

Variations in shoreline vegetation and turbidity of shallow lakes.

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Abstract

Shoreline vegetation provides vital ecological services and can impact water quality of shallow lakes. We determined the area and composition of shoreline vegetation for 20 shallow lakes of varying turbidities in the Prairie Parkland Province of Minnesota. We examined differences in shoreline vegetation between clear and turbid lakes and identified relationships between shoreline vegetation and several lake environmental variables (lake depth, submerged vegetation cover, turbidity, chlorophyll-a, total phosphorus, Ca+Mg, conductivity, and pH). In contrast to turbid lakes, the clear lakes had greater emergent and submerged vegetation cover. *Typha* spp. dominated the shorelines of clear lakes, while woody vegetation dominated the shorelines of the turbid lakes. Redundancy analysis (RDA) showed depth and chlorophyll-a concentrations were related to emergent vegetation composition. The percent shoreline of *Typha* spp. was negatively associated with chlorophyll-a concentrations and the percent shoreline of woody vegetation was positively associated with water depth.

Key words:

chlorophyll-a; emergent; shallow lakes; *Typha* spp.; turbidity.

Introduction

Aquatic plants play a crucial role in the function of shallow lakes that includes preventing the suspension of sediments and subsequent release of nutrients, uptake of nutrients that would otherwise be available for algal growth, and provision of food and habitat for fish, invertebrates, and water birds (Dieter 1990; Blindow 1992; Weisner et al. 1994; Scheffer 1999, 2004; Horppila and Nurminen 2001, 2005). Lake shorelines can be colonized by a variety of emergent plant species, which provide various ecological services for lakes

such as diminished runoff, nutrient sequestration (Tyler et al. 2012), wave attenuation, shoreline stability, and provision of food and habitat for fish, invertebrates, water birds and other wildlife (Cronk and Fennessey 2001; Scheffer 2004).

The plant communities associated with shallow lakes can vary as these lakes shift from a clear, plant-dominated regime to a turbid, phytoplankton-dominated regime and back again (Blindow et al. 1998; Scheffer and Jeppesen 1998; Bayley et al. 2007; Zimmer et al. 2009). Clear lakes generally have low phytoplankton biomass and abundant submerged vegetation (Bayley et al. 2003). Submerged plants help maintain a clear-water environment by reducing sediment resuspension, releasing allelopathic compounds that inhibit phytoplankton growth, providing habitat for algae grazing zooplankton, and sequestering nutrients making them unavailable to phytoplankton (Blindow 1992; Weisner et al. 1994).

Algal blooms form when environmental conditions favor excessive phytoplankton growth (Assmy and Smetacek 2009) and can occur naturally or as a result of nutrient loading from surface runoff of agricultural or nutrient-rich uplands (Welch et al. 1979; Nilsson and Håkanson 1992; Carstensen et al. 2007). Freshwater algal blooms 1) decrease the aesthetic and recreational value of water bodies by coating the water surface with a green scum and producing foul smells, 2) release toxins such as microcystins, anatoxins, and nodularins, and 3) dramatically alter photic zone depths, levels and distribution of available nutrients, and dissolved oxygen concentrations (Ridge et al. 1995; Anderson 2007; Lopez et al. 2008). Management of algal blooms in shallow lakes is becoming a high priority because of their increasing occurrence and negative effects (Arbuckle and Downing 2001; Fraterrigo and Downing 2008).

Preemptive methods of controlling algal blooms often focus on constructed wetlands to remove excess nutrients and contaminants in wastewater and agricultural runoff (Salt et al. 1995; Goulet and Pick 2001; Hoagland et al. 2001; O'Sullivan et al. 2004). Abundant emergent vegetation in constructed wetlands often decreases nutrient availability for phytoplankton by uptake and accumulation of nutrients, and by stabilizing sediment, thus decreasing resuspension of sediment-bound nutrients (Chen and Barko 1988; Hoagland et al. 2001; Horppila and Nurminen 2005). Emergent plants can also be a source of organic matter, which can bind nutrients and thus make them available for phytoplankton growth (Barnes 1980; Davies 1994; Jackson 1998; Goulet and Pick 2001). Organic matter accumulation enhances reducing conditions of wetland sediments and subsequently influences nutrient mobility (Golterman 1995; Jacob and Otte 2004a, 2004b). A variety of chemical and biological methods have been used to treat lakes where algal blooms are problematic (Lembi 2002). For example, the application of barley straw (*Hordeum vulgare*), is reported to produce algae-static effects upon decomposition, inhibiting



the reproduction of various algal species (Ridge et al. 1995; Overall and Lees 1996, 1997; Ball et al. 2001; Ferrier et al. 2005). Some submerged plants such as *eratophyllum demersum*, *Chara* spp., and *Stratiotes obliquus* may exert allelopathic effects on algal growth (Wium-Andersen et al. 1983; Mjelde and Faafeng 1997; Mulderij et al. 2005). Della Greca (1990) reported that *Typha latifolia* produced allelopathic compounds that inhibited the growth of blue-green algae in cultures, but field studies have yet to confirm these findings. Here, we compared shallow lakes of varying turbidities to identify relationships between shoreline vegetation and the environmental variables at these sites. We considered the shoreline vegetation as the fringe or marginal emergent vegetation occurring from water depths of approximately 1 m to waterlogged soil on the shore (where water was not standing) (Sculthorpe 1967; Cronk and Fennessy 2001). We hypothesized that lakes with more shoreline vegetation, especially areas with dense *Typha* stands, would often be characterized by clear-water conditions in response to large litter inputs.

Methods

Vegetation assessment

Our study was carried out on 20 shallow lakes in southwestern Minnesota in the Prairie Parkland Ecological Province (Omernik 1987) during August 8-18, 2011 (Figure 1). More than 80% of the land in these watersheds is agricultural (Minnesota Geospatial Information Office Staff 1999). For each lake, the percent shoreline vegetation was determined at 10 locations around the lake. Each of the 10 sampling locations was located more or less equidistant of one another and at least 4 m from shoreline. At each location, we identified the plant species present and the percent cover of each species over an approximately 50 m transect that was parallel to the shoreline. Species were identified on site or collected for identification in the laboratory. Vegetation was grouped into the following 7 categories: *Typha* spp. (hereafter *Typha*), *Scirpus* spp. (hereafter *Scirpus*), *Phalaris arundinacea* (hereafter *Phalaris*), *Polygonum amphibium*, *Sparganium* spp., *Asclepias incarnata* and woody (including all mature trees). *Polygonum amphibium*, *Sparganium* spp., and *Asclepias incarnata* occurred in less than 15% of the lakes and so were not included in the analysis. Total emergent vegetation area (EVA) and basin area (BSN) for each lake were estimated using aerial photographs (details described by Hanson et al. 2012; Table 1). Woody shoreline (trees, shrubs) vegetation was not included in this delineation because it was not classified as emergent vegetation. The percent cover of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) was also determined at each of the 10 locations using an acrylic glass bottom cylinder (Kissoon et al. 2013).

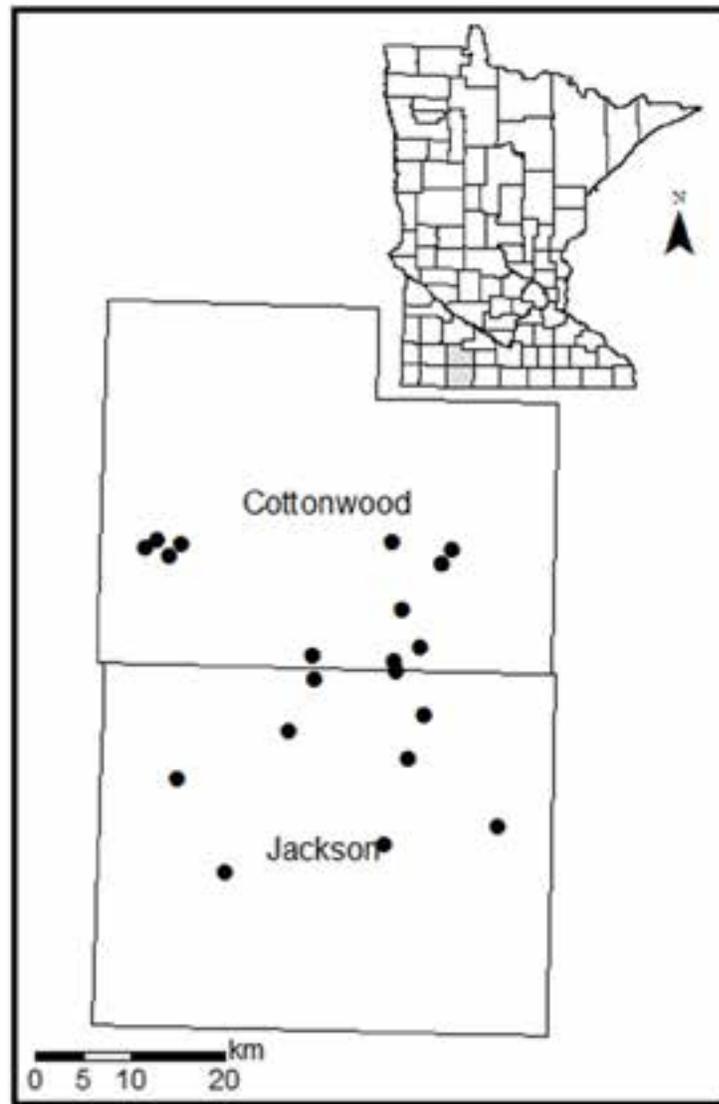


Figure 1: Map of study area showing the locations of the 20 shallow lakes in southwestern Minnesota that were used in this study.

Water sampling and analysis

Water samples were collected at approximately the same 10 locations at depths of 25 cm and a portion of the water sample was used to measure turbidity using a Hach® Portable Turbidimeter (Model 2100P) and pH using a VWR Symphony SP90M5 Handheld Multi-meter. The remaining water was filtered (0.45- μm pressure filter, Pall Corporation Supor® -450), acidified with 0.1 ml HNO_3 , and later analyzed for Ca and Mg with a Spectro Genesis Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emission Spectrometer (ICP-OES). The sum of the mmol l^{-1} of Ca and Mg (Ca+Mg) was used as an indicator of alkalinity (Kissoon et al. 2013). Conductivity, chlorophyll-*a* (chl-*a*), and total phosphorus concentrations (TP) were measured in water samples collected from two different locations in each lake during July of the same year. Chl-*a* was determined using fluorometry following acetone extraction and TP was measured according to methods of APHA (1994).



Regime	Lake ID	Emergent Vegetation Area (EVA)	Basin Area	EVA/Basin Area
		<i>hectares</i>	<i>hectares</i>	<i>ratio</i>
Turbid	03	0.23	40.61	0.01
	04	0.00	42.31	0.00
	06	2.27	6.14	0.37
	07	19.94	38.33	0.52
	08	0.33	6.52	0.05
	09	0.15	26.24	0.01
	11	0.97	12.45	0.08
	12	1.19	40.25	0.03
	16	2.50	37.48	0.07
	19	0.36	13.93	0.03
	20	2.00	31.75	0.06
Clear	01	15.87	40.41	0.39
	05	2.05	26.75	0.08
	10	10.20	13.49	0.76
	13	8.65	11.54	0.75
	14	23.47	31.58	0.74
	15	2.27	58.66	0.04
	17	0.66	3.49	0.19
	18	1.09	3.81	0.29
	21	1.54	3.59	0.43

Table 1: Emergent vegetation area and emergent vegetation area relative to basin area for 20 shallow lakes in Minnesota (*Lake 04 had a predominant woody shoreline, which was not included in the delineation of emergent vegetation).

Statistical analysis

Prior to performing statistical analyses, turbidity, chl-a, Ca+Mg, and macrophyte data were log transformed to increase homogeneity of variance. K-means cluster analysis (Lattin et al. 2003) was carried out in Minitab to classify lakes into two groups based on, turbidity, chl-a concentrations, and submerged vegetation cover. The two resulting groups consisted of lakes in clear (macrophyte-dominated) and turbid regimes. A General Linear Model was then used to test for significant differences between the clear and turbid lakes (One-Way ANOVA, $p < 0.05$) using Minitab® Minitab® 15 © 2006 Minitab Inc.). Pearson correlations and p-values were calculated in Minitab to explore the relationships between the percent shoreline for the different vegetation categories, emergent vegetation area relative to basin size, and turbidity. Relationships between environmental variables (depth, SAV cover, turbidity, chl-a, pH, Ca+Mg, conductivity, and total phosphorus) and percent shoreline vegetation were assessed using redundancy analysis (RDA)

in CANOCO (© 2005 CANOCO Version 4.5). Preliminary Detrended Correspondence Analysis (DCA) indicated that linear gradient analysis (RDA) was appropriate because the gradient lengths were < 4.0 standard deviations (ter Braak and Šmilauer 2002). Prior to performing the RDA the shoreline vegetation data were relativized by maxima to reduce the influence of highly abundant species (McCune and Grace 2002) and the environmental variables were log transformed to increase homogeneity of variance. Forward selection with Monte Carlo permutation tests (999 permutations) was used to identify environmental variables associated with variation in shoreline vegetation for inclusion in the final model ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Clear lakes had larger areas of emergent vegetation and higher ratios of emergent vegetation: basin area (Table 2). *Typha* was the most abundant shoreline vegetation in clear lakes while woody vegetation was more abundant in the margins of turbid lakes (Figure 2). The percent shoreline extent of *Phalaris* and *Scirpus* did not differ between the turbid and clear lakes. Depth, turbidity, and chl-a concentrations were greater in turbid lakes, while submerged vegetation was more abundant in the clear lakes (Table 2). Total phosphorus, conductivity, Ca+Mg concentrations, and pH did not differ between turbid and clear lakes.

The extent (percent) of shoreline for the different vegetation categories correlated with several environmental variables. For example, *Phalaris* was positively correlated with chl-a and total phosphorus, while *Typha* was negatively correlated with depth, turbidity, and chl-a and positively correlated with SAV cover. Woody vegetation was positively correlated with depth, turbidity, and chl-a and negatively correlated with SAV cover. Emergent vegetation area was negatively correlated with depth, turbidity, and pH, but positively correlated with SAV cover and Ca+Mg. The ratio of emergent vegetation area: basin area was negatively correlated with depth, turbidity, chl-a, and pH and positively correlated with SAV cover and Ca+Mg. Results of the RDA indicated that water depth and chl-a were associated with 45% of the variance in percent of shoreline vegetation. Percent shoreline of *Typha* was negatively associated with chl-a while woody vegetation and *Scirpus* were positively associated with water depth (Figure 3).

Discussion

Our study found that the shorelines of clear shallow lakes in Minnesota's prairie parkland region had more extensive emergent vegetation compared to turbid lakes, and that these stands of vegetation tend to be dominated by *Typha*. Previous studies indicated that emergent vegetation accumulates elements in the rhizosphere and plant tissues (Kissoon et al. 2010, 2011) and sequesters nutrients (Tyler et al. 2012), demonstrating their potential to decrease nutrient availability and perhaps turbidity in shallow lakes. Dense stands of *Typha* may



Variables	Clear (n=9)	Turbid (n=11)
Emergent vegetation area (hectares)	7.3±7.6*	2.7±5.6
Emergent vegetation area/basin area (ratio)	0.4±0.3*	0.1±0.2
Environmental variables		
Depth (m)	0.9±0.4	1.5±0.7*
Turbidity (NTU)	8±8	45±25*
chlorophyll-a (µg l ⁻¹)	35±46	105±97*
SAV cover (%)	88±29*	14±33
pH	8.9±0.7	9.0±0.3
Ca+Mg (mmol l ⁻¹)	2.5±0.6	2.2±0.4
Conductivity (µS)	351±75	381±49
Total phosphorus (µg l ⁻¹)	147±146	195±98

Table 2: Mean emergent vegetation area and environmental variables (*indicates the significantly higher value between lakes for a particular variable; p<0.01).

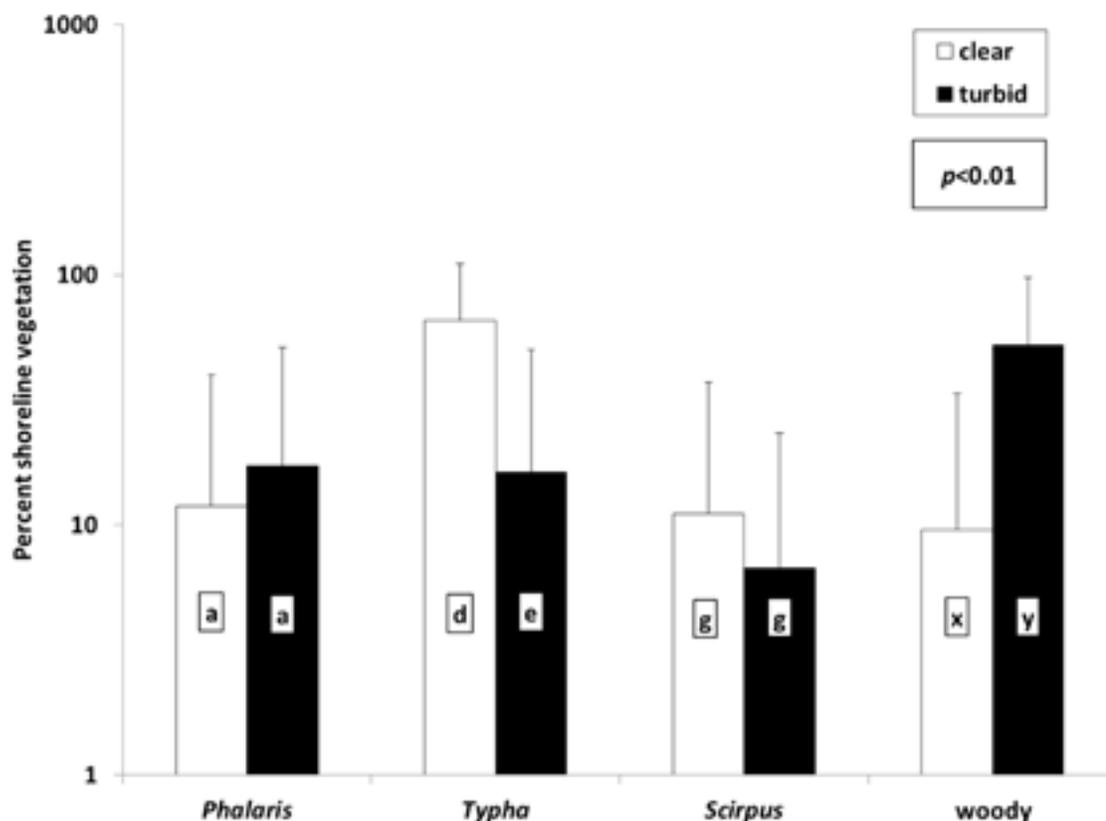


Figure 2: Mean percent of shoreline vegetation for the four different vegetation categories (*Phalaris* spp., *Typha* spp., *Scirpus* spp., woody) for clear and turbid lakes (different letters within each vegetation category indicate significant differences between turbid (n=8) and clear (n=12) lakes, p<0.01)

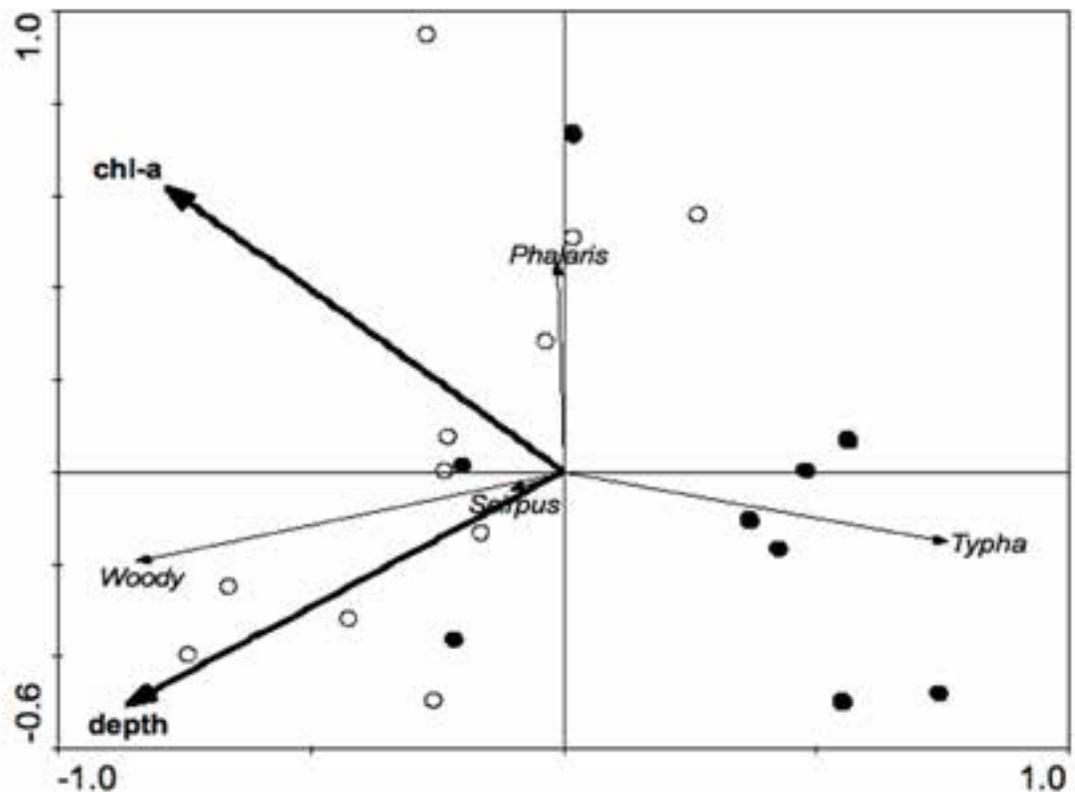


Figure 3: RDA ordination plot of percent shoreline vegetation constrained by environmental variables (environmental variables (in bold): depth and chlorophyll-*a* concentrations (chl-*a*); vegetation categories (occurred in >14% of lakes): *Typha* spp., *Scirpus* spp., *Phalaris* arundinacea and woody vegetation; Lake regimes: turbid (O), clear (•)).

decrease and block nutrient access to algae due to *Typha's* affinity for nitrogen and phosphorus (Koottatep and Polprasert 1997; Chiang et al. 2000; Maddison et al. 2009). Dubbe et al. (1988) reported that nutrient utilization by *Typha* peaks during June to August, potentially taking up these nutrients when phytoplankton populations are most dependent on them. The greater emergent vegetation area in the clear lakes also allow sediment to stabilize (Dieter 1990) and may serve to filter nutrient runoff, perhaps limiting nutrient inputs to open-water areas in shallow lakes (Horppila and Nurminen 2001; Tyler et al. 2012).

Emergent vegetation area may also contribute to clear water conditions by providing habitat for aquatic invertebrates that feed on algae (Voigts 1976; Campeau et al. 1994; Oertli and Lachavanne 1995; Lembi 2003). Emergent plants and resulting litter may also protect invertebrate populations by providing them with cover from predators (Campeau et al. 1994). Low oxygen levels in *Typha* stands also discourage fish and invertebrates that may prey on zooplankton, thus favoring higher zooplankton densities which, in turn, contribute to lower phytoplankton biomass and clear-water conditions (Timms and Moss 1984; Murkin et al. 1992; Scheffer 2004). The clear lakes were also dominated by SAV that could also be contributing to the clear conditions by stabilizing sediment, blocking nutrient access to algae, and providing suitable habitat to algal grazers (Scheffer and Jeppesen 1998; Scheffer 2004).



	<i>Phalaris</i>	<i>Typha</i>	woody	EVA	EVA: Basin area
Depth		-0.482	0.755	-0.505	-0.618
Turbidity		-0.433	0.359	-0.341	-0.478
Chl-a	0.411	-0.493	0.624		-0.545
Sav cover		0.532	-0.492	0.346	0.583
Ca+Mg				0.361	0.386
pH				-0.328	-0.358
Total Phosphorus	0.477				

Table 3: Pearson correlations for shoreline vegetation and environmental variables (only significant correlations where $r \geq 0.316$ and $p < 0.01$ are shown).

Allelopathic substances released by submerged vegetation may also decrease phytoplankton growth and contribute to the clear-water conditions (Wium-Andersen et al. 1983; Mjelde and Faafeng 1997). Della Greca et al. (1990) isolated an allelopathic compound from *Typha latifolia*, which inhibited blue-green algae in cultures. This allelopathic compound may be released from *Typha* stands and might favor clear-water conditions in lakes with *Typha*-dominated shorelines. Ridge et al. (1995, 1999) reported algae-static properties associated with brown-rotting wood and with the breakdown of tannins in oak leaf litter. However, in our study, the lake shorelines dominated by woody vegetation tended to be turbid and supported high phytoplankton biomass.

The results of the RDA indicated that water depth and chl-a were important variables associated with the extent of shoreline emergent vegetation. Water levels play a key role in the distribution of emergent vegetation (Squires and van der Valk 1992; Grosshans and Kenkel 1997) and may explain the variation in the composition and abundance of emergent vegetation in our shallow lakes. Negative correlations between emergent vegetation area and water depth also indicated that water levels play a critical role in the abundance of emergent plants along the margins of shallow lakes. Negative relationships between turbidity and chl-a with emergent vegetation area and extent of *Typha* may indicate the role of emergent vegetation in maintaining clear-water conditions by stabilizing sediments and subsequently contributing to decreased nutrient availability and phytoplankton growth (Dieter 1990).

Initially we suspected litter inputs from decomposing emergent vegetation in our shallow lakes inhibited the reproduction of phytoplankton, similar to responses observed following additions of barley straw. The lignin content of emergent vegetation such as *Typha* is about 15% and similar to that seen in barely straw (Ridge et al. 1995; Jaques and Pinto 1997). Barley straw has been reported to have algae-static effects which result from the decomposition of its ligneous fraction (Ridge et al. 1995, 1999; Everall and Lees 1996, 1997; Ball et al. 2001; Ferrier et al. 2005). In fact, we found that the extent of emergent

vegetation area and presence of a *Typha*-dominated shoreline were positively associated with clear lakes. Water depth appeared to play a role in the emergent vegetation composition and possibly contributed to water clarity. Other factors such as submerged vegetation cover and nutrient availability may also explain clear or turbid conditions in these lakes. Future studies are needed to determine whether *Typha* and other emergent vegetation inhibit phytoplankton growth, and if so, in what ways. We hypothesize that *Typha* litter inputs may reduce phytoplankton growth rates in shallow lakes similar to additions of barley straw and, if so, addition of a *Typha* litter or extract to lakes may warrant evaluation as a management option for future control of phytoplankton in shallow or eutrophic lakes.

Conclusion

Shallow lakes with a greater area of emergent vegetation and a *Typha*-dominated shoreline tend to be clear. Depth and water clarity appear to be related to the emergent vegetation composition. There may be several benefits of the extent of the emergent vegetation area and a *Typha*-dominated shoreline that contribute to low lake turbidity. Some of these include the capacity of emergent plants to take up nutrients otherwise available for algae, provide refugia for algae grazing invertebrates, and contribute organic matter that bind nutrients. Future studies are needed to determine if algae-static compounds are released from emergent vegetation litter in field conditions.

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