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HEADLINE: Has someone been poisoning Spring Lake?

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Has someone been poisoning Spring *Lake*?Laurie Rich Salerno Record–Journal

1 comment

WALLINGFORD " Ed Bradley walks around the *lake* behind his house nearly every morning. This summer he noticed it was clear for the first time in memory, with no *weeds* or algae blooms.

"I don't know how many mornings I walked by and admired the *lake* until I realized " 'Hey, something's wrong here,' " Bradley said.

Spring *Lake* was missing the algae, water lilies, *weeds* and other aquatic plants that have grown each summer, an important part of the ecosystem of the little *lake*, which is home to a variety of fish, birds and other animals. The small body of water near Route 68 is surrounded by about 30 private homes.

Bradley called the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection in August. He also contacted the town's Water Division, because the *lake* is upstream from a public watershed. Several other neighbors noticed the change, too, and called the town and other agencies. One of those neighbors was Scott Gray, who said he called several times to push for testing of the water after noticing the changes.

A DEEP report from the Pesticide Program is still being prepared by the department, but a separate report by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station's Invasive Aquatic Plant program determined that a chemical had nearly eradicated all the plant life in the *lake*.

"Somebody had to just go in there and nuke the *lake*," said Mark June–Wells, the biological limnologist who prepared the report. "It took me like an hour to find a plant."

The source of the suspected chemical remains a mystery. After surveying the *lake* on Sept. 1 and comparing it with reports of what it had looked like in previous years, June–Wells says he believes someone living near the *lake* poured an herbicide without following directions in an effort to clear it of the *weeds* and algae and make it fit for recreational use.

June–Wells and town Environmental Planner Erin O'Hare both said there had been resident complaints over the years about the dense *weeds* and algae blooms on the *lake*.

But Bradley and Gray point out that Bristol–Myers Squibb received two permits from the DEEP in April to apply an aquatic pesticide to two of its storm water basin ponds that feed into Muddy River, which in turn feeds Spring *Lake*, according to a detailed memo by O'Hare. The company performed two applications, on June 22 and July 11, according to the memo. Bristol–Myers Squibb media representatives could not immediately be reached for comment Wednesday.

But June–Wells said in his report that he did not believe the plant eradication was due to products traveling downstream from the ponds. He reached that conclusion after speaking with the company that applied the

pesticide to Bristol–Myers Squibb's ponds and conducting his own survey of the *lake*. He said the applications upstream weren't concentrated enough to travel through a river and do the massive amount of damage to the *lake* below. He believes whatever killed the plants was directly applied to the *lake*.

Although Spring *Lake* is upstream from town watershed, the Water Division said in August that it did not have any concerns about drinking water contamination, according to the memo. The Health Department also did not report any effect on neighbors' wells, or from skin contact.

June–Wells said fish were not harmed by the herbicide, but amphibians and snails may have been. The lily pads and blooms are not likely to return, he said. Other plants may, he said, but non–native species will likely dominate over native species.

"It's going to completely change the community identity. Imagine it as a tornado that ripped through a forest. Is that forest going to look like it used to? No," June–Wells said.

That's disappointing to Bradley and Gray, who both enjoy the thriving nature of the place. Both are anticipating the DEEP report, which should include analyses of samples taken at the site. The DEEP representative in charge of the report was out of the office Wednesday, but O'Hare said she expects it will be completed in mid–October.

Bradley, who has lived with his family on the *lake* since 1974, is worried that some birds " Canada geese, osprey, herons " may not return, and said that the eggs of the *lake's* resident swan this summer did not hatch.

Gray canoes the *lake*, and the *weeds*, he said, are usually dense, making paddling near–impossible by fall, but he said he and his wife enjoy the quiet nature of the spot.

"In the summertime we neighbors on the *lake* make jokes that we'll walk over to one another's houses because the *weeds* are so thick," Gray said. As for the plant eradication, "It's not a natural thing " it probably killed off the frogs ... I've seen nothing but dead snail shells."

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Highlights: Lake, lake, weeds