Rep. Deen and esteemed members of the House Committee on Natural Resources , Fish & Wildlife. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. It is truly an honor to be here. Thank you so much for caring for Lake Carmi.

My name is Peter Benevento. I have been coming to Lake Carmi since 1971. I have owned a camp on Lake Carmi since 1991. My testimony today is intended to convey to the Committee what actions Lake Carmi lay organizations have taken to improve the water quality in Lake Carmi and to hopefully impress the Committee that urgent action is needed to save Lake Carmi, i.e. we need to pass House Bill 730. First however I would like to read you excerpts from an article I wrote for the Lake Carmi Newsletter. The title of the article is Lake Carmi Cries for Help.



I wrote this article in October 2006. It’s a real tragedy that the 2006 article so accurately describes what occurred in Lake Carmi in 2017, eleven plus years later.

It was then in 2006 that I began actively attending meetings of the Franklin Watershed Committee and the Lake Carmi Campers Association. I later became a Director and Officer serving in both organizations. It should be noted that all Directors and Officers of both the Lake Carmi Camper’s Association and the Franklin Watershed Committee are unpaid volunteers many of whom appear before you today and are attending this committee hearing.

Improving water quality efforts at Lake Carmi initially rested for the most part with the Franklin Watershed Committee, heretofore referred to as the FWC. The FWC began in the mid 1990’s operating on small grants and meeting once every other month. Myself and others realized that this was not sufficient to address the water quality problems at the lake and we embarked on growing the organization to what it is today. We incorporated and became a federally recognized 501©(3) tax exempt organization. At approximately the same time, in 2009, the EPA approved the phosphorous reduction plan for Lake Carmi or what is commonly referred to as the Lake Carmi TMDL.

Initially we thought the TMDL was the panacea to our water quality problems. It opened up new doors for grant funding which initially included a significant monetary award emanating from Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act. This award enabled us to hire a part time Coordinator whose primary focus is to secure additional monetary grants to fund projects to improve the watershed. This also enabled us to hire a part time AmeriCorps volunteer to help us with our efforts.

Over the years since 2009 the projects of the FWC to improve the lake Carmi Watershed have been many and varied. We have done tree plantings along streams to curtail erosion. We have conducted stream and culvert surveys around the lake to identify where improvements to protect the lake can be made. We have implemented shoreline buffer projects to prevent erosion. This has included the construction of berms, rain gardens, stone revetments and vegetated swales. We have armored ditches and streams by lining them with rock. We have installed new culverts with appropriate plunge pools and headwalls. We have installed filter socks at culverts to mitigate unwanted sediment and have collaborated with Norwich University on experiments using filters for tile drains. We have built water bars with plunge pools and infiltration beds to capture run off from driveways and roads. We have removed unwanted sediment from a stream by hand shoveling it into a front end loader that carted it back to a field where the sediment belonged. We have attempted to remove sediment from the lake by sucking it out with a Garbage Pump and channeling it to dewatering bags. There are sections in the lake where you sink up to a foot in muck and sediment. These are areas where some of the worst blue green algae blooms occur. We have worked with the Better Roads Program to conduct road inventories around the lake and to complete projects to prevent harmful road run off. We have offered incentives for conservation practices such as cover crops, aerations and nutrient management plans.

To help us complete these projects we have partnered with work crews from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, the AmeriCorps NCCC and the VT Dept. of Labor.

We know that improperly operating Septic systems have an adverse impact on water quality and we have addressed that issue as well. We have conducted a Septic Pump Out Program for more than a decade where we issue a $75.00 rebate to shore owners who pump out their septic system. We also pay a $25.00 rebate to anyone on the lake who rents a port-o-let to accommodate crowds at parties and large gatherings. This is designed to encourage camp owners not to stress their septic systems. We have held demonstrations that have displayed the latest in septic equipment and have hosted Septic Socials in 2015 and 2016 where we focused on proper septic maintenance and care. We have done studies to determine the feasibility of community septic systems. We have cost shared on the purchase and installation of low flow toilets and have distributed for free low flow shower heads and faucets.

In the summer of 2017, at the height of camp occupancy during the July 4th holiday week, VT DEC conducted a Conductivity Study to identify potential septic seepage into the lake. We did this twice. Just before the July 4th holiday and then immediately thereafter. No seepage was detected.

We have been a strong proponent of the VT DEC Lake Wise Program where we have encouraged and assisted lake shore owners in improving their shoreline to prevent erosion. Many properties have either been Lake Wise certified or awarded a Lake Wise Certificate. We have utilized the Lake Wise Program to the fullest extent that available grant funding has allowed.

We have participated in the VT DEC Lay Monitoring Program since 1979 where we extract water samples from the lake weekly to test the water for Total Phosphorous and Chlorophyll-a. Phosphorous is indicative of the nutrient loading while the chlorophyll-a is directly proportional to the amount of algae living in the water. We also take weekly Seechi Disk readings to determine the clarity of the water. I submit to you the 2015 Vermont Lay Monitoring Program Annual Report which shows that Lake Carmi had the highest mean values of Total Phosphorous and chlorophyll-a for the 46 in land lakes tested. We also had the second shallowest seechi disk readings. This has been similar for other years as well. The data is readily available on the VT DEC web site.

We have also been extracting water samples from the lake’s tributaries since 2008. This data is also available on the DEC web site and shows where the highest loads of phosphorous are entering the lake. This data was recently used as the basis for a watershed project that was completed in the fall of 2017. The intent of the project is to mitigate phosphorous loading to the Sandy Bay section of the lake. Other projects of this nature desperately need to be identified and funded to save the lake.

We have also conducted numerous outreach programs over the years. We have conducted agricultural information sessions with a free lunch. We have conducted environmental presentations to local schools and youth organizations. We have hosted numerous workshops on shoreline erosion and other lake topics.

The Lake Carmi Camper’s Association has also been involved in the fight to save Lake Carmi. The LCCA has been in existence for more than fifty years. It was originally formed as a social organization sponsoring events and activities the Town of Franklin and the lake community could enjoy. The fourth of July holiday is our most active time during the summer. We sponsor a spectacular fireworks display and the only pontoon boat relay race in the world! We have a pirate ship that “raids” the shoreline before and after the pontoon boat relay race and a “Light Up Lake Carmi” event that promotes and emulates the community spirit of the lake. We have also hosted five Cottage Tours that show off the character and culture of the Lake Carmi and Franklin area. We have a professional web site at [www.lakecarmi.mylaketown.com](http://www.lakecarmi.mylaketown.com) and we publish four very informative and well done newsletters during the summer months.

Historically the LCCA’s water quality efforts focused on the operation of the mechanical weed harvester that manages our Eurasian Milfoil problem. In addition to blue green algae the lake has a serious milfoil infestation. We partially fund the operation of the weed harvester with the Town. The LCCA sponsors two VIPs or Vermont Invasive Patrollers who regularly inspect the lake for additional invasive species. These efforts combined with the FWC’s staffing of a Boat Steward at the lake’s only free public boat launch has served as our main defense against additional aquatic invasive species. It should be noted that all of these activities are conducted with the guidance of VT DEC.

I believe it was about six years ago at a the annual Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds Lake Seminar where we heard you Rep. Deen speak about the need for developing “political will” to pass legislation to improve the water quality of our rivers, lakes and ponds here in Vermont. Well the LCCA heard you Rep. Deen and political activism became a primary focus of our organization. We formed a Policy Committee and began engaging our membership to be more vocal for improving Lake Carmi’s water quality. We also engaged our local elected officials, the Franklin County Delegation. We started attending hearings, meetings, rallies and forums and would like to think we were helpful in the passing of the Shoreland Act as well as the Clean Water Act. We tried like heck to have more stringent RAPs or Required Agricultural Practices imposed and have been very vocal in how we feel the Clean Water Fund should be appropriated. We also formed the Lake Carmi Community Foundation which we hope will be a strong focal point for raising funds for water quality. More recently we hosted a “Legislative Breakfast” where we attempted to inform and educate all of our elected State officials about the perilous state of Lake Carmi.

And I mean perilous state. The blue green algae bloom of 2017 was by far the worst we have ever experienced. We had bad blooms in 2014, 2015 and as you heard earlier 2006 but 2017 was the most indicative of a serious, severe health threat and was also by far most devastating to the local economy. If you can’t use your camp you are not staying in Franklin.

Despite all our efforts over the last decade water quality has not improved in Lake Carmi. The TMDL is almost ten years old and the blue green algae blooms are more harmful than ever. Things must change. The overwhelming majority of the work done by the FWC and LCCA have concentrated on the shorelines and the lake. If real change is to happen to the water quality in Lake Carmi we need to seriously address the agricultural practices in the watershed. This is where real progress can be made. All of the models and experts point to agriculture as the primary source of pollution to the lake. Very little has been done to significantly change agricultural practices in the Lake Carmi watershed. If we don’t act now the 4th largest in land lake in Vermont is in jeopardy of dying.

It was reported that at the Farm Show in Burlington a week ago Governor Scott stated that “ I look forward to working with Secretary Tebbetts and his team to ensure this industry (Dairy) continues to thrive and remain an important cornerstone of Vermont’s economy, heritage and culture.

We agree with Gov. Scott but at what price. Vermonters who have sacrificed much and worked hard to own a home on a lake cannot use their home at the expense of the dairy industry. Moreover their health is at risk.

I would like to read to you the Mission Statement of the Farmer’s Watershed Alliance of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. “the Franklin and Grand Isle Farmer’s Watershed Alliance mission is to ensure environmentally positive solutions and to enable the dairy industry through education and funding to better the soil, air and water of the Lake Champlain Watershed while remaining economically viable. Secondly to promote and defend dairy farming to further its future as one of the largest contributors to the state’s economy”.

The Farmer’s Watershed Alliance is an organization that has committed to many progressive farming activities to help the Lake Champlain watershed. They have engaged in injection manure operations and cover cropping to name a few. They have worked continuously with UVM Extension and host an annual Farm Day in the summer to showcase and promote environmentally friendly farming techniques. The problem as we know is that farming is a business and as the Farmers Watershed Alliance states in their mission they are only interested in water quality to the extent it does not hurt their bottom line. This is clearly understandable but it is also the heart of the problem when it comes to Lake Carmi. It establishes an economic baseline that is not conducive to cleaner water. We need to stop the agricultural practices in the watershed that are destroying Lake Carmi and yet keep our neighboring farming community “economically viable”.

That is the challenge. We put a man on the moon and split the atom. We can do this but we need the expertise and authority of the State of Vermont to fully engage and examine the Lake Carmi Watershed to determine where improvement is needed and to seek cooperation, compromise and if necessary impose regulation to save Lake Carmi. If you can’t save Lake Carmi you can’t save Lake Champlain. It is imperative you pass House Bill 730. Thank you. And thank you so much for caring about Lake Carmi.