

MORGAN RESIDENTS' AND LANDOWNERS' GUIDE TO THE FINAL REPORT: ECHO & SEYMOUR LAKES WATERSHED ACTION PLAN

Remembering the heavy rain storms which ravaged the land surrounding Seymour Lake, this plan comes at just the right time. The plan presents actions which land owners in our community can take to mitigate future serious destruction and the possibility of harmful algae blooms. The action plan was developed for the entire Echo-Seymour watershed, but this guide addresses only the Seymour Lake watershed which includes most of the land in Morgan and a little in Holland.

The guide is written to assist landowners in the watershed in finding the projects involving their land, the streams on their land and both town and private roads. The Action Plan was approved and paid for by Vermont's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to help the landowners, town and lake association identify specific projects designed to best control the runoff of flowing water in order to maintain the lake in good condition so that people can continue to fish, swim and recreate safely in the lake. The funding was awarded to Memphremagog Watershed Association and Orleans County Conservation District staff (which we will refer to as the Team) to collect information about the watershed and present specific projects which will not only protect the lake, but also mitigate storm damage throughout the watershed.

A lake is filled with water flowing from all the streams which flow into it from the highest points of the land to the lakeshore. This geographical drainage area is called a watershed. A watershed encompasses all land, streams, roads and infrastructure upon which precipitation falls, thus all landowners have a stake in preserving the landscape, the surface waters, the infrastructure and wildlife. Seymour Lake Association volunteers assisted the Team and have created this Guide because the report is 37 pages long and filled with technical terms. More details can be learned by reading portions of the full report.

Seymour Lake Association has supported this Lake Watershed Action Plan (LWAP) because of the benefits of having expert advice identifying specific projects which when completed will reduce sediment and phosphorus flowing into the lake, improve streams, lessen the damage to land and buildings from storms and lower the need for frequent repair of both Town and private roads. The Team began to identify specific projects by surveying the forested, agricultural and developed parts of the watershed. They collaborated with local volunteers, the town and Seymour Lake Association to conduct assessments of streams, private/ town road erosion and the lakeshore. Many of the assessments were redone after the 2023 and 2024 storms caused severe damage.

Projects the Team identified include restoring stream banks, stabilizing steep banks, managing road and stormwater to prevent washouts, upgrading stream crossings with properly installed right-sized culverts, increasing native vegetation on the lakeshore and adopting agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). The report describes in detail plans for specific projects which have been prioritized based on criteria including phosphorus reduction, sediment reduction, cost, feasibility and benefits to people and wildlife.

Two projects were identified as highest priority with plans for initial designs, which will then be used to apply for grant funds and implemented as soon as possible. Other identified projects will be addressed when land owners, the Town of Morgan and Seymour Lake Association find the time and resources to implement the plans. Some projects are as simple as allowing a 15 foot buffer of natural vegetation to grow on stream banks, the lakeshore and on steep banks throughout the watershed. More complex projects include installing open top culverts in driveways, planting rain gardens, restoring wetlands, building infiltration steps to access the lake shore or a stream and creating the means for aquatic organisms such as smelt to move up streams from the lake. For some identified projects, costs will need to be covered by the landowners including the Town. It will take time and work to apply, but there is much grant money available for the more costly projects. The Team, Town and SLA have begun working on accessing the grant funding.

Officially, the work of the Team to create the plans ends at the end of this year. However, MWA, Orleans County Conservation District and their close partner Northwoods Stewardship Center remain to advise and support us when we ask for help. What you can do is to learn about these projects and then find ways to help complete them. If you only have time to read one section of this report, please look for the parts of Section 5 which interest you the most. This section includes:

- 5.1 Priority Project Selection
- 5.2 30% Preliminary Designs
- 5.3 Next Steps
- 5.4 Flood Recovery
- 5.5 Landowners
- 5.6 Lake Associations
- 5.7 Municipalities
- 5.8 Local Conservation Partners
- 5.9 Workshops
- 5.10 Broader Recommendations
- 5.11 Lakeshores
- 5.12 Streams & Stream Crossings
- 5.13 Town Roads & Private Drives
- 5.14 Agriculture & Forestry
- 5.15 Wastewater Systems & Zoning

Click on this link to access the full report:

 FINAL REPORT Echo-Seymour LWAP w Figures.pdf