

# Has Lake DeWeese Become Lake Disease?

by Reggie Paré

For several weeks, Lake DeWeese Wildlife Area has been under a toxic blue-green algae warning. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) posted the warnings.

What causes blue-green algae blooms? A combination of factors such as excessive nutrients (rich in nitrogen and phosphorus), warm temperatures, and lots of sunlight all encourage the growth of blue-green algae. We cannot control the temperatures or the sunlight, but we can control the amount of nutrients

been monitored since, on average, about 50 head of cattle can be seen grazing from May through October, about 180 days.

According to a USDA study on "Animal Manure Management", an average 1,000 lb. beef cow produces 59.1 lbs. of manure per day that contains 31% nitrogen and 11% phosphorus. Multiply 50 head of cattle x 59.1 lbs. per cow x 180 days = 531,900 lbs. or about 265 tons of manure are deposited in the wildlife area (SWA) at Lake DeWeese every year.

An EPA study ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov))

fecal contamination.

The federal Clean Water Act requires that wetlands be protected from degradation because of their multiple, important ecological roles including maintenance of high water quality and provision of habitat for fish and wildlife.

In 1996, the National Research Council (with sponsorship from seven federal agencies) undertook a comprehensive study of riparian areas.

Two reviews have illustrated the adverse effect grazing has had on fisheries and wildlife. Over 95 percent of the studies reviewed by Platts (1991) showed "stream and riparian habitats had been degraded by livestock grazing, and that these habitats improved when grazing was prohibited." Of the 76 federally listed plant and animal species on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, for which livestock grazing was a significant factor in their decline, approximately 80 percent were dependent on or associated with riparian habitats (Horning, 1994).

In 1994, BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) concluded that "water-shed and water quality would improve to their maximum potential" if livestock were removed entirely from federal lands (BLM and USFS, 1994). The USFS concluded that livestock grazing is the fourth major cause of species endangerment nationwide, the second major cause of plant endangerment, and the number one



Grape Creek and Lake DeWeese, photos taken from May - September 2020, all within the wildlife area boundary.

Photos courtesy of Reggie Paré

to restore the habitat for amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, shorebirds, and waterfowl; bank and shoreline stabilization; flood attenuation; groundwater recharge; sediment capture and retention; stream flow maintenance; nitrogen uptake and transformation; phosphorus removal and storage; and temperature regulation.

CPW managers are reluctant to make any improvements until they have received the results of a feasibility study to raise the height of the DeWeese Dam. If the dam is raised, they are concerned that the improvements could be flooded. It should be noted that "IF" the dam project is even feasible, the completion of dam construction could be 5-10 years down the road. The high water survey has already been completed and the fencing and plantings could be done above the survey lines. Most riparian plants are flood tolerant and would survive the temporary flooding that occurs at DeWeese every spring.

We all have a voice in how our wildlife areas are managed. If you would like to see efforts to protect, restore and improve DeWeese Wildlife Area, please call or email Area Wildlife Manager (Mike Trujillo) at (719) 561-5303 or [mikel.trujillo@state.co.us](mailto:mikel.trujillo@state.co.us)

Mr. Paré included references for the data he presents. The Sentinel reminds readers that the views, thoughts, and opinions expressed belong solely to the author.

cause of species endangerment in certain arid regions of the West, such as the Colorado Plateau and Arizona Basin (Flather et al., 1994). Several writers have suggested, "livestock grazing may be the major factor negatively affecting wildlife in the 11 western states".

SWA (State Wildlife Area) access rule #12 prohibits the grazing of livestock inside the wildlife area." The purpose of SWA parcels is to protect, conserve and improve wildlife habitat, and provide access to wildlife-related recreation.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE? Wetlands comprise less than two percent of Colorado's landscape but provide benefits to over 75% of the wildlife species in the state. As of July 1, 2020, all visitors 18 or older must possess a valid hunting or fishing license to access any SWA. The fees from your hunting and fishing licenses

fund SWAs. DeWeese is the only wildlife area in the Wet Mountain Valley and it has never received the protection that the "CLEAN WATER ACT" requires. Consequently, the Grape Creek riparian area and the lakeshores have suffered soil compaction, bank collapse, trampling of nesting grounds, erosion, sedimentation, and the waters have reached toxic levels --- sad examples of WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT.

What can be done to conserve and improve the riparian areas? Brian Sullivan (program coordinator for "Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program") has reached out to Colorado Park & Wildlife (CPW) offering to assist with the restoration of the damaged riparian areas. The proposed plan would be directed by a wildlife biologist and they would install additional fencing, plant grasses, shrubs and trees. The goals of the project would be:

WARNING

Toxic Algae Present

AREA IS CLOSED TO FULL-BODY CONTACT

- No Pets in Water!
- Do Not Drink Lake Water
- No Swimming or Body Contact
- No Water Skiing
- No Jet Skiing
- No Paddle Boarding

- Boating Permitted - avoid algae mats
- Fishing Permitted - rinse fish well and discard guts

Call your doctor or veterinarian if you or your animals have nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, irritated eyes, seizures or breathing problems.  
Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222

that enter the waters. CPW lists the possible nutrients as lawn fertilizers, pet waste and deicers that contain urea.

CPW failed to mention a major source of agricultural waste that could be, directly or indirectly, entering DeWeese waterways. For years CPW has allowed cattle to graze freely inside the DeWeese Wildlife Area. Currently, CPW has "GRAZING PLANS" that allow ranchers to graze cattle for 45 days in the spring and 45 days in the fall (September 1st to October 15th). The grazing plans have not

ie) found that if cattle have unrestricted access to waterways, they preferentially defecate in the proximity of water. Direct deposition of fresh fecal matter in waters is particularly harmful because there are no opportunities for bacterial die-off before the bacteria reaches the water bodies. This is important because one cow produces an estimated 5.4 billion fecal coliform and 31 billion fecal streptococci. Bacteria may survive in sediments for considerable periods; therefore, sediments may act both as sink holes and as sources of water

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