

Flathead Lake Citizen Science Program - Periphyton Study

Periphyton is a complex mixture of algae, cyanobacteria, heterotrophic microbes, and detritus that is attached to rocks and other submerged surfaces in most aquatic ecosystems.

Periphyton serves as an important indicator of water quality because it responds to changes in its environment quickly, it is easy to sample, and it is known for tolerance or sensitivity to change.

Periphyton is an important food source for invertebrates, tadpoles, and some fish. Scientists are just beginning to understand its value and importance in the aquatic food web. Periphyton may also act as an extension of vegetated shoreline riparian buffers by absorbing contaminants, removing them from the water column, and limiting their movement through the environment.



Adding periphyton to the list of water quality parameters will provide more comprehensive monitoring around Flathead Lake, which could help discover new threats and problems around the lake before they become widespread.

How to study periphyton in Flathead Lake?

We will recruit 10-12 citizen scientist volunteers to collect 3-5 rocks at knee to waist depths along their shoreline in July, August, and September. Samples will go to the Flathead Lake Biological Station's monitoring program.

We will recruit 2-3 volunteers to process and analyze samples.

Our Flathead Lake Citizen Science volunteers are contributing to meaningful science and protecting our greatest natural resource, clean water.

How to get involved?

Become a volunteer! Contact Hilary Devlin, Education and Science Coordinator, at hilary@flatheadlakers.org or 406-883-1341.

