

# IOWA'S WATER

## Ambient Monitoring Program

### Cooperative Lakes Area Monitoring Project Little Spirit Lake



A CLAMP volunteer uses a Secchi disk to measure water clarity.

The Cooperative Lakes Area Monitoring Project (CLAMP) began in 1999 as a joint partnership between Iowa Lakeside Laboratory and Friends of Lakeside Laboratory to take advantage of a rich tradition of volunteer involvement in the Iowa Great Lakes region. CLAMP combines efforts of multiple organizations into a long-term, unified program for assessing the quality of the lakes in the region. A group of volunteers was organized and trained to monitor water quality on 10 lakes in northwest Iowa. CLAMP focuses on monitoring nutrient levels (nitrogen and phosphorus) as well as chlorophyll *a* (an index of algal abundance) and Secchi depth (an index of water clarity). By monitoring these parameters, CLAMP volunteers provide an integrated measure of each lake's water quality. To address concerns of excessive algae growth, phytoplankton and microcystin were recently added to the program. Phytoplankton are microscopic plants, mainly algae, that live in water. Microcystin is a toxin produced by cyanobacteria, a type of algae.

Since its inception in 1999, over 100 volunteers have participated in CLAMP. These volunteers have taken over 3500 samples on 10 lakes in Dickinson County: Big Spirit, Center, East Okoboji, Little Spirit, Lower Gar, Minnewashta, Silver, Trumbull, Upper Gar, and West Okoboji. By volunteering their time, CLAMP participants are providing a long-term data set that will be useful in protecting these prized resources while learning more about water quality issues and the ecology of the lakes.

#### CLAMP Data

Secchi depth in Little Spirit Lake ranged from 0.1 meters (m) to 1.7 m, with the deepest Secchi depths occurring in the spring, when algal productivity is lowest, and the shallowest in late summer, when algal productivity is the greatest. Overall, Secchi depths in Little Spirit were shallower than other



Little Spirit Lake in Dickinson County.

algae and turbidity levels that will meet water quality standards. Data collected by CLAMP were used in creating the TMDL and will also play an important role in determining if the TMDL goals are being met.

The TMDL addressed the Phase 1 goal for Trophic State Index Scores: 70 for Total Phosphorus, 65 for Chlorophyll *a*, and 65 for Secchi Depth. CLAMP data show that these goals have not been met as of 2006. The complete TMDL for Little Spirit Lake can be found at <http://www.iowadnr.com/water/watershed/pubs.html>.

#### Other Monitoring

**Iowa DNR - Ambient Lake Monitoring Program.** Along with the volunteer monitoring that occurs through the CLAMP program, the lakes are routinely monitored throughout the summer by the Iowa State University Limnology Laboratory (2000-2006) and the University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory (2005-2006). Through this program, the lakes are monitored for a number of parameters including nutrients, solids, common field parameters, phytoplankton, zooplankton, and microcystin. Results can be found at <http://limnology.eeob.iastate.edu/lakereport/> and <http://wqm.igsb.uiowa.edu/iastoret/>.

**Iowa DNR - Beach Sampling Program.** Six state-owned beaches (Emerson Bay, Gull Point, Triboji, Pikes Point, Marble, and Sandy) and one county beach (Orleans) are monitored weekly during the outdoor recreation season for bacteria and microcystin. Results of beach monitoring can be found on the DNR website <http://wqm.igsb.uiowa.edu/activities/beach/beach.htm>.

#### References

Carlson, Robert E. (1977) A Trophic State Index for Lakes. *Limnology and Oceanography*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Mar., 1977), p. 361-369.

#### Acknowledgements

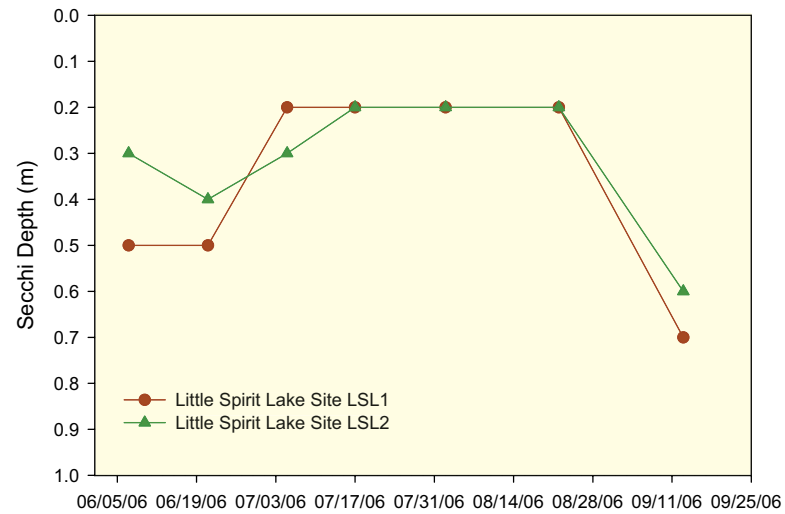
CLAMP is coordinated by the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory and supported by Friends of Lakeside Lab, the Dickinson County Water Quality Commission, the Okoboji Protective Association, the Spirit Lake Protective Association, and the East Okoboji Improvement Corporation. Data used in this factsheet were provided by Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, Iowa State University Limnology Laboratory, and the University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory.

The CLAMP program would not be possible without the hard work of the volunteers. Volunteers on Little Spirit Lake include: Roger Achterdorf, Karen Baker, Allen Duus, Deb Reiter, Roxana Rivedal, and Carolyn Vincelli. Thanks also to CLAMP interns: Tasida Barfoot, Ted Klein, Emily Greives, and Laura Guderyahn.

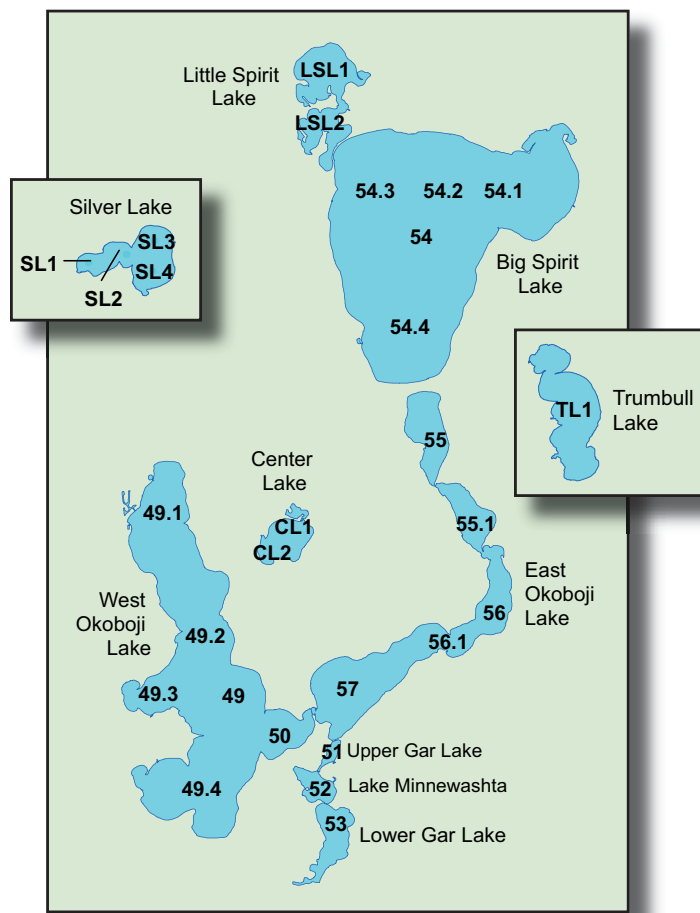
Photo on page 1 from CLAMP Program. Page 4 photo from Iowa State University Limnology Laboratory.



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**Figure 1.** Seasonal and site variation of Secchi depth in 2006 for Little Spirit Lake.



CLAMP sampling locations. NOTE: data used for this fact sheet were from the deepest spot in each lake (for comparison).

CLAMP lakes and near the median for all glacial lakes in Iowa (Insert 1). Total phosphorus and total nitrogen concentrations were high in Little Spirit compared to other CLAMP lakes (Insert 1). With the exception of Trumbull, Little Spirit had the highest median total phosphorus (0.29 milligrams per liter [mg/L]) and total nitrogen (3.1 mg/L) as well as a higher median concentration compared to other Iowa glacial lakes.

Chlorophyll *a* concentrations ranged from 3 micrograms per liter ( $\mu\text{g/L}$ ) (6/5/2002) to 4217  $\mu\text{g/L}$  (8/2/2005, not shown). Chlorophyll *a* concentrations varied greatly in Little Spirit between 1999 and 2006 (Insert 1). The median chlorophyll *a* concentration for Little Spirit was greater than other CLAMP lakes with the exception of Trumbull, and was greater when compared to other glacial lakes in Iowa (Insert 1).

Microcystin concentrations in Little Spirit Lake ranged from 0.6 nanograms per liter (ng/L) to 7.5 ng/L. Little Spirit Lake's maximum concentration of 7.5 ng/L falls below the 20 ng/L threshold the Iowa DNR uses to post warnings at swimming beaches. Overall, microcystin concentrations were similar to other CLAMP lakes and were slightly lower when compared to other glacial lakes in Iowa (Insert 1).

Figure 1 shows the seasonal and site variation of Secchi depth for Little Spirit Lake in 2006. Secchi depths were deepest in June and September and shallowest in July and August. There was little difference between sites on

Little Spirit Lake, with LSL1 having a slightly deeper Secchi depth in June and September of 2006.

### Carlson's Trophic State Index

The large amount of water quality data collected by CLAMP can be confusing and difficult to evaluate. In order to analyze all of the data collected it is helpful to use a trophic state index (TSI). A TSI condenses large amounts of water quality data into a single, numerical index. Different values of the index are assigned to different concentrations or values of water quality parameters.

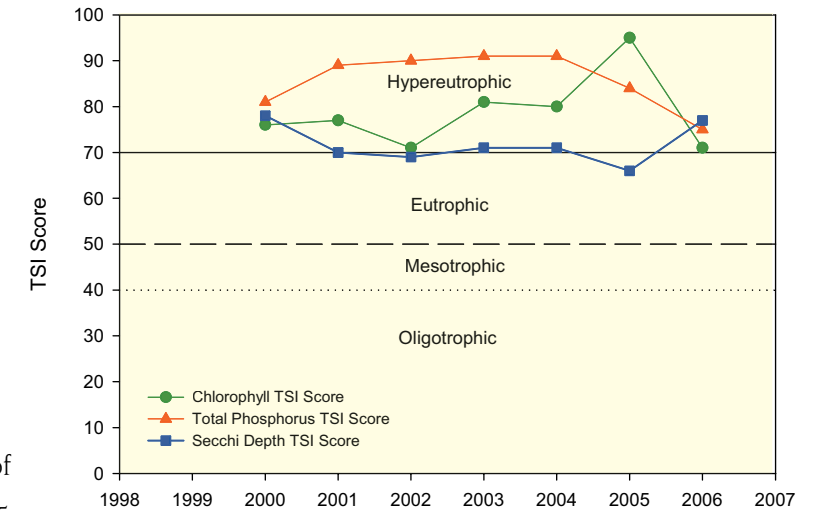
The most widely used and accepted TSI, called the Carlson TSI, was developed by Bob Carlson (1977). Carlson TSI values range from 0 to 100. Each increase of 10 TSI points (10, 20, 30, etc.) represents a doubling in algal biomass. The Carlson TSI is divided into four main lake productivity categories: *oligotrophic* (least productive), *mesotrophic* (moderately productive), *eutrophic* (very productive), and *hypereutrophic* (extremely productive). The productivity of a lake can therefore be assessed with ease using the TSI score for one or more parameters. Mesotrophic lakes, for example, generally have a good balance between water quality and algae/fish production. Eutrophic lakes have less desirable water quality and an overabundance of algae or fish. Hypereutrophic lakes have poor water quality and experience frequent algal blooms and a lack of oxygen in deep water.

Insert 2 shows the TSI scores for Secchi depth, chlorophyll *a*, and total phosphorus for CLAMP lakes. The median TSI scores for Little Spirit are in the *hypereutrophic* category for all parameters. TSI scores based on total phosphorus are generally higher than other TSI scores, indicating phosphorus is not limiting algae growth. Possible other factors that could limit algae include: light limitation due to excessive algal or non-algal turbidity, nitrogen limitation, zooplankton grazing, or toxin production.

Figure 2 shows the mean or average TSI scores for Little Spirit Lake by year. Secchi depth TSI has decreased slightly over time, while chlorophyll *a* TSI has increased. Total phosphorus TSI has remained about the same from 1999-2004, with a slight decrease from 2004 to 2006.

### Impairments

Little Spirit Lake was listed on the Iowa Section 303(d) Impaired Waters List as being impaired by algae and turbidity. Its Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) was completed in 2004. The purpose of the TMDL is to calculate the maximum allowable nutrient loading (phosphorus) for the lake associated with



**Figure 2.** Average Carlson Trophic State Index (TSI) scores by year for Little Spirit Lake.