

# Still some farmers letting animals in creek

*But farmers and residents working hard to clean up Lac Gauvreau*

By Cynthia Vukets

Farmers and waterfront owners concerned about the health of Parent Creek and Gauvreau Lake say the Ministry of the Environment should be doing more to make people follow environmental regulations.

Rules exist to ensure farms along waterways do not let their animals pollute the water. Farmers are supposed to have fencing in place to prevent animals from straying into streams like Masham's Parent Creek. But like any rules, they have to be enforced.

Gauvreau Lake Environmental Association president John

Leech says there are still farmers who have not made all the necessary alterations to their farms.

Union des Producteurs Agricoles Gatineau South president John Sullivan acknowledges there is still work to be done. But, he says, it is not up to his organization to monitor farmers' adherence to provincial laws.

"Our role is to provide advice, assistance, encouragement, information," he says. Currently, provincial grants are in place to help farmers with up to 90 per cent of the costs of projects like building fences, covering abandoned wells, or building shelters for animals, says Sullivan.

"There are animals in the waterways," he says. "There does need to be fencing and improvements."

But, he adds, the government must be responsible for ensuring farmers comply with provincial

regulations.

"I think what the [Gauvreau Lake Environmental] committee felt was that the Ministry of the

*"There does need to be fencing and improvements."*

*But, adds farmer John Sullivan, the government must be responsible for ensuring farmers comply with provincial regulations.*

Environment wasn't doing their job in respect to inspection and enforcement," says Sullivan.

There are currently about 130 cottages on Gauvreau Lake, 20 or so of them permanent residences. According to Leech, 80 or 90 per cent of those people are using lake water for bathing and doing their dishes.

He and his wife have a well now, so they don't have to rely on lake water. They also redid their shoreline, which had been sandy since Leech was a child. Their septic system is 20 years old, but was inspected and found to be within regulations.

The health of the lake was called into question in 2000, when a blue-green algae bloom devastated cottagers by causing the closure of the lake.

After 2000, with the help of the mayor, the lake's volunteer environmental group put together an action plan to clean up the lake. Two studies were done, and residents were encouraged to have their septic systems checked, reforest their shoreline and do away with any phosphate-ridden products.

The municipality agreed to begin inspecting septic tanks in the area.

"A large number of them were found to be defective and they brought them up to standard," says Leech.

The association also brought

in a horticulturalist to help cottagers re-do their shoreline; and the municipality did some rezoning, but Leech says it didn't help as much as they had anticipated.

"The last thing that was left to be done was this Parent Creek," says Leech. Parent Creek feeds Gauvreau Lake.

A study, performed by environmental engineering firm Pro-Faune, was released in February and Leech's group is now in the process of seeing it transmitted to residents, politicians and the media.

"We're hoping to use that to re-invigorate the farmers and the Ministry of the Environment."

But John Sullivan insists farmers are not the only ones who need to clean up their act.

"Everybody along that watercourse has a shared concern and responsibility," he says.

Sullivan has a beef farm along the creek. He says he has put in "a lot of electric fencing, over time." He has covered a natural spring on his property with a well tile, then properly excavated, drained and fenced the area. Now the water flows into a tub so his animals can drink fresh water year-round. He knows many of his neighbors have also taken advantage of provincial money to ensure their animals are not affecting the waterway.

For those who'd like to know more about the health of the lake and what they can do, the Gauvreau Lake Environmental Association annual general meeting and information day is coming up. The meeting will be held Saturday, June 28 at 10:00 a.m. at the Masham Community Centre. Membership is voluntary, at a cost of \$5 for the year.

"I'd be pretty PO'd if there were agricultural producers out there... who were deliberately polluting," says Sullivan.

Leech says he hopes the study will encourage farmers and cottagers to clean up their acts. "We would like for people to become knowledgeable about what they can do to help," he says.

