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News

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Acid-rain recovery

| *Pollution in Adirondack lakes decreasing, study finds*

RAQUETTE LAKE (AP) —Acid-rain-causing compounds are decreasing in Adirondack lakes, lending further evidence that the region's waters are recovering from decades of acid rainfall, according to a state study.

Consequently, some lakes' ability to buffer acid rain has improved, said Karen Roy of the State Department of Environmental Conservation's Adirondack Lake Survey Corporation at Thursday's conference on climate change.

The study found that in 44 of 48 lakes studied, sulfates, the building blocks of sulfuric acid, had declined since 1992.

For the first time in 20 years, scientists detected a reduction in nitrates, which form nitric acid in water, in 15 of 48 lakes.

No change was found in 32 lakes, and in one lake, nitrates were going up, according to the study.

Roy said that improvement in water chemistry does not mean fish and other organisms living in lakes have rebounded from acidic conditions. About 500 of the 2,800

Adirondack lakes show no signs of plant or animal life.

The study was conducted by the DEC, Syracuse University and the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry. It was recently submitted to the journal Environmental Science & Toxicology.

Left unclear in the research is why nitrates have declined, given that nitrogen oxides emissions by power plants and cars continue to rise, the Times Union of Albany reported in Friday's editions.

One theory is that the compound's interaction with soil and plants, which absorb nitrogen from the ground and use it as a nutrient, has changed, the paper reported.

This so-called saturation effect may have eased in recent years, Roy said.

"There may be a reversal. There are more fluxes in nitrogen because of its relationship to the biota," Roy said, referring to the region's plant life. "Wait three years. Are we still going to be there?"

Meanwhile, sulfur dioxide has declined nationwide.

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