



A heron plucks a fish from Esquimalt Lagoon near an algae bloom in July. A lagoon watchdog says a similar bloom depleted the water of oxygen last month.

Amy Dove/News staff

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Dead fish in lagoon linked to stormwater

By Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette

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Esquimalt Lagoon residents had a nasty surprise in September when crabs literally ran from the water, leaving behind fish gasping for air in the reeds.

People reported finding carcasses on the shore while fish darted around in the water, searching for oxygen, said Natalie Bandringa, Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative (ELSI) co-ordinator. While there is no way to tell how many animals died, it is clear that an algae bloom was to blame, she said.

ELSI hired a consultant to test both the water quality and algae in the water following a large bloom last year. No animals were reported dead in 2007, but it was important that testing be done throughout the next event to determine the cause, Bandringa said.

Test results have yet to be finalized, although it is thought the bloom was encouraged by nutrient rich runoff entering the Lagoon, she said. That could either be via the creeks or through stormwater.

“That means that this might have been urban induced,” she said, noting such events can happen naturally.

The bloom triggered what is known as a rollover event. As the algae dies and sinks to the bottom of the lagoon, it takes oxygen out of the water. The colder water on the bottom flips with warmer water from the surface, landing the deoxygenated water on top.

There have been years when there were algae blooms but no rollovers, Bandringa said. Rollovers were reported twice in the 1990s.

When the results are finalized, ELSI hopes the information will help them better inform residents about how to keep the lagoon water’s healthy.

“If we can work with local residents with fertilizers on their lawn maybe we can stop future urban induced incidents,” she said. “If we can make the link to the personal actions I think that’s a good thing.”

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