WHAT IS THAT FLOATING GREEN ALGAE ON THE LAKE?

The now-clear Lake Belle View is currently experiencing a bloom of filamentous algae. Unlike previous years when benthic algae blooms carried a strong stench and carp roiled the waters muddy, this unsightly type of algae is not without value.

Filamentous algae resembles wet wool. It starts growing along the bottom in shallow water or attached to structures in the water (like rocks or other aquatic plants). As this algae breaks loose, it often floats to the surface where it forms the dense mats currently being seen. Filamentous algae grows well in spring and early summer when water temperatures are cool, and before growth of rooted plants.

Filamentous algae provide habitats for many small insects, worms and crustaceans. Both the algae and small critters that inhabit the plants are food for a number of small fish species. Unlike benthic algae, filamentous algae does not produce the toxins that can be dangerous to both animals and humans.

Lake Belle View is in an early transitional stage of the ongoing restoration. It has only minimal growths of submersed and floating leaf plants, such as native pondweeds and water lilies. When these plants haven't been established, and when nutrients are available from the recently exposed lake sediments, this type of algae growth is not unexpected. Algae growth may diminish as the summer goes along, depending on how much rooted plant grow. Longer term, as the rooted plants are established and compete for nutrients, this type of growth will diminish.

Over a period of several years, the amount of available nutrients in the lake will also diminish as the low nutrient groundwater (spring water) entering the lake washes out leaches the nutrients currently present in the lake. Even after rooted plants and groundwater inputs become more dominant, there will always be some growth of this type of algae but it will be much more limited than is currently present.

What Can be Done?: Although this type of algae can be controlled by use of chemicals such as copper sulfate, control at this time is not recommended. This algae is currently providing habitat needed by the minnows and other forage fish to feed and reproduce.

In the future, perhaps even beginning next season, filamentous algae can be readily controlled by harvesting such as being done in many of Dane County lakes. In addition to removing the mats, harvesting also helps by removing the nutrients associated with these plants. Smaller less expensive removal efforts can involve raking from shore or towing a boom from a small boat to skim the plants toward shore where the material can be removed and composted for fertilizer.

FILAMENTOUS ALGAE

AQUATIC PLANT HARVESTOR