

Allatoona, EPD both inclined to spell phosphorus with an 'F'

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IN SCHOOL WHEN you fail, you have to repeat the test until you get it right, but when it comes to water quality in Lake Allatoona, it appears Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is on the verge of graduating a student that has yet to pass its exit exams.

In 2006, Lake Allatoona got an "F" in phosphorus.

High levels of this nutrient have caused an increase in chlorophyll-a in the lake — an indicator of excessive algae growth that can deplete oxygen levels and kill fish. It also results in increased treatment costs for drinking water. Last summer, the Cobb-Marietta Water Authority spent an additional \$500,000 to make its product palatable for its customers.

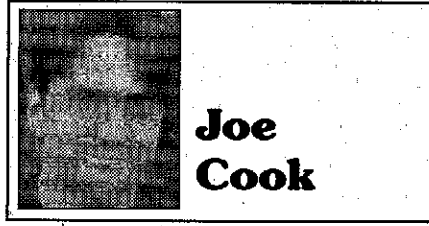
The majority of Allatoona's phosphorus comes from hard to pinpoint and difficult to eliminate "non-point sources" — the nutrient-rich soup that runs off lawns, farm fields, pastures and city streets after heavy rains.

The remainder gets to Allatoona when it is discharged from sewage-treatment plants.

Because of Allatoona's "F," we are required by federal law to eliminate this pollution problem and restore the lake.

Instead, the state agency charged with the clean up is now considering issuing a permit to the Cherokee County Water & Sewerage Authority (CCWSA) to construct a wastewater treatment plant that will ultimately discharge as much as 3,164 pounds of phosphorus into the Etowah River that feeds Lake Allatoona.

THIS IS THE EQUIVALENT of the gardener dosing his pumpkins with fertilizer to secure the biggest pumpkin prize at the county fair.



Joe Cook is the Coosa Riverkeeper and executive director of the Rome-based Coosa River Basin Initiative.

Want bigger algae on Lake Allatoona? Simple — add more phosphorus.

Despite data that show the Etowah arm of Lake Allatoona has failed to meet chlorophyll-a water quality standards for three out of the past five years — including a tremendous spike during last year's drought, it appears the EPD will deem it OK to add more fertilizer.

Currently, municipal wastewater treatment facilities in Cherokee County discharge about 6,000 pounds of phosphorus into the Etowah and Allatoona each year. In recent years, discharges have been reduced dramatically, but the algae problems in Allatoona remain, suggesting that greater reductions are needed from wastewater treatment facilities and other sources.

This can be accomplished with money and political will... and if EPD acts as it should and mandates it. Existing wastewater treatment facilities in Cherokee County discharge phosphorus at levels more than two times greater than those allowed at Gwinnett County's

state-of-the-art facility which releases wastewater to Lake Lanier — another lake that has received an "F" in phosphorus.

If CCWSA and the City of Canton matched the Gwinnett facility, they could cut their phosphorus discharges by more than 60 percent. These reductions would make room for CCWSA's new plant while still reducing total phosphorus discharges.

SADLY FOR ALLATOONA and those who enjoy it, including many from Rome and Floyd County, the EPD is moving in the opposite direction. While the agency expects to complete a long-term cleanup plan for the lake within the next year (presumably one that actually reduces phosphorus loads), EPD's interim phosphorus management plan allows Cherokee County to more than double its load to as much as 14,343 pounds per year.

When a school acts in this manner, the result is illiterate, unemployable young adults.

If EPD ignores Allatoona's failing grades and issues wastewater discharge permits that exacerbate already existing problems, the result could be a lake unfit for drinking water and recreation.

Will it cost money to remove more phosphorus from our sewage? You bet it will, but the alternative means gambling the future of our drinking water supplies and the \$93 million that the lake pumps into local communities each year through recreation and tourism spending.

That's not a gamble EPD should force upon the citizens of Cherokee, Cobb and Bartow counties.

Just a second!

There are no red lights in Greater Rome ... when it comes to finding new ways to extract money from the citizens.