

York Water District borrows airboat to test Chases Pond water



York Water District Workers get out on the ice on Chases Pond Monday, Feb. 14, to take water samples to test for algae. Picture By Todd Hill

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YORK — Riding an airboat owned by the Maine Warden Service, employees of the York Water District and state wardens went out over the ice and snow on Chases Pond on Monday morning, Feb. 14, to drill for water samples.

Motorized equipment is not allowed on Chases Pond, the town's water source, so Water District Superintendent Don Neumann Jr. contacted the York Police Department ahead of time, in case a member of the public reported seeing a boat illegally on the pond.

No one called police or the Water District, but many drivers stopped along Chases Pond Road to watch the action, according to Resource Protection Manager Gary Stevens, who was among those who got to ride on the airboat.

The boats are similar to those used in the Florida Everglades, said Neumann. They skim across the surface of water bodies, pushed forward by a large propeller mounted at the rear of the boat.

"When we first started talking about this, the ice on pond was sketchy," Stevens said.

That was no problem Monday.

Stevens and crew used an ice auger to cut through at least 14 inches of ice before finding open water.

They took an estimated five to six samples from various areas along the 2.75-mile-long Chases Pond, testing for an algae first detected in the water in February 2010, a year in which there was little snow. The



sun shown down on the ice then, acting as a magnifying glass and creating an algae bloom in the town's drinking water.

An algae bloom, Neumann said, is a rapid increase or accumulation in the population of algae. The Water District office began fielding calls from residents who said there was a strange taste to the water at that time.

Algae blooms are not uncommon in July, but are a rarity for the middle of the winter, Neumann said last year. The problem was

believed to be caused by a cold-water algae.

Since last February, the algae has been kept under control, Neumann and Stevens said.

After snow and ice blocked pond access this year, Water District workers continued to take water samples at the building called the screen house, next to the dam on Chases Pond Road. Screens there stop fish, leaves, branches and other debris from going into the water treatment plant across the street.

"We want to get a feel for what's going on under the ice," Neumann said Thursday, Feb. 3. "The algae is still there in lower numbers. We're trying to be proactive."

The algae poses no health threat, according to Neumann.

Results of the samples should be known by Friday, Feb. 18, said Stevens.

Stevens on Monday joined Water District employees Todd Hill and Larry Graham, and state Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife wardens Tim Spahr and Mike Joy, who used the airboat time as training hours.

Anyone with questions or concerns is asked to call the York Water District office at 363-2265 or visit www.yorkwaterdistrict.org



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