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Fish killed in recent days by oxygen depletion float in Loveland's Silver Lake.

Reporter-Herald photos/Bill Snow Jr.

# Low oxygen levels kill fish

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An apparently natural fish die-off has Silver Lake residents holding their noses and wondering who'll clean up the mess.

An estimated 2,000 bass, crappie, catfish, perch and carp began dying early Sunday when oxygen levels in the lake fell because of several factors, said Colorado Division of Wildlife officer Rick Spowart. Dead fish now float in the lake and drift in to shore.

Cloudy days triggered the

die-off. The lack of sunshine killed oxygen-producing vegetation in the small lake. Decaying fish and plants used up more oxygen.

Silver Lake, which is private, is about 1/4 mile east of the city cemetery split by U.S. 287.

"It didn't totally kill the lake. Quite a few fish survived. We saw a lot of them recovering," Spowart said.

Lakeside resident Kay Glinesman has been keeping her doors and windows closed against the smell as hundreds of dead fish continue to drift

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Neighbors of Silver Lake are concerned as thousands of dead fish wash ashore at the privately owned reservoir.

belly-up to shore.

"My concern is how to collect and dispose of them," Glinesman said. "I would like to see the health department help us out."

Dave McCloskey, a water-quality specialist with the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment, said he'd like to see members of the homeowners association organize some kind of cleanup.

"I think it's probably going to be more of an aesthetic thing," McCloskey said. "They're going to start smelling pretty bad, and it might contribute to the oxygen depletion. It adds to the organic loading in the lake."

"They should be removed, at least what they can," he added. "But physically it's going to be difficult to get them all."

McCloskey tested dissolved oxygen in the water and found 2 parts per million. Fish need about 7 parts per million to survive, he said.

Silver Lake Homeowners Association vice president Bill Watry said fertilizer running from the cemetery and city-owned housing near the lake contributes to the dense plant life in the lake. Garbage also drains in, he said.

"It's really a natural event, but what do we do in the future to see that it doesn't happen again?" Watry said. "My main concern and the main concern of the homeowners is, we'd like to make it a nice clean recreational environment. When I have my grandkids over they look at the water and say, 'Gee, Grandpa, I don't know.'"

The homeowners association has stocked the lake in the past. Spowart said the fishery was in good shape.

"We saw some just beautiful bass that died," he said. "It's a real shame. We weighed a couple that were just under 6 pounds. We had some 4-pound-class catfish, too."