

The Dredge Report

IF YOUR COMMUNITY has a lake, marina, pond, or other substantial body of water, it's almost certain to have stuff in it—cloudy, muddy stuff that looks terrible and probably gives residents pause about going anywhere near it. This is more than an inconvenience or an eyesore. The clarity of your water can have a significant impact on property values.

Water clarity drops when an aquatic area becomes filled with sediment—a process known as “eutrophication.” It occurs naturally over a period of a hundred years or more, but during construction or development, it can happen in a matter of months. Before it becomes an actual detriment to the community, you'll need to do something.

IN EUTRO

You'll notice the first signs of trouble in shallow water near the head of the lake or at the end of coves, where drainage enters the body of water. At first it will be limited to a small area. But over time, the sediment will grow and the area of surface water will shrink. Deeply rooted nuisance weeds will begin to emerge. Finally, water quality will deteriorate to a muddy brown.

In the battle against eutrophication, you have several options:

Drain the lake.

Believe it or not, draining a lake can sometimes be the least-expensive option. But it can have the harshest environmental impact, damaging the shoreline and surrounding areas, and it may take weeks or even months for the sediment to dry

enough to excavate.

Mechanical dredging. Because it addresses the sediment issue from the shoreline, mechanical dredging doesn't require draining the lake. The most common mechanical excavators reach 40 or 50 feet from the shoreline, so the best candidates are small ponds or the ends of coves.

Portable hydraulic dredging.

Hydraulic dredges float on the water and pump sediment through a temporary pipeline to an offsite location. The dredge, which is the size of a small boat, acts like a floating vacuum, removing sediment very precisely. Hydraulic dredges use a discharge line that can deposit sediment up to several thousand feet from the water.

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Under the Federal Clean Water Act and Amendments, the Army Corps of Engineers regulates dredging in accordance with certain environmental criteria. Thus, before you can dredge a significant body of water, you have to get a permit. To start the process, check the Corps of Engineers website (www.usace.army.mil) for your regional office; when you call, ask for the person who handles permit applications.

Of course, it's important to retain an experienced, professional con-

tractor who understands that every dredging project is unique and who is sensitive to the environment of a shoreline community. Ask each candidate these questions:

1. How many years of experience do you have working on similar projects?
2. Can you supply references?
3. Is dredging a sideline to your core business, such as excavating or dock work?
4. Do you own your own equipment?
5. Can you bond the project?
6. Do you have adequate marine insurance, and can you name our community as an additional insured on your policy?
7. How quickly can you start work?
8. Do you have a professionally trained, mobile workforce?
9. Do you have proper environmental controls in place as standard procedures?
10. Do you have a good safety record?

Sediment won't go away on its own. While dredging may be a significant investment, it's also a long-term benefit to the property value of your community and will increase everyone's enjoyment of your beautiful aquatic areas. **cg**

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AT-A-GLANCE

If you've got a lake, eventually it will become choked with sediment—thanks to a process called eutrophication.

IN EUTRO. To clean things up, you have two options: drain the lake entirely, or dredge it.

CRYSTAL CLEAR. Dredging means getting a professional contractor—and asking the right questions before you hire someone.