

York officials step up protection of Chases Pond

New aeration system poses threat to scofflaws



Bright yellow signs, like this one near the York Water District treatment plant, have been installed around Chase's Pond, warning people to stay off the pond this winter. Deborah McDermott photo

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YORK, Maine – As temperatures plummet, York Water District officials remind people it's against the law to engage in any winter activity on Chases Pond, the town's reservoir, especially now that a new aeration system will prevent thick ice from forming and could pose serious danger.

"We could get a snowstorm that leaves a sheen of snow on top of the pond, creating the illusion that it might be solid, but it's not," said water district superintendent Don Neumann.

To combat algae blooms that have plagued the pond off and on since 2011, the water district last summer installed eight 4-foot round disks. Each has 100 feet of coiled, perforated pipe that emit bubbles to break up the algae. As this is the first winter the system has run and as it's been a mild season until recently, York Water District officials are not sure if the bubbling action will

prevent all ice from forming or whether a thin and dangerous layer might form over these areas.

The district has installed 18 bright yellow signs around the pond, particularly in areas that have been used for illegal access that warn people the ice is not safe. No one should be on the pond to begin with, said Gary Stevens, the district's resource protection manager and a sworn officer of the York Police Department.

All activity including snowmobiling, cross country skiing and skating is prohibited, he said. Stevens, who is constantly patrolling water district land, can summons people on the spot with criminal trespassing, he said. He said he's finally convinced most snowmobilers to stay off the pond, but there are still winter sport enthusiasts who will tempt fate.

"We don't want anyone on the pond, period," he said. "The ice is not safe."

While in the past, Stevens may have issued warnings to violators, "if I find anyone out there now that the system has been installed, we're going to be having a little bit of a different chat."

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