such as fecal (thermotolerant) coliforms, *Escherichia coli*. A monitoring program was developed in 2012 that allowed a visual detection of algal blooms, along with the ability to sample for species composition and total cyanobacterial cell count. This program also allowed to sample for the concentrations of the most common cyanobacterial toxic, microcystin. Health Canada’s Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality (Health Canada 2012) were used to set the water quality targets.

It has been determined that *Enterococcus* species is a stronger health indicator than the previously tested fecal indicator, *E. coli* and coliforms. Based on the research (Wade et al., 2008) and the published work by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA 2014), *Enterococcus* was determined to be the best indicator organism for monitoring fecal contamination in swimming areas and other recreational water.

This sampling is done through a partnership between Lac La Biche County and Alberta Health Services. The County is responsible for obtaining the samples which are then delivered to Alberta Health Services. Alberta Health Services then ensures that the analysis is completed, and they are responsible for any subsequent beach closures.

The concentration of *Enterococcus* was within the criteria during June sampling. However, all subsequent sampling resulted in exceedances outside the criteria. Where there is exceedance of *Enterococcus*, Alberta Health Services issues a water quality advisory. Advisory signs are posted on site until samples show a concentration within criteria.

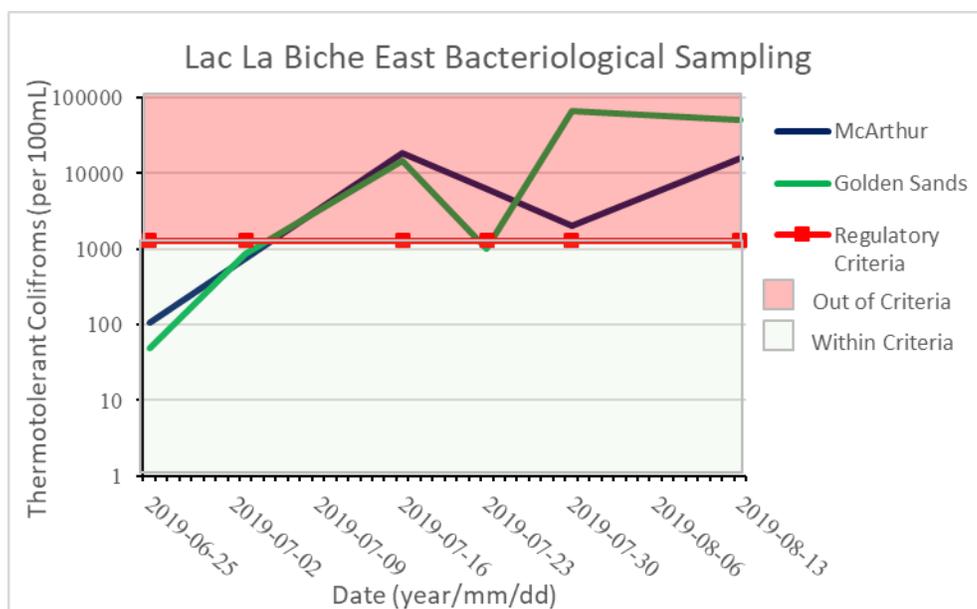


Figure 11: *Enterococcus* counts from beaches in East Basin of LLB Lake - 2019

## 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 the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake has historically been Mesotrophic (some productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) to Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on Secchi depth with little variation through the years. The Secchi depth ranges from 1.5 m to 2.9 m and has been less than the standard Oligotrophic Secchi depth of 4 m as shown ever since the monitoring began in 2006 (Figure 12). The low average Secchi depth means that the lake water has poor transparency due to suspended materials. The Secchi depth readings however, 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.

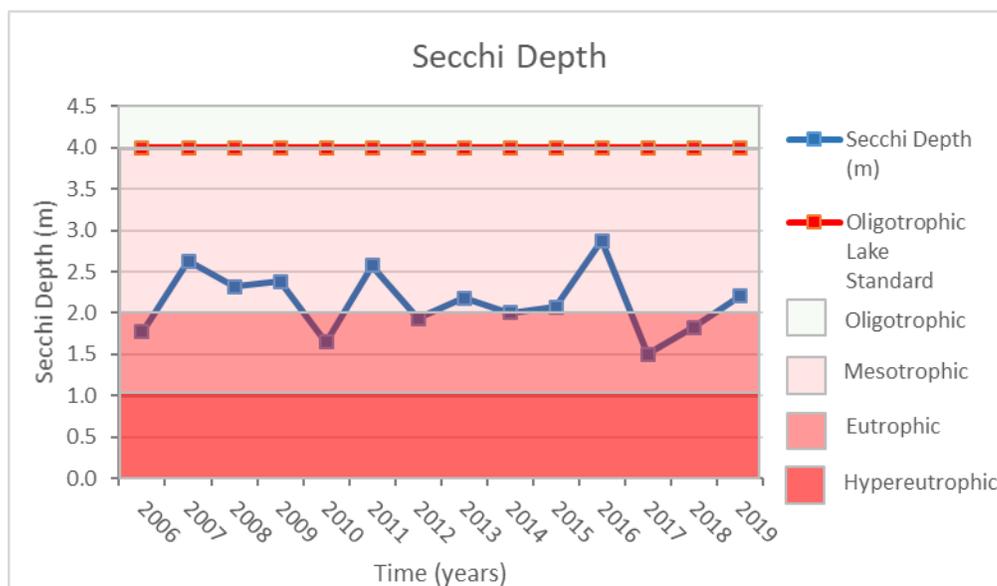


Figure 12: Historical trend for Secchi Depth in East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake

### 5.2 Total Nitrogen

Historical data indicates that the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake has been classified as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total nitrogen. The East Basin has been less than the regulatory guidelines of 1.0 mg/L of total nitrogen except during 2006, 2015, and 2017 to 2019. The maximum total nitrogen (3.15 mg/L) in East Basin was recorded in 2019 and the historical average of total nitrogen is 1.16 mg/L which is higher than the 0.82 mg/L total nitrogen reported in Atlas of Alberta Lakes (1990) indicating that total nitrogen load is increasing in LLB East Basin.

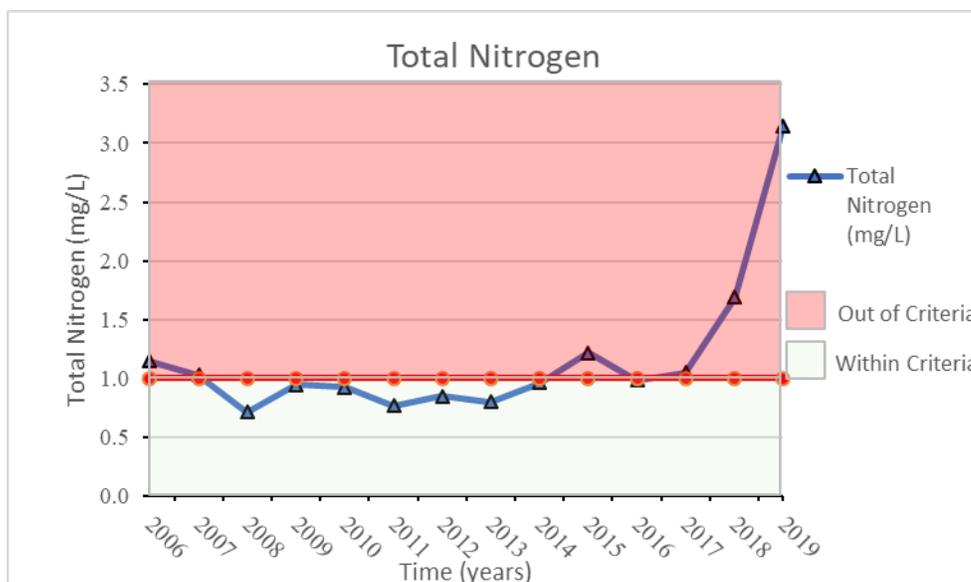


Figure 13: Historical trend of total nitrogen in East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake

### 5.3 Total Phosphorus

Historical data shows that total phosphorus concentration in the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake has ranged from 0.05 mg/L to 0.24 mg/L and has exceeded the regulatory criteria of 0.05 mg/L since 2006 as shown in Figure 14. Historical data shows that the East Basin of LLB Lake has been classified as Eutrophic (high productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) to Hypereutrophic (excessive productivity, nutrients, and algae growth) based on total phosphorus. A temporal increasing trend in total phosphorus concentration has been observed. The continuous increase of total phosphorus concentration in this lake clearly shows that phosphorus loading in this lake is increasing over time.

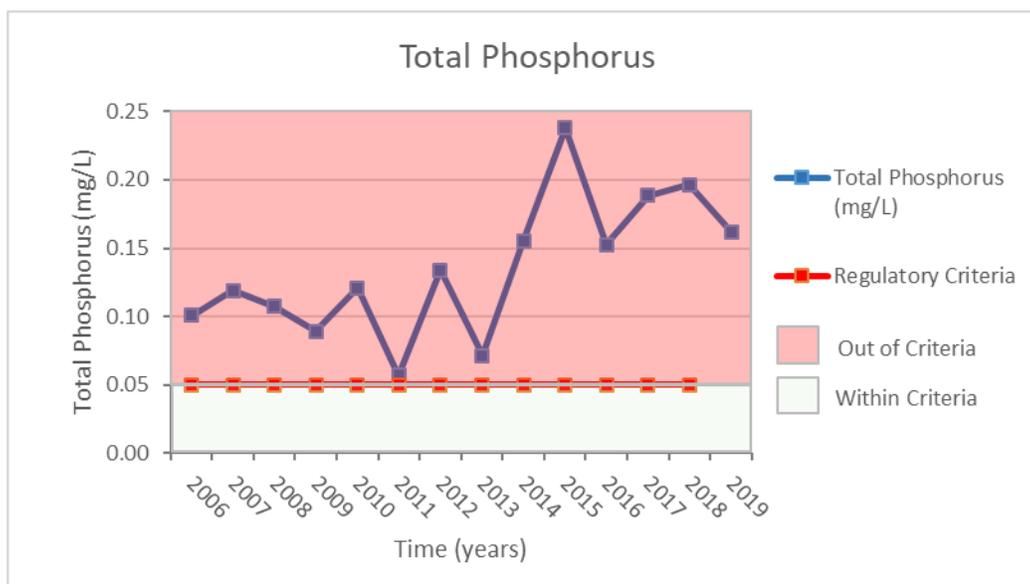


Figure 14: Historical trend of total phosphorus in East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake

## 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 the East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake based on Secchi depth and nutrients is presented in Table 2.

For the purpose of this report, the parameters used to determine the trophic state will only include Secchi depth, total nitrogen and total phosphorus. Chlorophyll will not be used to determine the trophic state. Chlorophyll 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. Chlorophyll concentration is measured as part of the County's monitoring program. However, the measurement can be an underestimate of algae biomass when blue-green algae are present. It is also difficult to have consistent measurements of Chlorophyll as there can be large variances in concentrations due to anomalies such as temperature and weather conditions such as precipitation and wind. Therefore, it is difficult to report Chlorophyll concentrations and make recommendations based on the results. Based on this information, Chlorophyll is not reported in this document.

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.

The East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake would be considered Hypereutrophic based on the average of the three water parameters Secchi depth, total nitrogen and total phosphorus. The trophic status would be Eutrophic based on Secchi depth, Hypereutrophic based on total nitrogen, and Hypereutrophic based on total phosphorus.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

A strategic monitoring plan should be developed by the County to ensure that sampling is carried out in a consistent manner for all lakes that are sampled each year. This would include sampling each lake the same number of times per year with a uniform sampling procedure; and implementing a quality assurance program for both the multi-probe and water chemistry analysis to ensure that data used to evaluate the lake water quality is accurate and reliable. By maintaining consistency in sampling programs, the County will be able to monitor changes occurring in lake water quality, and hence assist the County in developing policies and management practices to ensure the optimum health of the lake.

Nutrient loading is the main source of eutrophication in Lac La Biche 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 watershed protection and waste management; 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.



Figure 15: Map of Lac La Biche Lake with inflow/outflow locations

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# APPENDIX A

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

<b>Trophic State</b>	<b>Total Phosphorus (mg/L)</b>	<b>Total Nitrogen (mg/L)</b>	<b>Secchi Depth (m)</b>
Oligotrophic	<0.01	<0.35	>4
Mesotrophic	0.01 – 0.03	0.35 – 0.65	4 - 2
Eutrophic	0.03 – 0.10	0.65 – 1.20	2 - 1
Hypereutrophic	>0.10	>1.20	<1

Table 2: Trophic status of East Basin based on lake water parameters 2019

<b>Trophic State</b>	<b>Secchi Depth (m)</b>	<b>Total Nitrogen (mg/L)</b>	<b>Total Phosphorus (mg/L)</b>
<b>Oligotrophic</b>	>4	<0.35	<0.01
<b>Mesotrophic</b>	4 – 2	0.35 – 0.65	0.01 – 0.03
<b>Eutrophic</b>	2 – 1	0.65 – 1.00	0.0310 – 0.1
<b>Hypereutrophic</b>	<1	>1.2	>0.1
<b>LLB East Basin</b>	1.8	1.44	0.16
<b>Trophic State of LLB East Basin 2019</b>	Mesotrophic	Hypereutrophic	Hypereutrophic
<b>Trophic State of LLB East Basin 2018</b>	Eutrophic	Hypereutrophic	Hypereutrophic

Table 3: Average lake water N:P ratios for composite and Kemmerer samples from East Basin - 2019

<b>Sampling Event</b>	<b>Total Nitrogen (mg/L)</b>	<b>Total Phosphorus (mg/L)</b>	<b>N:P</b>
Composite Sampling	3.15	0.16	20:1
Kemmerer Sampling	2.83	0.19	15:1

Table 4: Routine water chemistry analysis from composite samples in East Basin of LLB Lake - 2019

Date of Sampling	13-Mar-19	17-Jul-19	14-Aug-19	22-Aug-19
	mg/l			
pH	7.246	8.255	8.218	8.112
Temperature (°C)	17.888	13.200	13.200	13.200
Ammonia, Total (as N)	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Nitrate (as N)	<0.020	<0.020	<0.020	<0.020
Nitrite (as N)	<0.010	<0.010	<0.010	<0.010
Nitrate and Nitrite (as N)	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022

\* Based on average pH and temperature of 7.97 and 14.0 °C of Lac La Biche East Basin in 2019

- 1: CCME C Guidelines, de-minimis criteria for Protection of Aquatic Life and Protection of Agricultural Water
- 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 Canadian Environmental Guidelines for the Protection of Agricultural Water

Table 5: Total recoverable metals from Kemmerer samples in East Basin of LLB Lake - 2019

<b>Lac La Biche East Metal Analysis</b>		
Analyte (periodic)	19 03 13 Concentration (mg/L)	19 08 15 Concentration (mg/L)
Aluminum (Al)-Total	<0.0030	0.0035
Arsenic (As)-Total	0.00107	0.00179
Calcium (Ca)-Total	32.4	32.2
Copper (Cu)-Total	<0.00050	<0.00050
Iron (Fe)-Total	<0.010	0.079
Lead (Pb)-Total	<0.000050	0.000054
Lithium (Li)-Total	0.0105	0.0106
Magnesium (Mg)-Total	11.4	11.2
Manganese (Mn)-Total	0.0426	0.19900
Mercury (Hg)-Total	<0.0000050	<0.0000050
Potassium (K)-Total	2.68	2.6
Sodium (Na)-Total	12.2	12.1
Sulfur (S)-Total	2.13	1.8
Zinc (Zn)-Total	0.0048	0.0445

\*Analysis for total dissolved metals began in 2016

1: CCME Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines, de-minimis criteria for Protection of Aquatic Life and Protection of Agricultural Water

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 Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines for Protection of Agricultural Water

Table 6: Historical data of routine chemistry and other parameters for East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake

Parameter	Year													
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
pH	8.62	8.60	8.60	8.47	8.48	8.39	8.86	8.39	8.30	8.90	8.30	8.72	8.36	8.13
Secchi Depth (m)	1.77	2.63	2.32	2.38	1.65	2.57	1.93	2.18	2.00	2.07	2.88	1.50	1.83	2.20
Total Nitrogen (mg/L)	1.15	1.03	0.72	0.95	0.93	0.77	0.85	0.80	0.96	1.22	0.99	1.05	1.69	3.15
Total Phosphorus (mg/L)	0.101	0.119	0.108	0.089	0.121	0.057	0.134	0.071	0.155	0.238	0.153	0.188	0.197	0.162
Nitrate/Nitrite (mg/L)	0.00	0.01	0.06	0.18	0.02	0.12	0.03	<0.071	0.09	0.07	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022	<0.022
Ammonia (mg/L)	0.11	0.02	0.04	0.13	0.05	0.08	0.08	<0.050	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.11	<0.050	<0.050
Specific Conductivity (µS/cm)	271	284	298	289	278	258	281	281	284	243	287	248	384	255

Table 7: Historical trend of total metals in East Basin of Lac La Biche Lake

Dissolved Metals	2016	2017	2018	2019	Criteria <sup>1</sup>	Criteria <sup>2</sup>
	------(mg/L)-----					
Aluminum (Al)	0.00425	0.0062	0.0041	0.0035	0.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.1
Antimony (Sb)	0.00011	0.0002	<0.0010	<0.00020	NS	NS
Arsenic (As)	0.00165	0.00166	0.00187	0.00179	0.005 <sup>a</sup>	0.005
Barium (Ba)	0.048	0.0423	0.0484	0.0455	NS	NS
Boron (B)	0.044	0.04	0.038	0.039	1.5 <sup>a</sup>	1.5
Cadmium (Cd)	<0.000005	0.0000055	<0.0000050	<0.000010	0.00009 <sup>a</sup>	0.00019
Chromium (Cr)	<0.00010	0.00012	<0.00010	<0.00020	NS	NS
Copper (Cu)	<0.00050	0.00172	<0.00050	0.0016	0.0032 <sup>a</sup>	0.02
Iron (Fe)	0.025	0.072	0.141	0.045	0.3 <sup>a</sup>	0.3
Lead (Pb)	<0.00005	0.000057	0.000064	<0.00010	0.005 <sup>a</sup>	0.0042
Manganese (Mn)	0.052	0.17	0.27	0.0782	0.2 <sup>b</sup>	NS
Mercury (Hg)	<0.000005	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	<0.0000050	0.000026 <sup>a</sup>	NS
Nickel (Ni)	<0.0005	<0.00050	<0.00060	<0.0010	0.125 <sup>a</sup>	0.063
Selenium (Se)	<0.00005	<0.000050	<0.000050	<0.00010	0.001 <sup>a</sup>	NS
Silver (Ag)	<0.01	<0.000010	<0.000010	<0.000020	0.00025 <sup>a</sup>	0.00025
Uranium (U)	0.049	0.000047	0.000054	0.000063	0.01 <sup>b</sup>	0.015
Zinc (Zn)	<0.003	0.0069	0.0096	<0.0060	0.007 <sup>a</sup>	0.03

1: CCME Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines, de-minimis criteria for Protection of Aquatic Life and Protection of Agricultural Water

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 Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines for Protection of Agricultural Water