

Light Pollution: Your Lake is at Risk

One of my fondest and most vivid memories growing up in Haliburton County was the night sky. Like so many kids, we spent hours lying on the dock gazing at the stars while contemplating the universe and the meaning of life.

Of course, we still do that today and it is still amazing. However, while I've always struggled to repress my uneasiness over sharing the dock with an unknown number of spiders, these days I also struggle to ignore the piercing glare of dozens of LED lights around the lake's perimeter.

During this year's Perseid Meteor Shower, the celestial highlight of the summer season, I was out in the middle of the lake to enjoy the show from my canoe, and honestly, the number of artificial lights on the water's edge made my heart sink.

Okay. I like it dark so I can see the night sky. Maybe you're not bothered. What should bother everyone is "ecological light pollution"; not the light pollution that obscures the night sky (for star nerds like me) but rather light that points into our lakes, forests and eyes and is known to alter the natural regime of ecosystems.

It's true. The issue of waterfront light pollution on sea life is not new. In primary school I remember the plight of the baby sea turtle who would scurry inland towards coastal lights (and be eaten) rather than heading out to sea. But what about on freshwater lakes and rivers?

The Great Lakes Environmental Assessment and Mapping Project, an ecological think-tank, explains that waterfront lighting is very disruptive to freshwater ecology as well. At the very foundation of the food chain, it stops zooplankton from coming toward the water's surface at night to feed. It's no surprise then that it can also disrupt the feeding and reproductive behaviour of fish and birds.

Makes sense, since most organisms, even humans, have evolved internal clocks that are controlled by natural light-dark cycles and, these internal clocks play important roles in metabolism, growth and behaviour.

You may be asking yourself, why should I care about bugs and other creatures of the night? Well most of us are here because of our beautiful, clean and clear lakes; our own utopia for water-based recreation. But make no mistake, our waterfront slice of heaven only exists because of a delicate natural balance that humans seem inclined to upset.

Light has its place. If you need it to see what you are doing, be it work or play, knock yourself out. If you have security concerns, design your external lighting to be minimally invasive to your neighbours, the lake and the night sky. But if a light on your property serves no purpose other than to generate light... consider leaving it off.

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