

# Lake study showed effects of acid rain

**BY GLEN MOBERG**  
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MINOCQUA – Researchers have wrapped up a 30-year study of the effects of air and water pollution on a northern Wisconsin Lake.

The experiment involved dividing Little Rock Lake north of Minocqua into two halves: one clean and one dirty.

The 39-acre lake in the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest is back to normal now after scientists and scuba divers recently removed a thick plastic curtain that had divided the lake into two halves since 1984.

One half of the lake was left undisturbed, while the other was slowly doused with acid to measure the effects of sulfur dioxide pollution from coal-fired power plants.

The simulated acid rain destroyed the native fish population, according to research scientist Carl Watras with the state Department of Natural Resources.

“The fishery basically collapsed,” he said. “We eventually got to a point where the bass stopped reproducing. The eggs just deteriorated on the nest.”

Watras said the acid also produced an ugly algae bloom on the bottom of the lake.

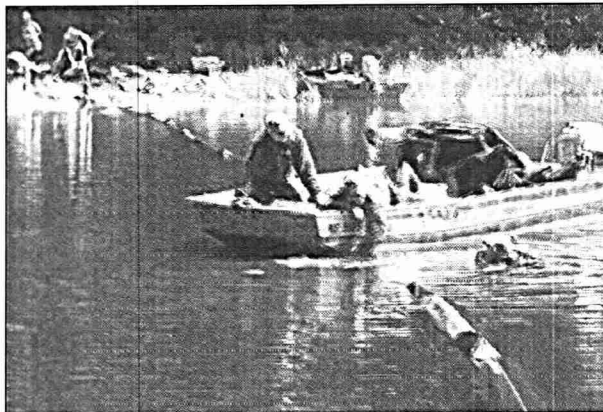
“A dense mat of filamentous algae developed, sometimes a meter thick,” he said. “It was like very, very fine angel hair spaghetti, but green.”

The experiment resulted in 130 peer-reviewed scientific papers and Watras said

it also led to new anti-pollution laws at the state and federal level.

“The initial work here played into Wisconsin’s acid rain bill in 1986 and it played into the Clean Air Act amendments in 1990,” he said.

The new laws have been successful in cutting sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, but planet-warming carbon dioxide is still a problem, according to Watras.



Researchers recently wrapped up a pollution study on Little Rock Lake near Minocqua.

Photo Courtesy of Wisconsin DNR

