

The “A1” Initiative

Representatives from LREF and LRA have been discussing with VT Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) the opportunity to reclassify Lake Raponda as an “A1 excellent water quality lake.” This is the highest rating given for a Vermont lake but very few of Vermont’s 800+ lakes and ponds have been accorded this highest A1/Excellent rating, and none situated below 2,500 feet. The vast majority are rated B2/Good, including Raponda. However, VT DEC believes Raponda could be upgraded to A1 given its favorable parameters which include over five years of tracking phosphorous levels, chlorophyll levels and secchi/water clarity levels that currently meet or exceed the A1 thresholds.

How would reclassification to A1 benefit Lake Raponda? Reclassification would put into place a mechanism for restorative action sooner and at lower cost. By reclassifying Raponda to A1, Raponda would be eligible for both technical assistance and funding to keep its total phosphorous concentrations from ever exceeding A1 limits and/or becoming otherwise “impaired.” In fact, if Raponda’s water quality (measured by the three parameters noted above) ever fails the A1 requirements, the state would be legally required to implement restorative action.

Why is VT DEC taking a proactive role on this A1 initiative for its higher quality lakes? VT DEC wants to protect its high quality lakes and it has become evident that even Vermont’s higher quality lakes have been experiencing a concerning trend of increased nutrient/phosphorous loading. Therefore, VT DEC wants to put in place this mechanism for accelerated action to protect, or restore if necessary, the high quality standards for its high quality lakes. And an A1 lake would get preferential consideration for state funding for restorative projects.

Are there any downsides to reclassification to A1? According to VT DEC, this should be viewed as a great opportunity for the Lake Raponda community, both for protection of Lake Raponda water quality and for enhanced property values. **There would be no new regulations applicable to Lake Raponda** but of course all existing VT laws and regulations would still apply. However, we would need to provide VT DEC with our own “customized” lake protection plan, which VT DEC has already acknowledged could include continuing our Greeter/Clean Boats program, Lake Wise shoreland enhancement initiatives, reducing road run-off, and maintaining good septic systems. All desirable actions that we would pursue anyway.

This “A1” opportunity does appear very promising, however, before going forward with an application to the state, LRA will make a concerted effort to discuss this initiative with as many Lake stakeholders as possible, including Town of Wilmington officials, to give all stakeholders a chance to hear the proposition firsthand and to ask any questions.