



Fall routines to help protect the lake and aquatic habitats

Fall is a season of transition on Lake Winnepesaukee. The busy hum of summer fades into quiet, crisp mornings. For many, it's also the time to "close up camp" until next year. But while these seasonal routines have become second nature, they can also leave a mark on the lake if we aren't careful. With a little extra thought, you can finish the season strong while protecting the waters we all love.

One of the biggest fall cleanup mistakes is blowing or raking leaves into the lake. Yes, leaves will find their way into the water naturally, but adding more on purpose is a very different story.

Because they're natural, it may seem harmless, but it's not. When leaves decompose underwater, they release phosphorus and nitrogen. These nutrients fuel algae, plant and cyanobacteria blooms. This is significant because one pound of phosphorus can fuel 500 pounds of algal growth.

Even a few wheelbarrows of leaves dumped into a cove can be enough to tip the balance. The same goes for grass clippings, branches, and other yard debris.

Once in the water, they quickly break down, consuming oxygen fish, insects, and amphibians depend on. Piles of organic matter can also smother spawning beds and nearshore habitat.

Starting in 2026, House Bill 416 will make it illegal in New Hampshire to dump yard waste into any surface waters, lakes, ponds, rivers, or streams, with fines in place for violators. The law reinforces what should already be common sense — the lake is not a compost pile.

Existing rules, like the Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act (RSA 483-B), require keeping a natural buffer within 250 feet of the shoreline, including a tightly protected waterfront zone and woodland buffer farther back. A newly passed measure, Senate Bill 299, also adds accountability by allowing the state to fine contractors who clear



By BREE ROSSITER
Lake Winnepesaukee Alliance

too much vegetation without a permit, a responsibility that previously fell only on property owners.

So, what can you do instead? Try mulching leaves back into your lawn, composting, or bringing them to a collection site if you must get rid of them. Clear gutters before the first heavy rain so they don't flush nutrient-rich debris into the lake. If you're cutting back gardens, or overturning your soil, consider leaving some of the vegetation as a cover, which provides winter habitat for pollinators while also

stabilizing soil.

For those removing docks and boats, it's important to check for aquatic hitchhikers. Invasive plants like variable milfoil can cling to anchors, ladders, and trailers. A quick clean, drain, and dry before storage helps stop the spread.

Another key step in closing up camp is paying attention to what gets stored near the shoreline. While fertilizers and pesticides aren't supposed to be applied close to the water, bags and containers often end up in sheds, boathouses, or garages right along the shore. Add in fuel cans for boats or lawn equipment, and it's easy for rain or snowmelt to carry small leaks or spills straight into the lake. The best approach is to keep these materials well back from the water for winter, or rethink how much you really need to bring to camp in the first place.

As winter approaches, dock owners also start to think about ice damage. Deicers and bubblers protect property, but if run too aggressively they can open up large areas of water. That wastes electricity, makes ice unsafe for recreation, and stirs up sediments that damage habitat.

It also leaves stretches of open water exposed to sunlight all winter long, light that would normally be blocked by ice.

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LAKE REGION BOATING

4-H Wild Side guide training Sept. 26-28

ALTON BAY — New Hampshire 4-H will host a training weekend for those interested in becoming a 4-H Wild Guides, Sept. 26-28, at Camp Kabeyun on Lake Winnepesaukee.

This immersive experience prepares volunteers to lead youth and families through outdoor adventures that build physical fitness, environmental literacy, and wilderness skills.

Wild Guides are trained volunteers who host outdoor experiences aligned with Wildside Challenge criteria. They help youth grow in confidence, competence, and connection to nature.

Wild Guides receive:

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Requirements include: Attend the full training weekend; host at least two guided experiences annually; and maintain communication with program staff.

The weekend will include a leadership workshop, wilderness trip leading 101, a hike of Mt. Major as well as first aid and CPR certification training. Volunteers must be 21 years or older.

For more information, email Michael.Harris@unh.edu. To register, visit 4h.zsuite.org/event-registrations/41472.

How will this year's weather impact fall foliage?

By KATE DARIO
NEW HAMPSHIRE PUBLIC RADIO

In a state where foliage-related tourism is an economic driver, there's hope that each fall will bring vibrant colors. But, like so many other aspects of the state's natural landscape, climate change is affecting fall leaves.

Tree scientists don't have a crystal ball on exactly how foliage will turn out, but they can make some educated guesses based on previous weather, trees' overall health and expected fall weather.

This fall's outlook isn't looking too promising after a cool wet spring, and a dry, hot summer. Now, most of the state is in a drought, with some of the worst conditions in the north.

But "fall foliage is extremely complex," said Steven Roberge, a forester with the UNH Cooperative Extension.

Roberge said heavy rain can lead to dark spots and leaf dimpling and dry conditions can hurt trees further. Still, he said what matters more is the weather during the fall itself. He said ideal foliage conditions are like ideal maple sugar conditions: cold nights and bright, sunny days. The larger concern is if those temperatures don't happen, he said, not just the weather so far this year.

"We may just have more of a muted kind of response if we don't have those colder temperatures during the fall," he said.

But other scientists, like Nat Cleavitt at Hubbard Brook

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NH Order of Rainbow Girls dedicate year to science center

HOLDERNESS — Squam Lakes Natural Science Center recently received a donation from the Grand Assembly of NH Order of Rainbow Girls, resulting from a yearlong effort led by Jaeda Bastien. The Rainbow Girls raised funds through creative and dedicated activities, hosting an "Enchanted Forest" ball, selling commemorative pins and T-shirts, and raffling baskets at their state convention.

Bastien, along with fellow members, selected the Science Center as their annual focus out of a desire to give back to a place dedicated to connecting people with nature and conservation. Throughout the year, the group not only raised support but also rolled up their sleeves as volunteers, helping pull invasive weeds from the campus. Additionally, Bastien and other Rainbow Girls made presentations at assemblies to raise awareness for the Science Center's mission.

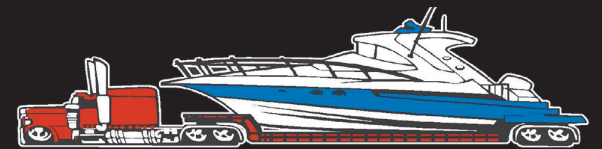
"We are deeply grateful to Jaeda and the Grand Assembly of NH Order of Rainbow Girls for their generosity, creativity, and hands-on help," said Executive Director of Squam Lakes Natural Science Center Iain MacLeod. "Their commitment is a wonderful example of youth leadership and community spirit making a real impact."

For more information, visit nhnature.org.



Members of the Grand Assembly of NH Order of Rainbow Girls volunteered with and raised funds for Squam Lakes Natural Science Center over the last year. From left, Supreme Deputy in NH Stacy Desrosiers and Grand Worthy Advisory 2024-25 Jaeda Bastien give Squam Lakes Volunteer Manager Carol Raymond the organization's donation. (Courtesy photo)

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LAKE REGION BOATING

ROUTINES from page 16

Extra sunlight penetrating the water column can give algae and cyanobacteria a head start before spring. The best practice is to run bubblers on a timer or thermostat, and only in the immediate area that needs protection. The smaller the footprint, the healthier and safer it is for both people and the lake.

With the lake level so low this fall, it's also a perfect time to walk your shoreline and pick up litter. Fishing line, old cans, and other trash can easily get caught in rocks or vegetation and stay hidden until water levels drop.

Fishing line in particular is a serious hazard — it can entangle loons, ducks, and fish often with deadly results. Taking a few minutes to clear debris not only keeps your property looking better, but also protects wildlife and prevents plastics and metals from breaking down into the water over time.

Finally, don't overlook the value of a natural shoreline buffer. Many seasonal homeowners trim vegetation before leaving, but leaving a strip of native plants along the water's edge is one of the best defenses against pollution. Buffers filter runoff, hold soil in place, and provide year-round habitat.

Closing up camp is part of the seasonal cycle of life for many Winnepesaukeeans. By being mindful we can make sure our routines don't come at the lake's expense. A little extra care now will pay off with cleaner water, healthier habitats, and a lake that's ready to welcome you back next summer.

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Bree Rossiter is the conservation program manager for the Lake Winnepesaukee Alliance. She manages the water quality monitoring program, cyanobacteria monitoring initiatives, the Winni Blue/LakeSmart program, and assists with watershed management planning efforts. Bree can be reached at brossiter@winnepesaukee.org. The Lake Winnepesaukee Alliance is a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the water quality and natural resources of the lake and its watershed. To learn more, visit winnepesaukee.org.

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Experimental Forest in Woodstock, think the damage may already be done.

She's pessimistic that this extreme "zigzagging" left trees "stressed out."

"The leaves are only getting worse," said Cleavitt. "I would think that we're going toward more browns and yellows and not toward a lot of vivid colors."

She said the rainy spring led to insect damage, which she saw in the sugar maple, American beech and yellow birch she's studying at Hubbard Brook. All of those species had thrip and young caterpillar damage.

Then, she said the summer weather became hot, dry and sunny, which sucked water out of the trees' leaves and led to canopy dieback.

Amey Bailey, a forest technician also at Hubbard Brook, echoed Cleavitt's observations. She said the drought has caused early deterioration in certain species, leading to some brown leaves already cropping up. She described this year as "a perfect storm" of challenges for trees.

"They're just kind of giving up," she said.

Different species are more resilient to drought than others. Beech trees, which make up about 30% of hardwoods in the state, are particularly vulnerable. Cleavitt predicts large swaths of them will die this year, like they did following the 2021 drought.

Trees play a crucial role in fighting climate change by removing carbon from the atmosphere, but when trees are under stress they can't function as well.

"An unhealthy forest is not capturing as much carbon as a healthy forest for sure," she said.

Climate change is making these extreme weather swings more common. In New Hampshire, climatologists predict the state will become wetter and warmer and more at risk for short-term droughts. Bailey said warming temperatures will likely change fall in compli-

cated ways.

"Climate change is causing it to stay warmer later into the fall, and so the trees have the potential to keep green on longer because it's warm," she said. "But climate change has caused so much stress to the trees that they really can't flourish the way you might wish them to."

Peak foliage varies across the state, ranging from late September in the North Country to late October in the southern part of the state.

Roberge, the forester with UNH extension, wants people to spend some time in the woods this fall regardless of what predictions people like him have made.

"Get out there, experience the landscape, because you're definitely going to find either one brilliant tree that the sun hits just right or a vista that looks great," he said.

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