

Researchers to monitor water quality of Spunk lakes

4 other lakes will be tested this summer as part of Stearns program

By Kirsti Marohn

TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Spunk chain of lakes near Avon will be the target of a Stearns County water quality monitoring program this summer.

Researchers from St. Cloud State University will begin their second year of comprehensive monitoring in June, said Neil Voelz, biology professor.

In addition to Upper, Middle and Lower Spunk lakes, the study will include:

- Two Rivers Lake near St. Anna.

- Pelican Lake near St. Anna.

- Kalla Lake south of Avon.

- Pine Lake near St. Anna.

Lakes in the same general area with similar soils were chosen this year to make the project easier, Voelz said. The Spunk chain was chosen because of the amount of development occurring along its shores, he said.

Voelz and professor Charles Rose, along with two graduate students, will conduct the research for about four months. The data will be compiled by December, Voelz said.

Stearns County started the monitoring program in 1998. A total of 30 lakes were chosen for the program. Comprehensive monitoring shifts to six different lakes every year, so that all 30 are studied every five years.

Last year, in the first monitoring season, researchers gathered data on Big Watab, Big Fish, North Browns, Eden, Maria and Sand lakes.

The program will cost \$13,500 again this year, paid for partly with state money.

The researchers measure the amounts of dissolved oxygen, phosphorus and chlorophyll in each of the lakes, as well as their temperature.

They use a water quality scale to rank the lakes, based on how much algae and phosphorus are in the water. Too much algae gives lakes a greenish color and can reduce the amount of oxygen, making for poor fish habitat.

The information gathered in the study can be used to help plan how to control development around lakes, Voelz said.

"We want to see, over time, trends," he said. "That's the exciting part of this whole thing."

The research is helping to create a database of information that will be useful to track water quality for several years, said Greg Berg, a wetland and shoreland specialist with the county environmental services department.

Planners will be able to use the information to learn how development is affecting water quality, Berg said.

In between the comprehensive testing, volunteers have been conducting their own water quality tests on the lakes, he said. They use a tool called a Secchi disk to measure the clarity of the water.