Alberta Government

**2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota**

# **2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

<span id="page-3-0"></span>Pigeon Lake is a large recreational lake located southwest of Edmonton prone to occurrences of blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) blooms. As a result of these blooms and increased stakeholder initiatives to address them, a more intense sampling program was undertaken in 2013. The purpose of the 2013 program was to increase understanding of the water quality and ecology of Pigeon Lake, provide additional information for completion of a nutrient budget, and provide additional information for investigation of watershed and in-lake management options.

Data collected from Pigeon Lake in 2013 (not including fisheries information) consisted of:

- Weekly lake water quality;
- Weekly to bi-weekly stream water quality samples;
- Groundwater quality samples;
- Sediment quality samples; and
- Zooplankton and phytoplankton taxonomy (weekly), and cyanobacterial bloom quality samples.

Pigeon Lake did not exhibit significant vertical variation or stratification in profiles of temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH and conductivity but did show seasonal variability for these and several other water quality parameters. pH, alkalinity and water clarity declined during peak blooms of cyanobacteria while dissolved oxygen concentrations, especially at the lake surface, increased. Chlorophyll-*a* concentrations exhibited a strong positive relationship with total phosphorus but were inversely related to dissolved phosphorus concentrations, suggesting preferential uptake of dissolved fractions of phosphorus by the phytoplankton community.

Stream concentrations of many parameters tended to be highest during the spring runoff and after significant storm events when accumulated upland material was washed into the streams. Concentrations for most parameters at the inflowing streams were generally similar and reflected surrounding land-use while the outflow reflected lake conditions.

Seasonal patterns in stream discharge rates were similar for most inflowing streams, with maximum rates occurring during spring freshet and after significant rainfall events. The outflow had higher measurable flows on most sampling dates relative to inflowing streams and reflected the increasing and decreasing water levels of Pigeon Lake as opposed to runoff conditions. For most nutrient parameters, Zeiner had the lowest loading rates of all inflowing streams despite often higher relative nutrient concentrations due to lower discharge rates. Similarly, although nutrient concentrations in Tide Creek were close to concentrations observed at other inflows, loading rates were often highest at this location.

Groundwater samples had relatively low concentrations of nitrogen parameters relative to Pigeon Lake and the streams with the exception of ammonia which was much higher. Phosphorus concentrations were highest in streams, but lower in Pigeon Lake relative to groundwater. Finally, TDS concentration was higher in groundwater samples relative to the streams and lake, while organic content (measured as TOC and DOC) was lower. Differences observed amongst groundwater samples and relative to lake and stream samples likely reflected chemistry of surrounding geology and not well depth or well age.

Pigeon Lake sediment nutrient concentrations tended to be higher in sediments with higher silt and organic carbon content and tended to be higher in shallow sections of sediment cores (0- 10cm) relative to deeper sections (>10cm). However, when normalized for moisture content, nutrient content was relatively similar amongst depths. Shallower samples closer to the shoreline tended to have higher amounts of sand as opposed to mid and deep samples which consisted of higher amounts of silt and clay.

The 2013 Pigeon Lake phytoplankton community shifted from true algal groups with a preference for cooler water temperatures such as Chrysophyceae, Cryptophyceae and diatoms early in the summer to cyanobacteria later in the summer. As cyanobacteria populations became more dominant, diversity of the phytoplankton community decreased. The cyanobacteria community was dominated by species not known to produce microcystin, hence levels of this algal toxin remained low throughout the summer.

Zooplankton density followed the true algae density, showing peaks in most species during the early and late summer. During the cyanobacterial bloom in August, zooplankton density declined likely reflecting issues of cyanobacteria palatability or size which can be difficult for zooplankton to graze. Despite the variation in zooplankton density, community diversity remained constant or increased through the summer likely reflecting a change in the zooplankton community from primarily juveniles to adult forms.

Detailed lake and watershed sampling contributed greatly to the existing data and knowledge base on Pigeon Lake. This supports the development of nutrient budget, understanding of the chemistry and biology of the lake as well as contributes to data requirements for the pursuit of in-lake and watershed methods for controlling nuisance algal blooms.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**





# **LIST OF FIGURES**

<span id="page-7-0"></span>



## **LIST OF TABLES**

<span id="page-9-0"></span>

# **LIST OF APPENDICES**

<span id="page-9-1"></span>

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# <span id="page-11-0"></span>**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Pigeon Lake is a large, shallow lake in central Alberta, highly valued for both its aquatic and recreational resources. It is located approximately 80 km southwest of Edmonton in the Counties of Wetaskiwin and Leduc. Recent severe cyanobacterial blooms have led to an increased concern about the lake's water quality. In order to improve water quality there is first a need to better understand the ecology and chemistry of Pigeon Lake and all the factors that may affect its water quality. To address these data needs, an enhanced lake and watershed monitoring program was initiated in 2012 and expanded in 2013. Data was collected to provide insight into potential causes of blooms, to develop a nutrient budget in order to partition phosphorus sources in the watershed and to objectively evaluate what management approaches may be most appropriate for improving the water quality in the lake. This report provides a synopsis of all 2013 data collected.

Each section of this report summarizes data collected in the open water seasons of 2013. Data collected included:

- Water quantity (levels) and quality data for the lake;
- Water quantity (discharge) and quality data for the major inflowing and outflowing streams;
- Groundwater quality;
- Sediment quality; and
- Phytoplankton and zooplankton data.

Individual sections detail relevant methods, analysis and conclusions and provide insight into why the data is relevant and what the data is indicating about the state of the lake. Although watershed characteristics and potential sources of measured nutrients are included here, a detailed nutrient budget for Pigeon Lake is documented in a separate report.

#### <span id="page-11-1"></span>**1.1 History and Settlement**

The lake name is a translation from the Cree *Mehmew Sâkâhikan*, which means 'Dove Lake', but by 1858 the name Pigeon Lake was in use (Aubrey 2006). It has been suggested that the name Pigeon Lake refers to the huge flocks of Passenger Pigeons that once ranged in the area. The lake was also previously known as Woodpecker Lake, and the Stoney name is recorded as *Kegemni-wap-ta*.

Pigeon Lake was a gathering place for First Nations peoples and is part of the traditional lands of the Maskwacis people, a part of the Plains Cree Nation, and was described in maps produced by the Palliser Expedition from 1857 to 1860. In 1847, Reverend Robert Rundle received permission to establish a mission on Pigeon Lake from the Hudson's Bay Co. and the Wesleyan Missionary Society. A Hudson's Bay Company post was established on the west shore in 1868. In 1896 the Pigeon Lake Indian Reserve was established on the southeast shore. European settlement began in earnest by the 1900s and logging, commercial fishing, and farming were important livelihoods of early residents. In 1924 the summer village of Ma-Me-O was developed at the south end of the lake on land leased from the Indian Reserve. In 1965, Rundle's Mission was dedicated as a National Historic Monument. Rundle's Mission is now held by the Government of Alberta and managed by the non-profit Rundle Mission Society (Mitchell and Prepas 1990).

Pigeon Lake has become a very popular recreational lake within easy driving distance of more than one million people in the cities of Edmonton, Leduc, and Wetaskiwin. The population of the watershed is estimated at 2500 people (Alberta Municipal Affairs 2014) but increases in the summer because of tourists and summer-only residents. Pigeon Lake has extensive recreational development along its shorelines with ten summer villages, two provincial parks (with campgrounds), and cottage or resort developments along the shorelines in the counties of both Leduc and Wetaskiwin. The watershed also has extensive agriculture, oil and gas, as well as recreational development throughout it.

#### <span id="page-12-0"></span>**1.2 Watershed Characteristics**

The lake's drainage basin is small (187 km<sup>2</sup>) with the lake itself (96.7 km<sup>2</sup>) occupying 52% of the watershed area (Table 1-1). The lake is shallow, with a maximum depth of 9.1m and a mean depth of 6.2m (Figure 1-1). Water flows into the lake through a number of intermittent streams draining the west and northwest portions of the watershed (Figure 1-2). The sole outlet, Pigeon Lake Creek, at the southeast margin of the lake, drains toward the Battle River.



<span id="page-12-1"></span>

 $a$  On date of sounding (1961)

**b** excluding groundwater inflow



<span id="page-13-0"></span>**Figure 1-1 Bathymetric Map of Pigeon Lake** 

Soils throughout the watershed are dominated by moderately well-drained, Orthic and Dark Gray Luvisols that developed from glacial bedrock underlying the area. Most of the soils are classified as III and IV, with low fertility (low in nitrogen, phosphorus, sulfur and organic matter), and are considered to have limited agricultural use. Some areas in the watershed have Class VI soils, which are limited for forage crops and are not feasible for improvement practices (Aquality 2008). Wetlands in the watershed have Gleysols and Organic soils.

The terrain can be level to gently rolling, ranging from 0 to 9% slope (Natural Regions Committee 2006). The lake's watershed consists of 15 subwatersheds (Figure 1-3, Table 1-2). These lie primarily in the Dry Mixedwood Natural Subregion of the Boreal Forest Natural Region. A much smaller portion of these subwatersheds lie within the Central Mixedwood and Central Parkland Natural Subregions. Vegetation in the subwatersheds are typical of their natural subregions; dominated by trembling aspen, white spruce and balsam poplar on upland sites and shrub dominated wetlands or sedge dominated fens and marshes (Natural Regions Committee 2006).



#### <span id="page-14-0"></span>**Figure 1-2 Pigeon Lake Sub-Watershed Boundaries and Stream Locations**

Over 60% of the watershed has been cultivated or converted to human uses, including urban development (2% of total area), pasture/perennial crops (48%), and annual crops (10%) (Table 1-2, Figure 1-3). A remaining 40% of the landcover is considered undeveloped and include water (1%), such as in tributaries and ponds, wetlands (1%), shrub lands (1%), and forests (35%) dominated by either deciduous or coniferous trees.



<span id="page-15-0"></span>**Figure 1-3 Distribution of Landcover Types in the Pigeon Lake Watershed**

<span id="page-16-0"></span>

	05FA- PL <sub>1</sub>	05FA- PL <sub>2</sub>	05FA- PL <sub>3</sub>	05FA- PL <sub>4</sub>	05FA- PL <sub>5</sub>	05FA- PL <sub>6</sub>	05FA- PL7	05FA- PL <sub>8</sub>
<b>LANDCOVER TYPE<sup>1</sup></b>								
Water	33.2	4.0	5.6	10.1	14.8	23.3	7.8	51.9
<b>Exposed Land</b>	$\Omega$	$\Omega$	$\Omega$	$\Omega$	$\Omega$	0.8	1.17	2.25
Developed	7.74	5.4	10.8	8.1	5.9	5.1	28.5	107.6
Shrubland	29.25	4.95	3.51	6.48	0	0	$\Omega$	111.9
Wetland	142.5	3.51	$\Omega$	2.07	8.6	$\Omega$	3.3	41.22
<b>Annual Crops</b>	610.9	76.95	17.37	162	70.01	94.5	82.2	302.9
Perennial								
Crops/Pasture	3022.1	177.4	214.0	234.2	87.66	147.1	279.4	673.7
Coniferous	294.6	29.43	0.45	$\Omega$	0	$\Omega$	28.8	1.62
Deciduous	1297	309.9	273.9	172.6	119.9	140.5	234	906.6
<b>Mixed Forest</b>	90.63	12.87	0.81	$\Omega$	$\Omega$	$\Omega$	16.56	$\Omega$
<b>Ecological lands</b>	1887.2	364.7	284.2	191.2	143.3	163.8	290.5	1113.2
<b>Built-Up/Urban</b> lands	3641	259.7	242.2	404.3	163.6	247.5	391.2	1087
<b>Total Area</b>	5528.0	624.4	526.4	595.5	306.8	411.3	681.7	2199.8

**Table 1-2 Pigeon Lake Watershed Landcover Types <sup>1</sup>**



1. All areas in hectares. Un-developed lands are the combined areas of water, shrub land, wetland, coniferous, deciduous, and mixed forest. Developed lands are the combination of developed, annual crops, perennial crops and pasture.

# <span id="page-17-0"></span>**2.0 LAKE WATER QUALITY**

In 2013, Pigeon Lake was sampled 15 times from June through September (Table 2-1). Water quality sampling was conducted at profile and composite sites. The profile site refers to the deepest location in the lake (approximately N53° 01'52.9, W114° 02'02.2) and sampling involved lowering a multi-meter probe from the surface to the sediments, taking measurements every 0.50 m. Secchi disk measurement was also taken at the profile site to determine the depth of the euphotic zone. The composite sample locations consisted of ten predetermined locations around the lake (including the profile site). Composite samples were collected from the euphotic zone using euphotic tubing with a one-way foot valve and pooled into a 10-L jug. This pooling of samples provides a snapshot of lake water quality as opposed to localized conditions at a single site which may not be representative of the entire lake. Results for all composite lake water quality samples collected are included in Appendix 2-1 while profile data is included in Appendix 2-2. Further discussions on individual parameters are presented in the following sections.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Dates Sampled</b>						
June	5, 16, 18, 26						
July	4, 10, 17, 24, 29						
August	8, 14, 22, 28						
September	5.19						

<span id="page-17-3"></span>**Table 2-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Sample Dates**

### <span id="page-17-1"></span>**2.1 Physical Parameters**

#### <span id="page-17-2"></span>*2.1.1 Water Levels*

Water levels in Pigeon Lake tend to fluctuate within a one-meter interval typical of many central Alberta lakes (Figure 2-1). Fluctuations in water levels are influenced primarily by rainfall and evaporation and to a lesser extent by groundwater and surface water inflows and outflows (Terry Chamaluk, Hydrologist, ESRD *pers. comm*.). A weir at the mouth of the outlet was initially installed in 1983 by ESRD with approval from the Pigeon Lake Municipalities and permitted for a full supply level (FSL) of 849.935 meters above sea level (masl). In 2008, monitoring revealed that the weir had risen 0.15 m due to frost heaving. Over the next four years, ESRD monitored the structure to ensure further shifting would not occur before taking restorative action. In March of 2013, the weir height was adjusted by ESRD to bring the structure back to the initially permitted FSL of 849.935 masl. This proactive approach was intended to restore the original design and height of the weir to ensure proper function.



<span id="page-18-1"></span>**Figure 2-1 Historical Pigeon Lake Water Levels**

#### <span id="page-18-0"></span>*2.1.2 Water Temperature and Dissolved Oxygen*

Given that Pigeon Lake is shallow and has a large fetch, the water column is frequently mixed by wind energy. Temporary weak thermal stratification events may occur on hot, calm days. Temperature and dissolved oxygen concentrations play an important role in the ecology of Pigeon Lake, affecting both fish and non-fish biota as well as influencing severity of nuisance blue-green algae blooms. Temperature and dissolved oxygen were measured on each sampling trip at the profile site with data recorded every 0.50 m.

In 2013, water temperatures were relatively uniform throughout the water column, with weak and deep thermal stratification observed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, June 26<sup>th</sup>, and July 4<sup>th</sup> (Figure 2-2). The absence of strong stratification is not unexpected, as temperatures in 2013 were relatively cool, and wind mixes the water column completely. On June  $5<sup>th</sup>$  water temperature measured a seasonal minimum of 14.1 °C at the surface and 11.0 °C at the lakebed. By July 24<sup>th</sup>, temperatures had increased to a seasonal high of 20.1 °C at the surface and 19.4 °C at the lakebed. In mid-August, water temperatures had declined slightly to 19.69 °C at the surface and 18.3°C at the lakebed. Finally, by September  $19<sup>th</sup>$ , water temperatures measured 17.1 °C at the surface and 16.9 °C at the lakebed.

2013 Pigeon Lake Temperature Profiles

2013 Pigeon Lake Dissolved Oxygen Profiles



<span id="page-19-0"></span>**Figure 2-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Temperature and Dissolved Oxygen Profiles**

In 2013, dissolved oxygen concentrations measured well above the Alberta and Canadian Council for Ministers of the Environment (CCME) guidelines of 5.0 mg/L for the Protection of Aquatic Life (PAL acute guideline; Figure 2-2). Surface concentrations ranged between a maximum of 11.41 mg/L on June  $5<sup>th</sup>$  to a minimum of 7.50 mg/L on September  $5<sup>th</sup>$ . On August 14<sup>th</sup> there was a notable increase in dissolved oxygen concentration, measuring 10.33 mg/L at the surface. This coincided with the occurrence of a large cyanobacteria bloom and may be the result of photosynthetic oxygen production. This bloom may also help explain the low dissolved oxygen concentrations observed in September, as decomposition of the dying bloom likely consumed large amounts of dissolved oxygen. Ultimately, due to a lack of strong thermal stratification, dissolved oxygen concentrations remained relatively uniform throughout the water column. Anoxia was not observed near the sediments in 2013 - a state which can contribute to the release of nutrients, such as phosphorus, from the sediments.

Pigeon Lake has experienced large fish kills, particularly in 2010, possibly due to high temperatures stressing fish and forcing them into deeper water with little oxygen. In response, fisheries staff from ESRD have begun deploying datasondes which collect temperature and dissolved oxygen data on a much more frequent basis (typically every 15 minutes) at a depth of 1 m in Pigeon Lake. Results from the datasonde deployed in 2013 are presented in Figure 2-3. Temperature rose in the lake from approximately 14  $^{\circ}$ C in June to over 20  $^{\circ}$ C by early July, remaining at this temperature for the rest of the summer. Dissolved oxygen declined slightly over much of the summer, increasing in mid-August, similar to what was observed during weekly readings.



<span id="page-20-1"></span>**Figure 2-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Datasonde Results**

#### <span id="page-20-0"></span>*2.1.3 Secchi Disk Depth*

Secchi disk depth, a measure of water clarity, can be a useful tool for tracking changes in lake such as changes in colour, suspended sediments, and algae or cyanobacteria densities. An inverse relationship between chlorophyll-*a* concentrations (a measure of algal biomass) and Secchi depth was observed. As algal biomass increased water clarity decreased (Figure 2-4), suggesting phytoplankton, primarily cyanobacteria, is the primary factor affecting water clarity in Pigeon Lake. Recorded at the profile site on each trip, 2013 Secchi disk depths fluctuated from a maximum of 5.70 m on July 10<sup>th</sup> (coinciding with some of the lowest chlorophyll-a concentrations of the season) to a seasonal minimum of 1.50 m on August  $28<sup>th</sup>$  (coinciding with the highest chlorophyll-*a* concentration of the season; Figure 2-4). By the last sample on September  $19<sup>th</sup>$ , Secchi disk depth had recovered slightly after the collapse of the cyanobacteria bloom, measuring 2.50 m.



<span id="page-21-1"></span>**Figure 2-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Secchi Depths**

#### <span id="page-21-0"></span>*2.1.4 pH and Alkalinity*

Measured pH profiles in Pigeon Lake are shown in Figure 2-5. pH was typically higher near the surface while slightly lower at deeper depths. This may reflect both sediment/water chemistry interactions as well as biological processes (*e.g*. photosynthesis), both of which can alter pH. Typically, pH remained above 8.0 throughout most of the water column over the course of the sampling season.

Pigeon Lake alkalinity and pH from composite samples are shown in Figure 2-6. Both parameters showed seasonality, potentially in response to changing primary producer (algae and macrophytes) biomass and corresponding photosynthetic rates. The removal of  $CO<sub>2</sub>$  due to photosynthesis increases pH and alkalinity by reducing concentrations of carbonic acid. pH and alkalinity reached a seasonal minimum in mid-July  $(7.93$  and  $158$  mg/L CaCO<sub>3</sub> respectively), though recovered quickly.

The high alkalinity (average = 163.9 mg/L CaCO<sub>3</sub>) and bicarbonate concentration (average = 194.5 mg/L) in Pigeon Lake help buffer the water from changes in pH. However, a combination of high pH and high bicarbonate concentration may provide a competitive advantage to cyanobacteria over other phytoplankton species as cyanobacteria are able to assimilate bicarbonate as a carbon source (Badger & Price, 2002).



<span id="page-22-0"></span>**Figure 2-5 2013 Pigeon Lake pH profiles**



<span id="page-22-1"></span>**Figure 2-6 2013 Pigeon Lake Total Alkalinity and pH**

#### <span id="page-23-0"></span>**2.2 Lake Chemistry**

#### <span id="page-23-1"></span>*2.2.1 Major Ions*

Conductivity, an indicator of salinity, may influence the amounts and types of algae and cyanobacteria in a lake. Conductivity of a lake may be influenced by inputs of dissolved solids from runoff or groundwater, and may be altered by climate as precipitation and evaporation will dilute or concentrate salts. In 2013, dominant ions included bicarbonate (194.5 mg/L), calcium (27.62 mg/L), and sodium (20.57 mg/L). Table 2-2 lists the concentrations of major ions in Pigeon Lake. While changes to concentrations of individual ions may be small, cumulative changes across major ions may be observed through changed in conductivity or total dissolved solids (TDS). In 2013, average conductivity measured 320 µS/cm and average TDS measured 176 mg/L. Profile data indicated very little variation in conductivity throughout the open water season in 2013 (Figure 2-7).

Average water hardness for Pigeon Lake was 122 mg/L CaCO<sub>3</sub> in 2013. This indicates that Pigeon Lake has hard water, and may be observed as a build-up of  $CaCO<sub>3</sub>$  in water lines.



#### <span id="page-23-2"></span>**Table 2-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Major Ions, Conductivity, Hardness, and TDS**



<span id="page-24-1"></span>**Figure 2-7 2013 Pigeon Lake Conductivity Profiles**

#### <span id="page-24-0"></span>*2.2.2 Nutrients*

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Phosphorus and nitrogen are important nutrients which can contribute to the growth of algae and cyanobacteria in Alberta's lakes. While agricultural plants are usually nitrogen limited, phosphorus is usually in shortest supply in aquatic ecosystems and even a slight increase of phosphorus can promote cyanobacterial blooms.

Throughout the summer, total phosphorus (TP) concentrations ranged from a minimum of 16  $\mu$ g/L on June 5<sup>th</sup> to a maximum of 56  $\mu$ g/L on September 19<sup>th</sup> with a mean of 26.7  $\mu$ g/L (Figure 2-8). Increasing TP concentrations throughout the summer is commonly observed in well-mixed lakes. Phosphorus released from sediments, entering the lake through runoff or through direct precipitation is constantly mixed into the water column and incorporated into biomass.



#### <span id="page-25-0"></span>**Figure 2-8 2013 Pigeon Lake Nutrient Concentrations**

In addition to total phosphorus, both dissolved phosphorus and dissolved ortho-phosphate were collected on all dates from Pigeon Lake. Results from these analyses are shown in Figure 2-9. Of interest is the decline in both fractions corresponding to an increase in algal biomass (as measured by chlorophyll *a* concentrations). This decrease suggests that the algae are preferentially taking up dissolved fractions of phosphorus, specifically ortho-phosphate for growth. Through uptake of dissolved phosphorus fractions and converting into algal biomass, this would effectively shift the form of phosphorus into the total pool which measures both bound (associated with sediment and algae) and unbound phosphorus in a water sample.



<span id="page-26-1"></span>**Figure 2-9 2013 Pigeon Lake Phosphorus and Chlorophyll-***a* **Concentrations**

Total Kieldahl Nitrogen (TKN) concentration ranged from a minimum of 526 µg/L on June 5<sup>th</sup> to a maximum of 1130  $\mu$ g/L on August 28<sup>th</sup> with an average value of 785  $\mu$ g/L in 2013 (Figure 2-8). Similar to total phosphorus, TKN concentrations increased over the course of the open water season. The average ratio of Total Nitrogen (TN of which TKN comprises the majority of) to TP was on average 30:1 for 2013. In a system in which no nutrient is limiting, the TN:TP ratio is typically 16:1 (Redfield, 1934). Hence, the TN:TP ratio in Pigeon Lake indicates a strong phosphorus limitation.

In addition to composite samples phosphorus and nitrogen were also measured from 1m below the surface and 1m above the sediment at the profile site on four occasions (Appendix 2-1). Phosphorus bound to the sediments may be released in a dissolved form back into the water column under anoxic conditions. Thus, the sediment can act as an important source of nutrients and these nutrients may accumulate in deeper waters under stratified conditions. 2013 data showed little difference in phosphorus or nitrogen concentrations at either depths.

#### <span id="page-26-0"></span>*2.2.3 Metals*

While most metals are naturally present in aquatic environments due to the weathering of rocks, elevated levels may be indicators of human pollution. In 2013, composite samples from the euphotic zone were analyzed twice for metals (Appendix 2-1). All concentrations fell within their respective CCME guidelines for protection of aquatic life.

### <span id="page-27-0"></span>**2.3 Lake Water Quality Summary**

Profiles of temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH and conductivity showed little variation with depth throughout the year in Pigeon Lake indicating little to no stratification. Conditions in Pigeon Lake such as high alkalinity, pH, and conductivity both reflect natural geology in the area, but also create favourable conditions for the growth of blue-green algae.

Variability over the season for several parameters likely reflected algal growth, photosynthesis and respiration. This included changes observes in pH, alkalinity, dissolved oxygen, water clarity and nutrient concentrations. While chlorophyll-*a* concentrations exhibited a strong positive relationship with total phosphorus as would be expected given that total phosphorus is the limiting nutrient for algal growth in Pigeon Lake, dissolved phosphorus was inversely related to chlorophyll-*a* concentrations. This suggests that during growth, algae and cyanobacteria may preferentially utilize dissolved fractions of phosphorus, converting it into total phosphorus through incorporation into algal biomass.

# <span id="page-28-0"></span>**3.0 STREAM WATER QUALITY**

Stream water quality samples were collected from a total of seven inflowing streams and the single outflow (Pigeon Lake Creek). Locations of the streams sampled are shown in Figure 3-1. Sample dates for each stream is presented in Table 3-1. All stream water quality data is provided in Appendix 3-1.

Streams sampling was conducted on a flow weighted basis. That is, more frequent (weekly) samples were collected earlier in the season when flows were higher, decreasing to bi-weekly sampling during the summer and early fall. In addition to routine sampling, streams were also sampled shortly after significant rainfall events on May 27 and July 16. As many parameters increase or decrease with changes in flow, it is important to conduct flow biased sampling in an attempt to capture the highest periods of variability in water quality.

In addition to water quality samples, physical parameters were also collected. These included measurements of dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH and conductivity. Instantaneous stream flow measurements were converted into discharge measurements to allow for calculation of loadings from streams. If there was no measureable flow in a given stream, water quality samples were not collected. Thus in some streams such as Grandview, Norris, Poplar Bay and Tide Creek, relatively few samples were collected due to zero measurable flow. While from a visual perspective, Tide Creek appears as though it would contribute a significant input into Pigeon Lake, it was found in 2012 and 2013 that there was relatively little to no flow throughout the season.

Streams represent a point source input of water quantity and quality into Pigeon Lake. Current water balances for Pigeon Lake suggest that these input sources are relatively small compared to diffuse non-point surface sources. However, sampling non-point sources is difficult, relying mostly on use of runoff coefficients developed through more extensive sampling programs and water quality models. Stream sampling by comparison is cost and time effective and provides a good broad overview of potential issues in the watershed which may manifest themselves in the receiving environment of the streams and lake.



<span id="page-29-0"></span>**Figure 3-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Water Quality Sample Locations**

<span id="page-29-1"></span>

	Date ('X' indicates sample was collected)															
Location	<u>က</u> ्। च	ဖ $4\overline{2}$	4/30	5/2	5/6	က 5/1	$\overline{\phantom{0}}$ 5/2	0 61	6/24	7/8	ဖ 7/1	7/22	8/6	8/20	9/3	$\overline{\phantom{0}}$ $\overline{\delta}$
Grandview		X														
Mitchell	X			X	X	X	Χ	Χ	X	Χ	Χ	X				
<b>Norris</b>		X		X												
Outflow				Χ	X	X	Χ	Χ	X	X	Χ	X	X	X	Χ	Χ
Poplar	X			X	X		$\overline{\mathsf{X}}$				X					
Bay																
Sunset	X			X	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	X	Χ	Χ	X		X		
Tide			X								Χ					
Zeiner		Χ		Χ	Χ	Χ	X	Х	Х	Х		X				

**Table 3-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Sample Dates**

*Note: Highlighted cells correspond to samples collected after significant rainfall events.*

#### <span id="page-30-0"></span>**3.1 Stream Chemistry**

For all stream parameters measured, figures of measured values for each stream on each date sampled are presented in the following sections. In addition, summary statistics were also generated for all inflow streams combined, the outflow stream, and all streams combined (inflows and outflows). Summary statistics are presented to show the general range of concentrations observed at Pigeon Lake streams. One summary statistic unique to streams is flow weighted mean concentrations (FWMC).

FWMC is the average concentration of a substance in the water corrected for volume of water between samples. Thus, samples collected during higher flows and/or more with more time to a subsequent sample are given greater weight than those collected under low flows and/or collected close to the next sample. The FWMC is calculated as:

$$
\sum_{1}^{n} (c_i * t_i * q_i)
$$
  
\n
$$
FWMC = \frac{\sum_{1}^{n} (c_i * t_i * q_i)}{\sum_{1}^{n} (c_i * t_i)}
$$

where  $c_i$  = concentration in the  $i^h$  sample

 $t_i$  = time window for the  $f^h$  sample

q<sub>i</sub> = flow in the *i*<sup>th</sup> sample

#### <span id="page-30-1"></span>*3.1.1 Physical Parameters*

Table 3-2 provides summary statistics for Pigeon Lake stream physical parameters (dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity and water temperature). Figures 3-2 to 3-3 present individual measures for Pigeon Lake stream physical parameters.

		<b>Dissolved</b>			Water
<b>Streams</b>	<b>Statistic</b>	Oxygen	pH	<b>Conductivity</b>	<b>Temperature</b>
<b>Inflows</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	7.31	7.38	265.7	7.92
	Mean	7.23	7.33	410.7	9.61
	Median	6.88	7.36	416.7	10.22
	Min	1.35	6.68	169.0	0.36
	Max	11.58	7.91	666.7	18.15
	5th percentile	3.93	6.82	197.5	0.68
	10th percentile	4.16	6.95	213.4	2.11
	90th percentile	10.74	7.62	567.7	15.30
	95th percentile	11.28	7.68	589.0	17.21
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	8.70	8.50	317.8	17.32
	Mean	10.37	8.48	291.4	16.17
	Median	9.88	8.57	317.0	19.22
	Min	8.77	7.74	144.0	3.10
	Max	13.78	8.84	328.8	22.51
	5th percentile	8.80	7.98	179.6	6.92
	10th percentile	8.87	8.18	216.2	9.47
	90th percentile	13.40	8.71	325.0	20.88
	95th percentile	13.72	8.77	326.5	21.53
<b>Combined</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	8.28	8.17	302.2	14.50
	Mean	7.94	7.61	382.0	11.19
	Median	8.29	7.52	383.8	11.22
	Min	1.35	6.68	144.0	0.36
	Max	13.78	8.84	666.7	22.51
	5th percentile	4.03	6.83	196.9	0.86
	10th percentile	4.29	7.03	212.6	3.11
	90th percentile	10.95	8.57	542.1	19.33
	95th percentile	11.53	8.62	579.9	20.69

<span id="page-31-0"></span>**Table 3-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Physical Parameters Summary Statistics**



<span id="page-32-0"></span>**Figure 3-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Conductivity and Water Temperature**

Conductivity was lowest during the spring, increasing over the course of the summer. This reflects early spring melt which tends to be low in dissolved ions. The lower conductivity of the outflow is likely due to the influence of lake water which comprises the majority of the outflow water.

Water temperature increased at all streams over the course of the open water season. Outflow temperatures were higher than all inflowing streams beginning in July, again reflecting the influence of the lake which is subject to less temperature fluctuations as opposed to the smaller inflowing streams.



<span id="page-33-0"></span>**Figure 3-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Dissolved Oxygen and pH**

Dissolved oxygen concentrations decreased through the open water season at all locations. Warmer water holds less dissolved oxygen relative to colder water and the pattern observed in water temperature suggests that dissolved oxygen concentration in streams primarily reflects temperature. The outflow did have slightly higher dissolved oxygen concentrations throughout the year, despite having warmer water relative to the inflowing streams. This may be in part due to high primary productivity in the outflow (growth of algae and plants were observed throughout the season) or the influence of Pigeon Lake where primary productivity contributes to elevated daytime dissolved oxygen levels. Tide Creek dissolved oxygen concentrations in mid-July were near anoxic levels (1.35 mg/L). This sample was collected after a recent storm event which resulted in an increase in dissolved oxygen levels at most other streams. Thus prior to this date, the water was likely stagnant and dissolved oxygen levels may have been lower due to chemical and biological processes.

Stream pH stayed relatively consistent throughout the open water period, showing small declines potentially in response to storm events. For the inflowing streams, pH was near neutral (FWMC=7.38) while the outflow had a more alkaline pH (FWMC=8.50), again reflecting influence of Pigeon Lake as well as higher productivity which can lead to elevated pH readings.

#### *3.1.2 Nutrients*

#### <span id="page-34-0"></span>*Nitrogen Parameters*

Measured nitrogen parameters included ammonia  $(NH_3)$ , nitrate  $(NO_3)$ , nitrite  $(NO_2)$ , nitrate+nitrite ( $NO<sub>3</sub>+NO<sub>2</sub>$ ) and total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN). Total nitrogen was calculated as the sum of organic and inorganic nitrogen parameters. Summary statistics for nitrogen parameters are presented in Table 3-3. Figures 3-4 to 3-6 present individual stream measurements for the various nitrogen parameters. Due to contamination issues, all nitrogen values from July 16 for Poplar Bay Creek and Pigeon Lake Creek (outflow) were removed from the dataset.

<span id="page-35-0"></span>

<b>Streams</b>	<b>Statistic</b>	Ammonia	<b>Total</b> Kjeldahl Nitrogen	<b>Nitrate</b>	<b>Nitrite</b>	<b>Nitrate</b> <b>Nitrite</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>Nitrogen</b>
<b>Inflows</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	0.0809	1.173	0.2272	0.0084	0.2355	1.408
	Mean	0.0815	1.151	0.1576	0.0071	0.1646	1.315
	Median	0.0683	1.140	0.0599	0.0063	0.0679	1.210
	Min	0.0122	0.641	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.705
	Max	0.3720	1.890	0.8130	0.0368	0.8330	2.060
	5th percentile	0.0180	0.768	0.0033	0.0010	0.0061	0.860
	10th percentile	0.0238	0.863	0.0091	0.0010	0.0126	0.904
	90th percentile	0.1287	1.504	0.4973	0.0115	0.5045	1.881
	95th percentile	0.1566	1.650	0.6123	0.0137	0.6255	1.903
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	0.0261	0.968	0.0145	0.0014	0.0151	1.005
	Mean	0.0666	1.025	0.0992	0.0024	0.1010	1.171
	Median	0.0302	0.841	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.934
	Min	0.0103	0.612	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.612
	Max	0.2850	2.027	0.9840	0.0074	0.9880	2.040
	5th percentile	0.0107	0.615	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.666
	10th percentile	0.0115	0.627	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.710
	90th percentile	0.1535	1.768	0.0831	0.0048	0.0902	1.861
	95th percentile	0.2141	1.902	0.4901	0.0060	0.4960	1.947
<b>Combined</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	0.0425	1.029	0.0783	0.0035	0.0812	1.126
	Mean	0.0781	1.122	0.1441	0.0060	0.1499	1.282
	Median	0.0639	1.065	0.0453	0.0046	0.0529	1.200
	Min	0.0103	0.612	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.612
	Max	0.3720	2.027	0.9840	0.0368	0.9880	2.060
	5th percentile	0.0143	0.660	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.711
	10th percentile	0.0184	0.719	0.0030	0.0010	0.0030	0.836
	90th percentile	0.1427	1.616	0.4940	0.0113	0.5003	1.879
	95th percentile	0.1700	1.814	0.6303	0.0126	0.6535	1.923

**Table 3-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Nitrogen Parameters Summary Statistics**


**Figure 3-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Ammonia and Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen Concentrations**

Ammonia concentrations were slightly elevated early in the open water season, but quickly declined at all streams by mid-May. A small increase was observed at most streams sampled on July 8, but generally declined again on subsequent sampling dates. Ammonia concentrations at the outflow were slightly lower than the inflowing streams most of the season. Relative to lake concentrations, all streams had much higher ammonia content.

Total Kjeldahl nitrogen, a measure of organic nitrogen, ammonia and ammonium (NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>), varied between 0.5 and 2.0 mg/L throughout most of the open water period. TKN concentrations did

not show any strong pattern related to flow or time of year. TKN was slightly lower at the outflow during the latter part of the year (with the exception of the final sample collected in September), but was indiscernible from other streams during the early part of the year. TKN concentrations were higher at Zeiner Creek for the latter part of the year.



**Figure 3-5 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Nitrate and Nitrite Concentrations**

Both nitrate and nitrite concentrations showed similar patterns at streams throughout the year as would be expected. Concentrations were highest early in the open water season and declined through the rest of the year. Peaks were observed shortly after major rainfall events (May 27 and July 16) likely as a result of flushing of surrounding soils. Outflow concentrations for both parameters were low, but within the range of the other inflows.



**Figure 3-6 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Nitrate+Nitrite and Total Nitrogen Concentrations**

The combined variable of nitrate+nitrite showed very similar patterns to nitrate in Pigeon Lake streams. As nitrate is present in much higher concentrations relative to nitrite, this is to be expected. Similarly, total nitrogen, a measure of all inorganic and organic nitrogen, showed similar patterns to TKN which comprises the majority of nitrogen in Pigeon Lake streams. Concentrations of total nitrogen were typical of what is observed at other small streams flowing into lakes in Alberta (C. Teichreb, unpub. data) and were higher than concentrations observed in Pigeon Lake (see Figure 5-2 in Groundwater Quality section).

#### *Phosphorus Parameters*

Phosphorus parameters measured in 2013 included total phosphorus, total dissolved phosphorus and dissolved ortho-phosphate. Table 3-4 presents summary statistics for the three phosphorus parameters measured while Figures 3-7 to 3-8 presents individual measurements for each stream sampled. Due to contamination, all phosphorus results from July 16 for Pigeon Lake Creek (outflow) were removed from the dataset.

<b>Streams</b>	<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>Phosphorus</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>Dissolved</b> <b>Phosphorus</b>	<b>Dissolved</b> Ortho- Phosphate
<b>Inflows</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	0.1612	0.0958	0.0604
	Mean	0.1554	0.0954	0.0643
	Median	0.1370	0.0677	0.0390
	Min	0.0598	0.0279	0.0102
	Max	0.4000	0.3330	0.2890
	5th percentile	0.0678	0.0353	0.0141
	10th percentile	0.0736	0.0371	0.0185
	90th percentile	0.2790	0.1940	0.1480
	95th percentile	0.3030	0.2950	0.1930
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	0.0862	0.0064	0.0010
	Mean	0.0701	0.0077	0.0014
	Median	0.0286	0.0076	0.0005
	Min	0.0179	0.0053	0.0005
	Max	0.2600	0.0115	0.0061
	5th percentile	0.0189	0.0056	0.0005
	10th percentile	0.0198	0.0059	0.0005
	90th percentile	0.1770	0.0096	0.0035
	95th percentile	0.2156	0.0105	0.0048
<b>Combined</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	0.1087	0.0332	0.0188
	Mean	0.1361	0.0755	0.0501
	Median	0.1270	0.0526	0.0296
	Min	0.0179	0.0053	0.0005
	Max	0.4000	0.3330	0.2890
	5th percentile	0.0228	0.0068	0.0005
	10th percentile	0.0271	0.0075	0.0005
	90th percentile	0.2624	0.1636	0.1106
	95th percentile	0.2916	0.2740	0.1924

**Table 3-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Phosphorus Parameters Summary Statistics**



#### **Figure 3-7 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Total Phosphorus Concentrations**

Total Phosphorus Concentrations in Pigeon Lake streams were similar to nitrogen parameters, starting at elevated concentrations during the spring runoff and decreasing shortly afterwards in late May. However, most streams showed a gradual increase in concentration from late May onwards, especially at Zeiner. This may reflect an increased flushing of phosphorus off of surrounding soils into the receiving streams. Storm events did not appear to play a significant role in influencing short-term phosphorus concentrations.

Outflow total phosphorus concentrations were typically lower than the inflow streams (FWMCs of 0.0862 and 0.1612 for outflow and inflowing streams respectively). However, peaks in phosphorus concentration above inflowing stream measurements were also observed through the season. Concentrations of total phosphorus were much higher in streams relative to Pigeon Lake (see Figure 5-3 in Groundwater Quality section).



**Figure 3-8 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Total Dissolved Phosphorus and Ortho-Phosphate Concentrations**

Total dissolved phosphorus and dissolved ortho-phosphate are constituents of total phosphorus and therefore showed similar patterns to total phosphorus with elevated concentrations at the beginning of the year, declining rapidly, and then increasing through the rest of the season at most sites. Zeiner Creek concentrations were generally much higher relative to all other streams. The outflow concentrations were lower than the other streams and did not show the same peaks as total phosphorus, indicating that the peaks may have been associated with suspended sediments observed on those dates (see Figure 3-10 in the following section). Overall, concentrations of dissolved phosphorus and ortho-phosphate in the outflow were

similar to Pigeon Lake, while the inflowing streams had higher concentrations of these two parameters relative to the outflow and lake.

## *3.1.3 Organic Carbon, Total Dissolved Solids and Total Suspended Solids*

Table 3-5 presents summary statistics for total and dissolved organic carbon (TOC and DOC), total dissolved solids (TDS) and total suspended solids (TSS). Figures 3-9 to 3-10 present individual dates and stream data for these parameters.



#### **Table 3-5 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Summary Statistics for Organic Carbon, Total Dissolved Solids and Total Suspended Solids**



**Figure 3-9 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Total and Dissolved Organic Carbon Concentrations**



**Figure 3-10 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Total Suspended Solids and Total Dissolved Solids Concentrations**

Both total and dissolved organic carbon showed similar patterns in Pigeon Lake streams throughout the year. Concentrations were typically between 10 and 20 mg/L at all streams with the exception of the outflow and Zeiner Creek. While Zeiner Creek initially had similar concentrations as the other inflows, both TOC and DOC steadily rose throughout the rest of the year indicating a much higher organic carbon loading source to this stream relative to others. The outflow had much lower concentrations of both parameters relative to the inflows throughout the year with the exception of a storm related peak in concentration on July 16. While TOC and DOC were not measured in Pigeon Lake, it is likely safe to assume the concentrations observed in the outflow reflect lake chemistry as a similar pattern was observed for many other measured parameters.

Total dissolved solids, a measure of dissolved organic and inorganic constituents in water, was lowest during the spring runoff when primarily dilute melt waters would be entering the streams. Concentrations increased through the year, showing slight declines corresponding to rainfall events (May 27 and July 16). Similar to other parameters, the outflow had lower TDS concentrations reflecting lower TDS concentrations of Pigeon Lake. It is likely that low TDS water entering via precipitation may have resulted in lower TDS concentrations in the lake and subsequently the outflow.

Total suspended solids were relatively low at all streams throughout the year with the exception of initial samples collected during runoff. TSS did show significant peaks at the outflow. The peaks on May 27 and July 16 corresponded to recent rainfall events. The June 10<sup>th</sup> peak appears to be the result of a windstorm event on Pigeon Lake which resulted in resuspension of sediment. The September 17<sup>th</sup> peak likely corresponded to the cyanobacterial bloom occurring at that time, as algae contribute to measures of TSS.

## **3.2 Stream Bacteriological Parameters**

Both fecal coliform bacteria and *E.coli* bacteria samples were collected from all Pigeon Lake streams sampled. Table 3-6 presents summary statistics for the two bacteria parameters, and Figure 3-11 presents individual results by stream and date.

Both bacteria parameters were typically low in all streams, often being present below detection limit (<10 colony forming units per 100 mL). However, samples collected after recent rainfall events (May 27 and July 16) had elevated to extremely high numbers in several streams. As these bacteria originate from the digestive tracts of warm blooded animals, these peaks likely reflect a flushing of the bacteria from surrounding soils into the streams. High peaks followed by rapid declines are not unusual for small streams located in agricultural areas. From a contact recreation standpoint, it would be advisable to avoid contact with streams after recent storm events for health and safety reasons.

		<b>Fecal</b>	
<b>Streams</b>	<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Coliforms</b>	E. coli
<b>Inflows</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	630	477
	Mean	458	384
	Median	50	20
	Min	5	5
	Max	8800	8800
	5th percentile	5	5
	10th percentile	5	5
	90th percentile	470	340
	95th percentile	2600	2100
<b>Outflow</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	35	29
	Mean	84	64
	Median	18	5
	Min	5	5
	Max	780	600
	5th percentile	5	5
	10th percentile	5	5
	90th percentile	96	82
	95th percentile	372	289
<b>Combined</b>	<b>FWMC</b>	213	164
	Mean	368	307
	Median	30	10
	Min	5	5
	Max	8800	8800
	5th percentile	5	5
	10th percentile		5
90th percentile		449	334
	95th percentile	1417	1125

**Table 3-6 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Bacteria Numbers**



**Figure 3-11 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Fecal Coliform and** *E.coli* **Bacteria Counts**

## **3.3 Stream Water Quality Summary**

Concentrations of many parameters tended to be highest during spring runoff which tends to wash accumulated material from the winter into the streams. Similarly, concentrations of several parameters peaked shortly after significant storm events. These post-storm event peaks were especially evident in the bacterial parameters.

While concentrations for most parameters at the inflowing streams was generally similar, the outflow was quite different. Outflow dissolved oxygen, pH and TSS tended to be higher relative to inflows while conductivity, TDP, ammonia, TKN, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, total dissolved phosphorus, ortho-phosphate, TOC and DOC were lower. The occasional high TSS peaks in the outflow contributed to high peaks in total phosphorus, despite being lower than most streams on all other dates. Concentrations observed in the outflow strongly reflected those of Pigeon Lake, while concentrations in the inflow likely reflected surrounding land-use activities.

# **4.0 STREAM NUTRIENT LOADINGS**

While stream chemistry is useful in delineating differences amongst streams that may be the result of differences in land-use or formation, it is also useful to know how much of a given substance is entering a lake from a given stream (or leaving the lake in the case of the outflow). Loadings can be estimated using instantaneous discharge measurements. By quantifying discharge (measured in cubic meters per second) and knowing the concentration of a given parameter (typically in milligrams per liter), an instantaneous loading rate expressed as kilograms per day can be calculated. Instantaneous loading rates therefore account for differences in stream flow and provide an estimate of how much of a substance is entering the lake. While a stream may have high concentrations of a given parameter, it may not contribute a large load to the lake if there is minimal flow and vice versa.

From a watershed management perspective, it is important to know which streams contribute high loads of phosphorus, as these can be seen as potentially contributing more to the growth of algae in the lake. However, this must be weighed carefully with concentration measurements. Reducing phosphorus levels in a stream with low concentrations but high overall loads due to high flows may prove more difficult than reducing concentrations in a smaller stream with problematically high phosphorus concentrations.

For this report, loadings were calculated for nutrient parameters only, as nuisance algal blooms are currently the primary water quality concern of the majority of lake users at Pigeon Lake. Loads were calculated on an instantaneous basis using the method described above. For cumulative (*i.e.* annual) loads, the period between sampling dates was calculated. Daily loads were assumed to be constant from a given sampling date to the next sampling date. For example, if loading rates were calculated to be 1 kg/day for a given parameter on July 5, and the subsequent sampling date was July 10, the rate was assumed to be 1kg/day for July 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Cumulative loads were calculated as the sum of all daily loads over the course of the sample period (late April to late September).

On July 16, samples for nitrogen parameters at Poplar Bay and Pigeon Lake (outflow) Creeks and phosphorus parameters for Pigeon Lake Creek were found to be contaminated and subsequently removed from the dataset. To estimate loads for this date, concentrations from the previous sample trip (July 8 for the outflow, May 27 for Poplar Bay) were assumed and discharges from July 16 were used. Results for both instantaneous and cumulative loads for all streams are presented in Appendix 4-1. Discussion of individual parameters follows below.

## **4.1 Stream Discharge**

Figures 4-1 and 4-2 show instantaneous and cumulative stream discharge respectively for all streams sampled in 2013. For all streams except the outflow and Tide Creek, discharge was highest during the initial spring runoff, decreasing to low levels soon afterwards. Increases in discharge rates were observed after major rainfall events on May 27 and July 16 at several streams. Several of the streams decreased to zero measurable flow by early summer reflecting their ephemeral nature.

Tide Creek had measurable flows on two dates only (May 30 and July 16). Discharge rates were similar on both dates and much higher than the relatively smaller streams. Discharge rate for the outflow of Pigeon Lake reflected lake levels. As lake levels increased through the initial part of summer, so did this discharge rates. The July 16 storm sampling event saw a peak occur at the outflow which was maintained to July 22 before gradually declining. This is in contrast to the sharper decline observed at the smaller inflows. As the lake rose in level during this period, it would create a buffering volume along discharge out the outflow to continue for a longer period of time.



**Figure 4-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Discharge**



#### **Figure 4-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Cumulative Discharge**

Cumulative discharge was similar for most inflows, ranging from 58,270,560 L (Zeiner) to 307,405,800 L (Sunset Harbour). Of the inflowing streams, Tide Creek had the highest cumulative discharge (747,718,800 L). The outflow had had a higher cumulative discharge than all sampled inflowing streams combined at 3,796,531,500 L. This was due to a combination of continued flow throughout the year with discharge rates much higher than the inflows on most dates. Interestingly, the outflow does not discharge on a continuous basis from year to year. During 2013, the weir at the outflow of Pigeon Lake was lowered as previous frost heaving had raised the level. As a result, discharge from the lake occurred sooner and on a more consistent basis relative to previous years.

## **4.2 Nitrogen Loadings**

Instantaneous loadings for ammonia and total Kjeldahl nitrogen are presented in Figure 4-3. Figure 4-4 shows cumulative loadings for these two nitrogen parameters.



**Figure 4-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Instantaneous Ammonia and Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen Loads**

Instantaneous ammonia loadings showed the influence of discharge measurements, loading rates being highest in spring and declining later in the season. Tide Creek, which had relatively higher discharge measurements but similar ammonia concentrations had higher ammonia loading rates relative to the other inflow streams. Despite having much higher discharge rates than the inflows, the outflow ammonia loading rate was only slightly higher than inflow rates. This is due to the low ammonia concentrations detected on most dates at the outflow (Figure 3- 4).

Instantaneous TKN loading rates were similar to the ammonia loading rates for all streams. The exception was the outflow, where loading rates were much higher on most dates than the inflowing streams. TKN concentration was similar in the outflow relative to the inflows, so this higher loading rate reflects higher discharge rates observed at the outflow.

Cumulatively, ammonia loads were lowest in Zeiner Creek (3 kg) and highest in Tide Creek (53 kg) for the inflowing streams. The outflow discharged 104 kg of ammonia over the 2013 sampling period. For TKN, cumulative loads were lowest in Zeiner Creek (70 kg) and highest in Tide Creek (875 kg) for inflowing streams while the outflow TKN cumulative load was 3838 kg.



**Figure 4-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Cumulative Ammonia and Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen Loads**

Figure 4-5 shows instantaneous loading rates for nitrate and nitrite in Pigeon Lake streams, while Figure 4-6 shows cumulative loading rates for these two parameters. Both parameters had higher loading rates during initial spring runoff, with subsequent small peaks after the May 27 and July 16 storm event. Nitrate loading rates for the outflow were very similar to the inflowing streams, as nitrate concentration was much lower in the outflow relative to the inflowing streams. While Tide Creek initially had the highest nitrate loading rate during spring runoff, this rate would have dropped off significantly afterwards when no flow was detected. By the July 16 storm event, loading rates were similar to other streams at Tide Creek.

Instantaneous nitrite loading rates were highest at Tide Creek on the two dates sampled. Loading rates at the outflow were slightly elevated compared to the inflows although the low nitrite concentration in the outflow resulted in lower loading rates than might have been expected with the higher discharge rates observed at the outflow.

On a cumulative basis, for inflowing streams nitrate load was lowest at Grandview (10 kg) and highest at Sunset Harbour (143 kg). Instantaneous rates may appear to suggest loads would be highest at Tide Creek. However, the more consistent flows observed at Sunset Harbour meant a more consistent supply of nitrate to the lake at lower levels. Cumulative nitrate load at the outflow was 55 kg, lower than several of the inflows.

Nitrite cumulative loads were lowest at Zeiner (0.4 kg) and highest at Tide (5.4 kg) for the inflowing streams. Cumulative loads at the outflow were very similar to Tide Creek at 5.4 kg.



**Figure 4-5 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Instantaneous Nitrate and Nitrite Loads**



**Figure 4-6 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Cumulative Nitrate and Nitrite Loads**

Figure 4-7 shows instantaneous loading rates for nitrate+nitrite and total nitrogen. Cumulative loads for both parameters are shown in Figure 4-8.

Instantaneous loading rates for nitrate+nitrite were very similar to nitrate loading rates. Rates for inflowing streams were highest during spring runoff and declined to low levels afterwards. Increases were observed after significant rainfall events. For total nitrogen, loading rates reflected discharge rates much more closely. Loading rates were highest in Tide Creek for the inflowing stream and were generally higher on most dates for the outflow.

Over the course of the sampling season, Zeiner had the lowest nitrate+nitrite load (12 kg) and Tide Creek had the highest (126 kg). Outflow cumulative nitrate+nitrite load was only 58 kg. For total nitrogen, Zeiner had the lowest load (82 kg), and Tide the highest (1001 kg). The outflow had significantly more total nitrogen load at 3896 kg.



**Figure 4-7 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Instantaneous Nitrate+Nitrite and Total Nitrogen Loads**



Stream

**Figure 4-8 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Cumulative Nitrate+Nitrite and Total Nitrogen Loads**

## **4.3 Phosphorus Loadings**

Instantaneous total phosphorus loading rate for Pigeon Lake streams is shown in Figure 4-9 while Figure 4-10 shows cumulative total phosphorus loads. Phosphorus loading rates were highest in the spring runoff with a small peak occurring for some streams on July 16 after the rainfall event. Tide Creek had the highest phosphorus loading rates relative to all streams on both dates when flow was detected. The inflow phosphorus loading rate was similar to slightly elevated compared to most inflow streams with the exception of June 10 (17 kg/day). Higher discharge rate along with higher total phosphorus concentration on that date contributed to the higher loading rate.

Cumulative total phosphorus loads were lowest at Zeiner (10 kg) and highest at Tide (98 kg) for the inflowing streams. The outflow total phosphorus loads were much higher than the inflows at 331 kg over the course of the sampling season.



**Figure 4-9 2013 Pigeon Lake Instantaneous Total Phosphorus Loads**



**Figure 4-10 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Cumulative Phosphorus Loads**

Figures 4-11 and 4-12 show instantaneous loading rates and cumulative loads respectively for total dissolved phosphorus and dissolved ortho-phosphate. Instantaneous loading rates were similar for both parameters to total phosphorus loading rates, showing peaks during spring runoff as well as after major rainfall events. Tide Creek had the highest loading rates for both parameters on both dates, while the outflow loading rates were generally quite low and indiscernible from the inflows.

Cumulatively, Tide Creek had the highest loads for both total dissolved phosphorus (61 kg) and ortho-phosphate (33 kg). The outflow had relative low loads of total dissolved phosphorus (26 kg) and the lowest loads of ortho-phosphate (4 kg). The much lower loads for the dissolved phosphorus constituents in the outflow relative to total phosphorus reflects the fact that the majority of phosphorus in the outflow was likely bound to sediment particles. As discussed previously, the higher sediment load (as TSS) in the outflow likely contributed to the high total phosphorus loads.



**Figure 4-11 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Instantaneous Total Dissolved Phosphorus and Ortho-Phosphate Loads**



**Figure 4-12 2013 Pigeon Lake Cumulative Total Dissolved Phosphorus and Ortho-Phosphate Loads**

## **4.4 Stream Nutrient Loadings Summary**

Discharge rates were similar for most inflowing streams, with maximum rates occurring during spring freshet. Peaks were also observed after significant rainfall events. Tide Creek had high discharge rates, reflecting the size of this stream. However, flow was only measured on two dates, thus despite its size, Tide Creek cumulative discharge was not a great deal higher than other measured inflows. The outflow had measurable flows on most sampling dates and reflected the increasing and decreasing water levels of Pigeon Lake.

For most nutrient parameters, Zeiner had the lowest loading rates despite often higher nutrient concentrations. This is the result of lower discharge rates in Zeiner relative to other Pigeon Lake streams. Similarly, although nutrient concentrations in Tide Creek were close to concentrations observed at other inflows, loading rates were often highest at this location.

While the outflow had higher and more continuous flows, cumulative loadings were only highest in the outflow for ammonia, TKN, total nitrogen and total phosphorus. Total nitrogen was primarily comprised of TKN indicating that most nitrogen in the outflow was organic in nature despite the relatively low TOC and DOC concentrations observed in the outflow. Total phosphorus loads were higher in the outflow primarily due to peaks in total phosphorus concentration associated with peaks in TSS from storm related events and potentially suspended biological material.

## **5.0 GROUNDWATER QUALITY**

Groundwater refers to sub-surface waters contained within interstitial pores and cracks in the soil. While generally not a large component of a lake water balance, groundwater inputs and outputs become more important in lakes with small watersheds such as Pigeon Lake where the relative volume of surface water entering the lake is smaller. Much is unknown about the size and movement of groundwater into and out of lakes in Alberta due to the difficulty of monitoring these aspects, however typical water balances do assume a certain quantity entering the lake and offsetting surface outflows and evaporation to some degree. As groundwater contains dissolved constituents such as nutrients, it is important to monitor in order to ascertain potential impact from this resource.

Twelve groundwater samples were collected from domestic wells located within the Pigeon Lake watershed on October 22 and 23, 2013 (Table 5-1 and Figure 5-1). Samples were collected following guidance outlined in U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (2012). In short, resident volunteers at Pigeon Lake allowed access to domestic wells servicing their residence. Samples were collected after purging the outside line for a minimum of 15 minutes. Samples were submitted to an accredited analytical laboratory for analyses of nutrients, total dissolved solids, total suspended solids, organic carbon, and bacteriological parameters. Additional information collected from volunteer residents included well age, well depth, and frequency of use. Complete results are presented in Appendix 5-1 and discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Sample ID	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
13GWE01506	<b>Crystal Keys</b>	22-Oct-13
13GWE01500	Ma-Me-O	22-Oct-13
13GWE01501	<b>Rundle's Mission</b>	22-Oct-13
13GWE01502	Itaska Beach	22-Oct-13
13GWE01503	Golden Day's Beach	22-Oct-13
13GWE01504	<b>Grandview Beach 1</b>	22-Oct-13
13GWE01505	<b>Crystal Springs</b>	22-Oct-13
13GWE01510	<b>Grandview Beach 2</b>	23-Oct-13
13GWE01509	Leduc County @ Hwy 616 RR 11	23-Oct-13
13GWE01511	<b>Sunset Harbour</b>	23-Oct-13
13GWE01508	<b>Silver Beach</b>	23-Oct-13
13GWE01507	Johnsonia Beach	23-Oct-13

**Table 5-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater Sampling Locations and Dates**



**Figure 5-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater Sampling Locations**

## **5.1 Nutrients**

Nutrients were sampled from groundwater wells primarily to determine potential loading from groundwater into Pigeon Lake. Parameters collected were the same as for the streams and lake, including various nitrogen and phosphorus components. Summary statistics are presented in Table 5-2.

<b>Measure</b>	Total Kjeldahl <b>Nitrogen</b>	Ammonia	Total <b>Nitrogen</b>	Total <b>Phosphorus</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>Dissolved</b> <b>Phosphorus</b>	Ortho- phosphate
Mean	0.327	0.276	0.349	0.032	0.029	0.023
Median	0.305	0.231	0.315	0.023	0.024	0.023
Minimum	0.074	0.009	0.074	0.002	0.001	0.001
Maximum	0.596	0.540	0.596	0.111	0.102	0.054
5th percentile	0.080	0.014	0.143	0.005	< 0.001	< 0.001
10th percentile	0.097	0.033	0.211	0.007	0.002	0.002
90th percentile	0.540	0.539	0.544	0.061	0.054	0.042
95th percentile $\blacksquare$	0.567	0.540	0.570	0.085	0.076	0.048

**Table 5-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater Nutrient Summary Statistics**

*All values in mg/L*

#### *5.1.1 Nitrogen*

A summary of nitrogen components found in detectable quantities is presented in Figure 5-2. Both nitrate and nitrite were below analytical detection limits in all samples collected. Ammonia ranged in concentration from 0.009 to 0.540 mg/L (median 0.231 mg/L) while total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN) ranged in concentration from 0.074 to 0.596 mg/L (median 0.305 mg/L). Total nitrogen, calculated as the sum of inorganic and organic nitrogen components, ranged from 0.074 to 0.596 mg/L (median 0.315 mg/L).

Relative to stream and lake nitrogen concentrations, TKN and total nitrogen concentrations in groundwater samples were much lower. Median TKN values for the lake and streams were 0.76 and 1.07 mg/L respectively while total nitrogen values were 0.76 and 1.20 mg/L respectively. Ammonia concentrations, however, were much higher in groundwater samples relative to the lake and streams (medians of 0.029 and 0.059 mg/L respectively).

As TKN is a measure of organic nitrogen, ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) and ammonium (NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>), it appears that groundwater contains a much higher fraction of ammonia relative to surface water. Ammonia typically occurs at concentrations lower than 0.2 mg/L in groundwater (Bouwer and Crowe, 1988) however surveys of raw drinking water in Alberta has shown that average ammonia concentrations range from 0.2 to 0.6 mg/L (Health Canada, 2013). Concentrations observed from Pigeon Lake fall well within this range.



*Note: Boxes delineate 25th and 75th percentiles around the median. Whiskers represent 10th and 90th percentiles.*

#### **Figure 5-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater, Lake and Stream Box and Whisker Plots for Nitrogen Parameters**

## *5.1.2 Phosphorus*

Samples for phosphorus parameters included total and dissolved phosphorus and orthophosphate. A summary of results for these three parameters is presented in Figure 5-3. Minimum detected concentrations for ortho-phosphate and dissolved phosphorus were below detection limit (<0.001 mg/L) while the minimum value for total phosphorus was 0.002 mg/L. Maximum concentrations for ortho-phosphate, dissolved phosphorus and total phosphorus were 0.054, 0.102, and 0.111 mg/L respectively. Median concentrations for the same three parameters were 0.023, 0.024, and 0.023 mg/L.

Concentrations of all three phosphorus parameters were very similar to each other, indicating the majority of phosphorus is in the dissolved phase. While the median value for dissolved phosphorus was slightly higher than that of total phosphorus, this was confirmed to be within acceptable analytical variability, emphasizing how similar concentrations amongst the three parameters were.

Median concentrations of phosphorus in groundwater were much lower relative to stream concentrations (0.124, 0.053, and 0.031 for total, dissolved and ortho-phosphate respectively). However, concentrations in groundwater were higher than those of Pigeon Lake (0.023, 0.007, and 0.001 mg/L for total, dissolved and ortho-phosphate respectively).

## **5.2 Total suspended solids, total dissolved solids and organic carbon**

Summary statistics for total dissolved solids (TDS), total organic carbon (TOC) and dissolved organic carbon (DOC) are presented in Table 5-3 and Figure 5-4. Total suspended solids (TSS), a measure of particulate matter >0.45µm in size, was below detection limit (3 mg/L) in all but one groundwater sample hence is not discussed further below.



#### **Table 5-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater TDS, TOC and DOC Summary Statistics**



*Note: Boxes delineate 25th and 75th percentiles around the median. Whiskers represent 10th and 90th percentiles.*

#### **Figure 5-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater, Lake and Stream Box and Whisker Plots for Phosphorus Parameters**


*Note: Boxes delineate 25th and 75th percentiles around the median. Whiskers represent 10th and 90th percentiles.*

#### **Figure 5-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater, Lake and Stream Box and Whisker Plots for TDS, TOC and DOC**

TDS, a measure of dissolved constituents (primarily major ions like chloride, sodium, magnesium, etc.) ranged from 367 to 949 mg/L (median 593 mg/L). DOC and TOC ranged from a minimum of 2.3 mg/L for both to maximums of 7.2 and 7.5 mg/L respectively (medians of 3.75 and 4.05 mg/L for DOC and TOC).

TOC and DOC were higher in streams (medians of 15.6 and 15.2 mg/L respectively). Both stream TDS (median 239 mg/L) and lake TDS (176 mg/L) were much lower relative to groundwater samples. TOC and DOC were not measured in Pigeon Lake. The apparent differences between groundwater chemistry and surface water chemistry reflects the fact that groundwater is in contact with inorganic material (low organic content, greater dissolution of major ions into solution), while surface water is in contact with material higher in organic content (organic top soils).

# **5.3 Groundwater Bacteriological Parameters**

Both *E.coli* and faecal coliform bacteria were sampled for from all groundwater wells. These bacteria are of significant human health concern, especially if present in drinking water. While these bacteria are not usually present in groundwater, wells which are not maintained properly may become contaminated. None of the twelve wells sampled had detectable quantities of either bacteriological parameter.

# **5.4 Well Depth and Age**

Additional aspects collected during sampling included the depth of the well and the year the well was drilled. Depths varied from 7.62 to 53.34m, while the year the wells were drilled varied from 1964 to 2011 (Appendix 5-1). To determine if relationships between water chemistry parameters and either depth or age existed, scatter plots for each parameter were created (Appendix 5-2). In addition, linear regressions were conducted on raw and transformed data. In all cases, there did not appear to be any relationship between a given parameter and either age or depth of the well.

While the above analysis was, for practical purposes, rudimentary, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that a given parameter concentration was independent of the well depth or age and was instead reflective of surrounding geology. This also provides further support to the assumption that the wells sampled were likely free from surface contamination.

# **5.5 Groundwater Summary**

Groundwater samples collected from the Pigeon Lake watershed showed a degree of variability amongst samples, but also some consistent trends relative to lake and stream water chemistry. While most nitrogen components had relatively low concentrations in groundwater, ammonia was much higher than stream and lake concentrations. Phosphorus concentrations were highest in streams, but lower in Pigeon Lake relative to groundwater. Finally, dissolved constituents, as measured by TDS concentration, was higher in groundwater samples relative to the streams and lake, while being lower in organic content (measured as TOC and DOC), likely reflecting chemistry of surrounding geology.

All groundwater wells sampled had no detectable quantities of faecal coliform bacteria, indicating wells were likely not contaminated. This is further supported by the fact that parameters were not significantly related to well depth or age which can be an indicator of surface contamination.

# **6.0 SEDIMENT CHEMISTRY**

Sediment samples were collected from Pigeon Lake in 2013 to provide site specific data for supporting the development of the nutrient budget as well as to provide supporting data for the exploration of the potential for dredging to reduce in-lake nutrient (specifically phosphorus) concentrations. Sediment cores were collected in early June from a total of six sites ranging in depth to account for spatial variability with location and depth (Table 6-1 and Figure 6-1). Individual cores were further sub-divided into shallow and deep sections (0-10cm and >10cm), bagged and sent to ALS laboratories for analysis.

Complete analytical results are available in Appendix 6-1 while select parameters are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date Sampled</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Sample</b> Depth (m)
Shallow Spot #1	June 5	+52° 58' 33.70", -113° 57' 46.70"	0.7
Shallow Spot #2	June 5	+53° 1' 48.50", -114° 7' 44.70"	4.0
Shallow Spot #3	June 10	+53° 4' 27.17", -114° 5' 0.10"	1.2
Medium Spot #1	June 5	+52° 58' 46.90", -114° 1' 19.00"	6.5
Medium Spot #2	June 5	+53° 3' 17.50", -114° 5' 14.00"	7.5
Deep Spot #1	June 5	+53° 0' 0.95", -114° 0' 22.50"	9.0

**Table 6-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Sample Locations**



**Figure 6-1 2013 Sediment Sampling Locations, Pigeon Lake**

# **6.1 Sediment Composition and Carbon Content**

Figure 6-2 presents an overview of sediment composition for the cores collected from Pigeon Lake. Sediment tended to be sandier in the shallow zones of Pigeon Lake and dominated by silt at deeper depths.

Carbon content tended to follow the pattern observed for composition, with highest carbon content occurring in samples with higher silt content (Figure 6-3). Silt content and carbon content are important to note as nutrient concentrations tend to be higher in sediments with higher organic and silt and clay content (more binding sites and more organic source matter).



**Figure 6-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Composition**

For total phosphorus concentration, there was a significant positive relationship between total organic carbon content ( $r^2$ =0.782, p<0.001) and silt content ( $r^2$ =0.585, p=0.002) and a significant negative relationship with sand content ( $r^2$ =0.470, p=0.008). However, clay content was not a good predictor of phosphorus content in sediments, indicating phosphorus is more strongly associated with silt in Pigeon Lake sediments. Appendix 6-2 contains figures showing the relationship between these parameters.



**Figure 6-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Total Organic Carbon Content**

### **6.2 Nutrients**

Both phosphorus concentration and total nitrogen content were analyzed in all sediment samples collected at Pigeon Lake. Results for both are shown in Figures 6-4 and 6-5.



**Figure 6-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Total Nitrogen Content**



#### **Figure 6-5 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Phosphorus Content**

Phosphorus concentration ranged from 201 to 1,470 mg/kg while total nitrogen content ranged from <0.020 to 2.06%. For both nutrient parameters, concentrations tended to be higher in those sediments containing higher proportions of silt and higher concentrations of organic carbon. Concentrations for both nitrogen and phosphorus were typically lower in the deeper sections of a given core (*i.e*., >10cm) than the shallower sections (*i.e*., 0-10cm). Phosphorus concentration and nitrogen content were strongly correlated to each other ( $r^2$ =0.849, p=0.012, Appendix 6-2) indicating that as phosphorus concentrations increase in sediments, so does total nitrogen content.

While the concentration of phosphorus in sediments may seem extremely high relative to surface waters, it is important to keep in mind that the analysis conducted by the lab is a strong digestion technique and represents both biologically available and bound sediment phosphorus. It is likely that, while higher than water phosphorus concentrations, the biologically available phosphorus content of sediments is much lower than the total phosphorus content.

## **6.3 Moisture Content**

Differences in nutrient concentrations are also attributable to differences in moisture content. Shallow sections of sediments have higher moisture content relative to deeper sections and sandier sediments hold lower moisture content relative to silt laden sediments (Figure 6-6). As analytical results for parameters such as total phosphorus are expressed on a dry weight basis (i.e., mg/kg of dry material), it is important to normalize results to account for moisture and compare wet (i.e., *in situ*) nutrient content.



### **Figure 6-6 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Moisture Content**

When normalized for moisture content, phosphorus concentration per kilogram of wet material is very similar across sediment types and sectional depths (Figure 6-7). To put this into context, sandier sediments have lower phosphorus content but also have lower moisture content. Therefore, a larger volume of sediment would need to be collected to achieve the equivalent wet weight of material removed as a higher moisture content sediment and would therefore remove a larger amount of phosphorus.





# **6.4 Sediment Summary**

Analytical results of Pigeon Lake sediment demonstrated variability in composition and organic carbon content, and as a result, differences in nutrient concentrations. Nutrient concentrations tended to be higher in sediments with higher silt and organic carbon content and tended to be higher in shallow sections of sediment cores (0-10cm) relative to deeper sections (>10cm).

The examination of sediment phosphorus concentration at shallow and deep sections within the core is important from a lake chemistry standpoint. Within a lake, phosphorus is released and bound to the sediment under differing states of redox potential. It has been long established that the chemically interactive zone (i.e., depth to which phosphorus may be actively released to the overlying water) is typically in the upper 10cm of sediment (Søndergaard *et al* 2003, Wetzel 1983, Boström *et al* 1982). This means that the phosphorus in the lower depths of the sediment is essentially 'bound up' and not actively releasing to the overlying water column. Disturbance or removal of the overlying sediment would result in chemical reactivation and release of phosphorus from those lower depths.

# **7.0 LAKE BIOLOGICAL PARAMETERS**

## **7.1 Phytoplankton**

## *7.1.1 Chlorophyll-a*

Chlorophyll-*a* is a photosynthetic pigment possessed by both algae and cyanobacteria (bluegreen algae). As concentrations of this pigment can easily be measured in a laboratory, chlorophyll-*a* is a good estimate of the amount of algae and cyanobacteria in the water.

Chlorophyll-*a* concentration remained fairly constant throughout the early summer months until mid-August when it increased dramatically (Figure 7-2). On June 5<sup>th</sup> chlorophyll-a concentration was 9.90 µg/L and remained low until August, averaging 4.50 µg/L throughout June and July. Early phytoplankton populations consisted primarily of true algae (not cyanobacteria) species from the taxonomic groups Cryptophyceae and Chrysophyceae. By August 14<sup>th</sup>, concentrations of chlorophyll-*a* had increased to 30.90 µg/L and continued to increase to an observed maximum of 49.20  $\mu$ g/L on August 28<sup>th</sup>. A community composition shift accompanied these increases in chlorophyll-*a* concentration, with the phytoplankton community becoming dominated by species of cyanobacteria, primarily *Aphanizomenon flos-aquae* and *Aphanocapsa*  sp*.* (Figure 7-1).

### *7.1.2 Microcystin*

Microcystins are toxins produced by cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) which, when ingested, can cause severe liver damage. Microcystins are produced by many species of cyanobacteria which are common to Alberta's lakes, and are thought to be the one of the most common cyanobacteria toxins. In Alberta, recreational guidelines for microcystin are set at 20 µg/L. 2013 microcystin samples for Pigeon Lake were collected from composite samples and are presented in Figure 7-1. Appendix 7-2 contains all microcystin data collected from Pigeon Lake in 2013.

Microcystin concentrations remained relatively low throughout 2013. This is likely because the dominant cyanobacteria species observed in Pigeon Lake in 2013 was *Aphanizomenon flosaquae,* which is not known to produce microcystins (Neilan et. al, 1999). Microcystin concentrations ranged from a minimum of 0.05  $\mu$ g/L on July 4<sup>th</sup> to a maximum of 0.83  $\mu$ g/L on September 19<sup>th</sup>. This maximum concentration corresponded to increases in densities of known microcystin producing species such as *Anabaena* spp. and *Microcystis* spp. All microcystin concentrations measured were well below the recreational guidelines of 20 µg/L.



**Figure 7-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Cyanobacteria Cell Densities and Microcystin Concentration**

### *7.1.3 Phytoplankton Taxonomy*

Identifying the numbers and types of phytoplankton in Pigeon Lake can provide insight into nutrient dynamics, food-web dynamics, and lake toxicity. Phytoplankton taxonomy samples were collected on each sampling trip during the summer of 2013. Samples were collected from the euphotic zone using euphotic tubing with a 1-way foot valve at each of the 10 composite sites. Samples were preserved with Lugol's solution and formaldehyde and sent to a taxonomist for identification and enumeration. All taxonomy data is presented in Appendix 7-1. In addition to taxonomic results, richness, evenness, and the Shannon diversity index were also calculated. Richness refers to the number of unique species present, evenness evaluates the spread of individuals across species, and diversity considers richness and evenness to provide an overall measure of diversity.

Early in the summer the phytoplankton community was dominated by true algae primarily the diatoms *Asterionella formosa* and *Synedra* sp., Chrysophyceae, and Dinophyceae (Figure 7-2). Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) was present early in the summer, and showed an increase in relative biomass on June  $18<sup>th</sup>$ . After July, a diversity of cyanobacteria species made up the majority of the phytoplankton community, with *Aphanizomenon flos-aquae* as the dominant species (Figure 7-1).



**Figure 7-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Phytoplankton Densities**

Relative percent biomass for all algal groupings is shown in Figure 7-3. Algal biomass in Pigeon Lake was dominated by Chrysophyceae and Cryptophyceae early in 2013, with Dinophyceae appearing for a short period in July. By early August, algal community biomass was dominated almost entirely by cyanobacteria as conditions became more favourable for their growth leading to bloom conditions.



**Figure 7-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Phytoplankton Percent Biomass**

Richness, evenness, and diversity indices were calculated for the 2013 Pigeon Lake phytoplankton community and are presented in Figure 7-4. Species richness fluctuated between a minimum of 20 on June  $26<sup>th</sup>$  and a maximum of 31 on June 16 $<sup>th</sup>$ . Throughout the summer the</sup> number of unique species fluctuated around an average of 24. Evenness appeared to respond strongly to the cyanobacteria bloom observed in August. As the population became dominated by high densities of cyanobacteria species, evenness dropped from a maximum of 0.73 on July  $24<sup>th</sup>$  to a minimum of 0.31 on August  $22<sup>nd</sup>$ . Finally, diversity dropped significantly during the August cyanobacteria bloom, measuring a minimum of 0.89 on August  $15<sup>th</sup>$ , compared to a maximum of 2.49 on June  $16<sup>th</sup>$ .



**Figure 7-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Phytoplankton Diversity**

### **7.2 Bloom Chemistry**

To better determine partitioning of nutrients in the algal community and evaluate potential harvesting control methods of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) samples were collected during two periods of cyanobacteria surface blooms and nutrient chemistry analyzed. Samples were collected from composite sites as well as along shoreline areas where cyanobacteria had collected. A 500 µm kick-net was used to concentrate the samples, and the samples submitted for analysis. Complete analytical results are included in Appendix 7-3 and summary results presented in Table 7-1.





Variability existed between the two samples collected. On August  $22^{nd}$ , 75 mg of TP was present per kg of wet cyanobacteria, and on August  $28<sup>th</sup>$ , 126 mg of TP was present per kg of wet cyanobacteria. These concentrations indicate that cyanobacteria may bind a significant portion of lake phosphorus concentrations during growth and bloom conditions.

Large amounts of wet cyanobacteria, 7,937-13,417 kg, would need to be removed in order to remove 1 kg of phosphorus (Table 7-1). While lower phosphorus concentrations than sediment dredging (see Section 6), harvesting would likely be more cost efficient, have reduced environmental impacts and would have the added benefit of improving lake aesthetics.

# **7.3 Zooplankton**

# *7.3.1 Zooplankton Taxonomy*

Zooplankton are small microscopic invertebrates which graze primarily upon phytoplankton in lake ecosystems and in turn serve as a food source for other organisms such as fish. Zooplankton samples were collected on each sampling trip during the summer of 2013. Samples were retrieved at the profile site using a 63 um zooplankton net hauled from 1-m off the bottom of the sediments to the lakes surface. Zooplankton were preserved with buffered formalin and sent to a taxonomist for identification and enumeration. Complete results are provided in Appendix 7-4. In addition to taxonomic results, richness, evenness, and diversity were also calculated.

In terms of community composition, the rotifer community was dominated by the filter feeding species *Keratella cochlearis,* one of the most common species

of freshwater rotifers. Dominant cladocerans included the large, common filter feeders *Daphnia pulex* and *Diaphanosoma* sp*.,* and dominant copepods included the omnivorous *Diacyclops thomasi* (Figure 7-5).

Biomass of zooplankton fluctuated throughout the summer (Figures 7-6 and 7-7). In early summer, zooplankton biomass peaked when the phytoplankton population was dominated by non-cyanobacteria species. During the large cyanobacteria bloom at the end of August, zooplankton biomass (not including juveniles) was low dropping to 46.2  $\mu$ g/L on August 28<sup>th</sup> from 147.3 ug/L on July  $24<sup>th</sup>$ . Zooplankton biomass did not recover until early September (Figure 7-6). Although phytoplankton density was highest mid-summer, the phytoplankton population was dominated by relatively unpalatable *Aphanizomenon flos-aquae* which likely reduced zooplankton grazing rates and reproduction.



**Figure 7-5 2013 Pigeon Lake Zooplankton Densities**



**Figure 7-6 2013 Pigeon Lake Zooplankton Biomass**

Zooplankton biomass was dominated primarily by juveniles throughout most of the open water period (Figure 7-7). However, overall juvenile biomass declined through the year as larger bodied copepods (Cyclapoida and Calanoida) and cladocerans began to increase in numbers. By late September, large bodied cladocerns and calanoid copepods made up the majority of Pigeon Lake's zooplankton community biomass.

Despite the decreases in biomass during the cyanobacteria bloom, diversity indices did not appear to be strongly affected. Small decreases in diversity and evenness were observed at the end of the cyanobacteria bloom on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, though these indices appeared to recover by the final sample on September  $19<sup>th</sup>$  (Figure 7-8). Diversity tended to increase through the summer. This likely reflected a shift in the zooplankton community from one dominated by juveniles to a community which included adult organisms.



**Figure 7-7 2013 Pigeon Lake Zooplankton Percent Biomass**



**Figure 7-8 2013 Pigeon Lake Zooplankton Diversity**

## **7.4 Lake Bacteriological Parameters**

Faecal bacteria such as *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) can be indicators of contamination from sewage or faecal matter and may pose a threat to human health when present in recreational water bodies. In addition, faecal bacteria may act as indirect indicators of nutrient loading, as sewage is high in important nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. In 2013, faecal coliform and *E. coli* counts measured below the detection limit (<10 cells/100 mL) on all sampling trips (Appendix 2-1).

# **7.5 Lake Biology Summary**

The 2013 Pigeon Lake phytoplankton community shifted from groups with a preference for cooler water temperatures early in the summer to cyanobacteria later in the summer. As cyanobacteria populations became more dominant, diversity of the phytoplankton community also decreased. Zooplankton density predominantly followed the algal community, showing peaks in most grazers during the early and late summer while declining during cyanobacterial blooms. This likely reflects the fact that many species of cyanobacteria, including those present in Pigeon Lake, are not readily grazed by filter feeding zooplankton due to palatability or size. Despite the decrease in zooplankton density, diversity remained constant or increased. This was likely the result of increasing adult zooplankton and decreasing juveniles which typically can not be identified to species level.

# **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

Sampling during 2013 at Pigeon Lake and surrounding watershed was conducted for a much broader suite of parameters and on a more frequent basis in order to support activities such as the development of a nutrient budget and assessment of methods to reduce the frequency and intensity of nuisance blue-green algae blooms. While some variables showed little variation with season, others were quite variable on a week to week basis.

Pigeon Lake is typically not stratified as shown in profiles of temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH and conductivity. However, seasonal variability for these and several other water quality parameters was observed. For some parameters, such as pH, alkalinity, dissolved oxygen, water clarity and nutrient concentrations, seasonal variability likely reflected changes in the algal community as well. pH, alkalinity and water clarity declined during peak blooms while dissolved oxygen concentrations, especially at the surface, increased. Chlorophyll-*a* concentrations exhibited a strong positive relationship with total phosphorus but were inversely related to dissolved phosphorus concentrations, suggesting preferential uptake of dissolved fractions of phosphorus by the phytoplankton community.

In the streams, concentrations of many parameters tended to be highest during the spring runoff and after significant storm events, both of which tend wash accumulated upland material into the streams. Concentrations for most parameters at the inflowing streams were generally similar reflecting surrounding land-use while the outflow was quite different and reflected lake conditions. Dissolved oxygen, pH and TSS tended to be higher relative to streams while conductivity, TDP, ammonia, TKN, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, total dissolved phosphorus, ortho-phosphate, TOC and DOC were lower.

Discharge rates were similar for most inflowing streams, with maximum rates occurring during spring freshet and after significant rainfall events. Tide Creek had high discharge rates, reflecting the size of this stream, but flow was only measured on two dates. Thus, while this creek is large, its cumulative annual discharge was not significantly higher than other measured inflows. The outflow had higher measurable flows on most sampling dates relative to inflowing streams and reflected the increasing and decreasing water levels of Pigeon Lake.

For most nutrient parameters, Zeiner had the lowest loading rates despite often higher nutrient concentrations. This is the result of lower discharge rates in Zeiner relative to other Pigeon Lake streams. Similarly, although nutrient concentrations in Tide Creek were close to concentrations observed at other inflows, loading rates were often highest at this location.

Groundwater samples collected from the Pigeon Lake watershed did show variability in the parameters analyzed, however this was not attributed to well depth or age. Relative to Pigeon Lake and stream water chemistry, most nitrogen components had relatively low concentrations in groundwater with the exception of ammonia which was much higher than stream and lake concentrations. Phosphorus concentrations were highest in streams, but lower in Pigeon Lake relative to groundwater. Finally, TDS concentration was higher in groundwater samples relative to the streams and lake, while organic content (measured as TOC and DOC) was lower. These differences likely reflected chemistry of surrounding geology.

Pigeon Lake sediments demonstrated variability in composition and organic carbon content, and as a result, differences in nutrient concentrations. Nutrient concentrations tended to be higher in sediments with higher silt and organic carbon content and tended to be higher in shallow sections of sediment cores (0-10cm) relative to deeper sections (>10cm). Shallower samples closer to the shoreline tended to have higher amounts of sand as opposed to mid and deep samples which consisted of higher amounts of silt and clay.

The 2013 Pigeon Lake phytoplankton community shifted from true algal groups with a preference for cooler water temperatures such as Chrysophyceae, Cryptophyceae and diatoms early in the summer to cyanobacteria later in the summer. As cyanobacteria populations became more dominant, diversity of the phytoplankton community also decreased. Despite cyanobacteria being the predominant component of the phytoplankton community in later summer at Pigeon Lake, microcystin levels were relatively low reflecting the fact that predominant species comprising the cyanobacterial community do not produce microcystin.

Zooplankton density reflected the algal community, showing peaks in most species during the early and late summer. However, during the cyanobacterial bloom in August, zooplankton density declined. This was likely due to palatability or size issues. Despite the decline in zooplankton density, diversity remained constant or increased through the summer likely reflecting maturation of the zooplankton community from one dominated primarily by juveniles to adult forms.

Overall, data collected provided insight into potential causes of blooms, helped support the development of a nutrient budget in order to partition phosphorus sources in the watershed and to objectively evaluate what management approaches may be most appropriate for improving the water quality in the lake. Detailed lake and watershed sampling contributed greatly to the existing data and knowledge base on Pigeon Lake.

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# **10.0 APPENDICES**

**Appendix 2-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Chemistry Data**



























**Appendix 2-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Profile Data**

### **2013 Pigeon Lake Profile Data**



2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota And Non-Fish Biota




2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota And Non-Fish Biota







**Appendix 3-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Chemistry Data**

## **2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Chemistry Data**



#### **2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Chemistry Data**







**Appendix 4-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Stream Instant and Cumulative Nutrient Loads**



## **2013 Pigeon Lake Instant and Cumulative Stream Nutrient Loads**



## **2013 Pigeon Lake Instant and Cumulative Stream Nutrient Loads**





Note: Data from yellow highlighted cells was contaminated and not included in analysis.

For estimation purposes, highlighted cells used concentrations from previous sampling trip and flow measurements from highlighted trip to estimate instantaneous and cumulative loads.





Note: Data from yellow highlighted cells was contaminated and not included in analysis.

For estimation purposes, highlighted cells used concentrations from previous sampling trip and flow measurements from highlighted trip to estimate instantaneous and cumulative loads.







**Appendix 5-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater Chemistry Data**



# **2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater Chemistry Data**

**Appendix 5-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Groundwater Chemistry Plots with Well Age and Depth**



**Total Nitrogen** 



Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen







**Total Phosphorus** 

# **Total Dissolved Phosphorus**





Ortho-Phosphate



**Total Dissolved Solids** 









**Appendix 6-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Chemistry Data**



# **2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Chemistry**

**Appendix 6-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Sediment Total Phosphorus Relationship with Total Organic Carbon, Moisture, Sand, Silt, Clay and Nitrogen Content**







**Appendix 7-1 2013 Pigeon Lake Phytoplankton Taxonomy**







### **2013 Pigeon Lake Phytoplankton Taxonomy**




2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota A50









2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota A52







2013 Overview of Pigeon Lake Water Quality, Sediment Quality, and Non-Fish Biota A54









**Appendix 7-2 2013 Pigeon Lake Microcystin Content**



# **2013 Pigeon Lake Microcystin Content**

**Appendix 7-3 2013 Pigeon Lake Cyanobacteria Bloom Chemistry**



## **2013 Pigeon Lake Cyanobacteria Bloom Chemistry**

**Appendix 7-4 2013 Pigeon Lake Zooplankton Taxonomy**



Lake: Pigeon Pigeon



Lake: Pigeon





Richness (S) 20 Note:

K. cochlearis estimated after 0.5mls











**Lake:** Pigeon **Project No.** ABS115



**Note:**

**Sample was degraded could not analyze**





Lake: Pigeon Pigeon



Lake: Pigeon Pigeon



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