

THE LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

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VOLUNTEER LETTER

ALGAE TRAPS TRASH: Spring has come to the waters of Lake Merritt and with it has come algae. Not to be confused with widgeon grass (which grows in deeper waters) these primitive plants only grow along the shallow shoreline where water is less than three feet deep. That of course is where the trash accumulates, often prominently framed by the masses of green stuff.



A cookie bag, two balls, a bottle, paper and lots of goose feathers in the algae.

GOOD, OR BAD? Messy as it may seem, algae provides essential habitat for the thousands of fish that hatch in Lake Merritt during the spring, as well as for other estuarine life. When growing underwater in a few locations, it significantly enhances the biological value of our lagoon. When it grows over large areas, breaks the surface, rots and restricts shoreline circulation, it becomes a nuisance. Then it is time to call in the harvester boat.

PICK IT UP? Even small amounts of algae are too much to remove with our nets. We have tried; and after two hours of difficult work by college students, you could not even tell they had been removing the stuff. Heavy and hard to remove, it bends nets and strains volunteer backs. Because there is so much of it, removal by hand is ineffective. We also called in the fire department once and had them blast it with a fire hose. When the truck ran out of water, the algae was still there.

CALL IN THE HARVESTER BOAT: Last year the City harvester boat was damaged and has not been repaired. But the City has a contract with Aquatic Environments, a company that owns several such boats and we have heard that they will be out there next week scooping up the stuff, which has reached nuisance levels in a few spots (not as bad as some years past – when it covered the entire area within the bird islands).

VOLUNTEERS: You will not be able to pick up all of the algae, but you will not be able to avoid it either. Try to remove trash with the corner of your net, and watch for small fish that might come out with the algae. Within a few weeks after the summer solstice, it will be largely gone as light penetration, nutrient level and day length all decline.