

# Loch Lomond has algal bloom

Citizen scientists use testing disks to gauge watershed transparency after rainy winter

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**FELTON** » Loch Lomond's current algal bloom is driven by increased nutrients introduced in the watershed after record rainfall during winter, according to readings taken during Saturday's annual Great American Secchi Dip-In.

The Secchi disk is about the size of a dinner plate with quarters contrasting in white and black. Participants lower the disk, which has a weight on the bottom, with a line until the disk no longer is visible. When the disk fades from sight, researchers record the measurement. Saturday, about 20 participants lowered Secchi disks from the docks at the lock to

gauge water transparency.

Saturday, citizen scientists throughout the U.S. gathered at watersheds to celebrate National Lakes Appreciation Month by conducting similar studies.

Vincent Kaping, 10, of Felton, said he was surprised the disk wasn't a more complex tool. He thought it would have some filter or other contraptions attached to it.

"I was thinking that it would be a machine," Kaping said.

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City of Santa Cruz Water Resources Department's employee Nic Retford (center) wraps up the Great American Secchi Dip-In on Saturday at Loch Lomond Reservoir.

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Coastal Watershed Council intern Nico McGuire checks the Secchi disk as volunteer Max Keet takes notes.

## Algae

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He took two readings; both were about 6 feet of visibility marked when the disk disappeared in the green water about midday.

Coastal Watershed Council and Santa Cruz Water Department hosted the event.

Watershed Manager Chris Berry said the event was a good way to get people involved in hands-on science.

"Plus, it's fun," Berry said. "We do have an algal bloom right now."

And despite the winter's rain, the lake is down roughly 15 feet, Berry said.

The "day-to-day" monitoring of the lake, which helps to supply nearly 100,000 Santa Cruz water customers along with other sources, has gotten murkier than it was early this season, Berry said.

"That means we either will have to use treatment or the algae may use up all the nutrients on its own," Berry said.

No camping or swimming is allowed at the lake.

Loch Lomond Recre-

ation Area Ranger Brian Watson said those rules are not hard to enforce as most people know that before making the drive through the mountains.

"The rangers are here to protect the watershed," Watson said.

Scientist Nic Retford said most of the city's water customers' taps are supplied with rainwater that is collected. The lake is a reserve used during dry spells, he said.

Water-transparency readings are taken weekly by scientists to ensure the levels are safe.

"This has been a really critical year for the lake," Retford said.

Watershed Council river scientist Alev Bilginsoy said the amount of light moving through the water column provides an indication of the presence of suspended solids, such as sediment, and algae.

Santa Cruz Mayor Cynthia Chase spoke at the start of Saturday's event, describing the connection with the lake and the Santa Cruz water system.

"I'm excited to see today's results," Chase said.

For information about the council, visit coastal-watershed.org/.