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Lagoon algae bloom ‘natural’

By Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette

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Heron at Esquimalt Lagoon are dipping their feet in an algae bloom as the summer weather heats up.

The bloom is perfectly natural, but members of the Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative are keen to know what is causing it to grow so large, said ELSI co-ordinator Jody Watson. Blooms happen every year, some larger than others. While the overall impact of their presence has never been studied, decomposing algae has been linked to significant fish kills in the past, Watson said.

Algae blooms during the summer and floats until the end of August or early September, generally. In the fall it sinks to the bottom, cooling the water and sucking oxygen out. With lower water levels in the Lagoon due to summer tides and warmer weather, a “rollover event” occurs, she explained.

“The cold and hot water start to flip. In that type of a system it seems to result in a deoxygenated layer (on top),” she said, noting that explains water discoloration in the fall.

Studies done in the 1970s and 80s when Royal Roads was still a military college indicate that while the algae’s presence in the Lagoon is natural, nutrient-rich runoff may be to blame, Watson said. Whether that is coming from stormwater, leaky septic systems or somewhere else is unknown.

ELSI is currently looking for a University of Victoria masters student interested in doing further investigations. If that doesn’t happen the group may look to professional consultants, she said.

“We would like to get some samples done ... throughout the rollover event,” she said.

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