Michigan
Harmful Algal Bloom
Picture Guide

EGLE

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY

MDHHS

Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

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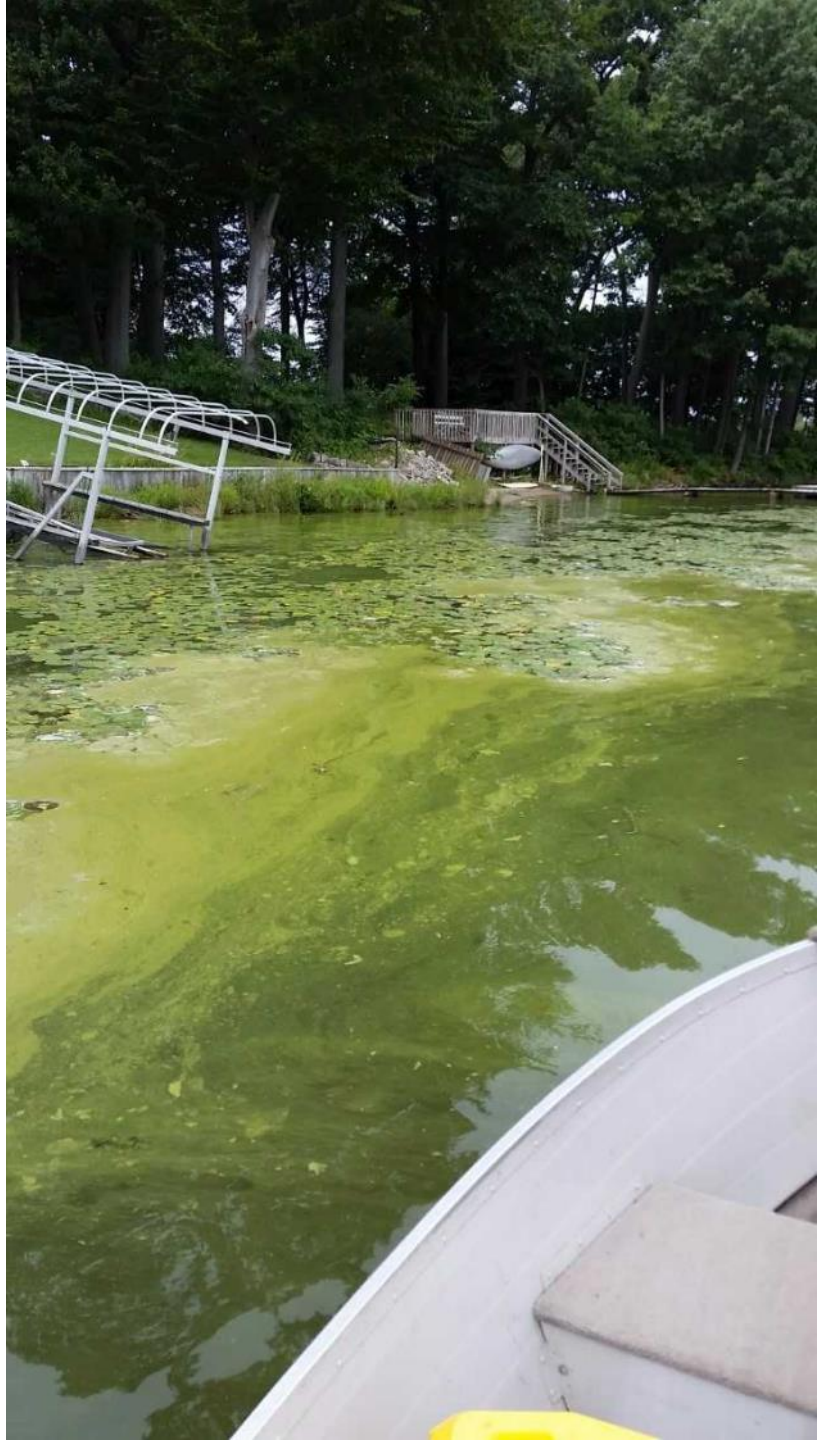
Cyanobacteria

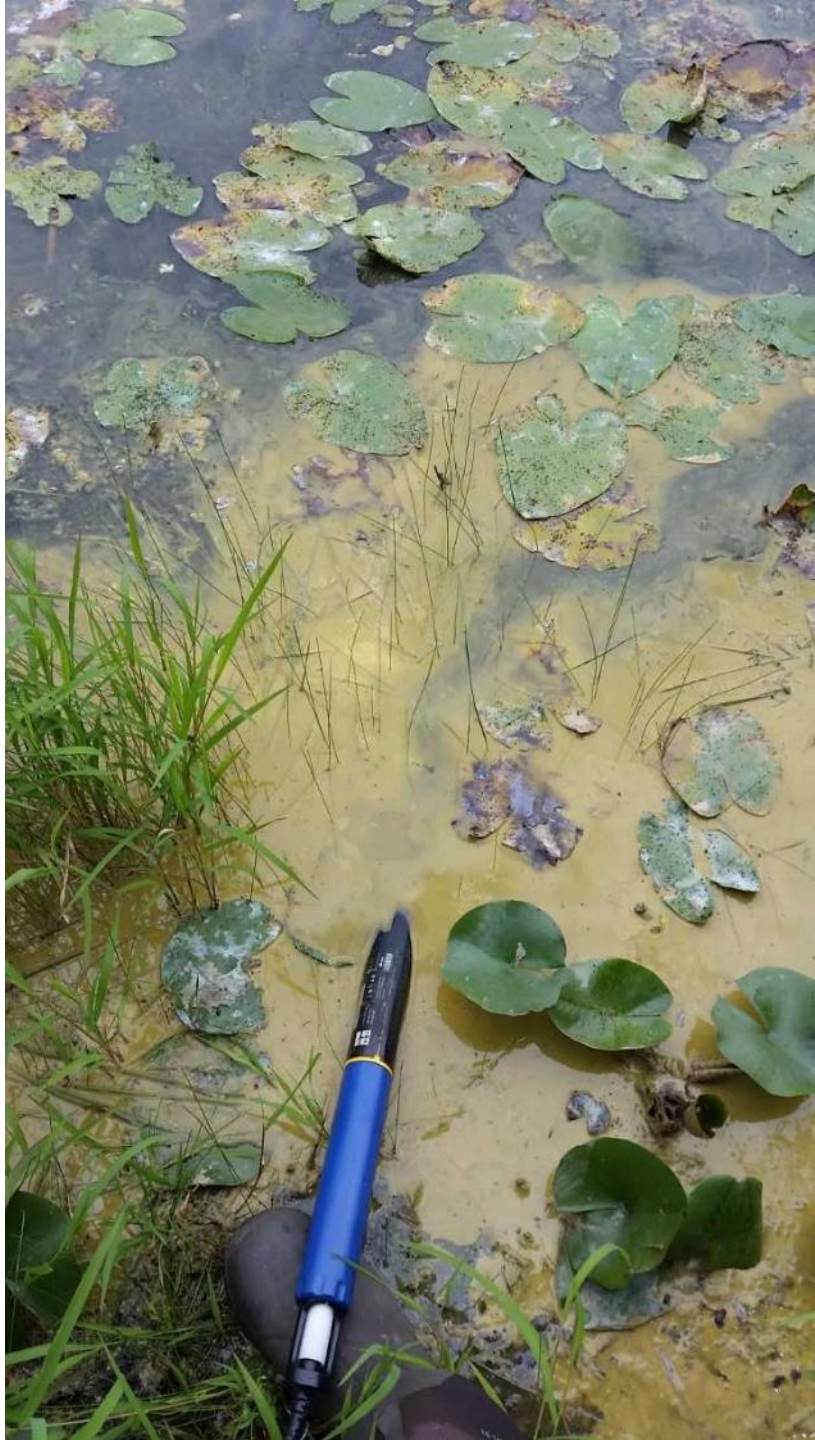
- Also known as “blue-green algae”
- A normal and important part of many aquatic ecosystems
- Can produce cyanotoxins and other irritants that can be harmful to people and animals
- There are many different species of cyanobacteria, and not all produce cyanotoxins
- A “bloom” occurs when there is a rapid increase in cyanobacteria
  - This may be called a “harmful algal bloom” or “HAB” if the bloom can produce toxins
- Can also produce strong odors

Appearance of Cyanobacteria

- Cyanobacterial blooms can be a variety of colors:
  - Green, blue-green, blue, brown, yellow, white, purple, or red
- They can look like scums in the water and may have small flecks, foams, or sometimes globs and mats floating in it
- The water can also look like it has spilled paint or a green sheen on the surface
- You cannot tell if cyanotoxins are present in a cyanobacterial bloom just by looking at it

Examples of green cyanobacteria





Examples of blue cyanobacteria

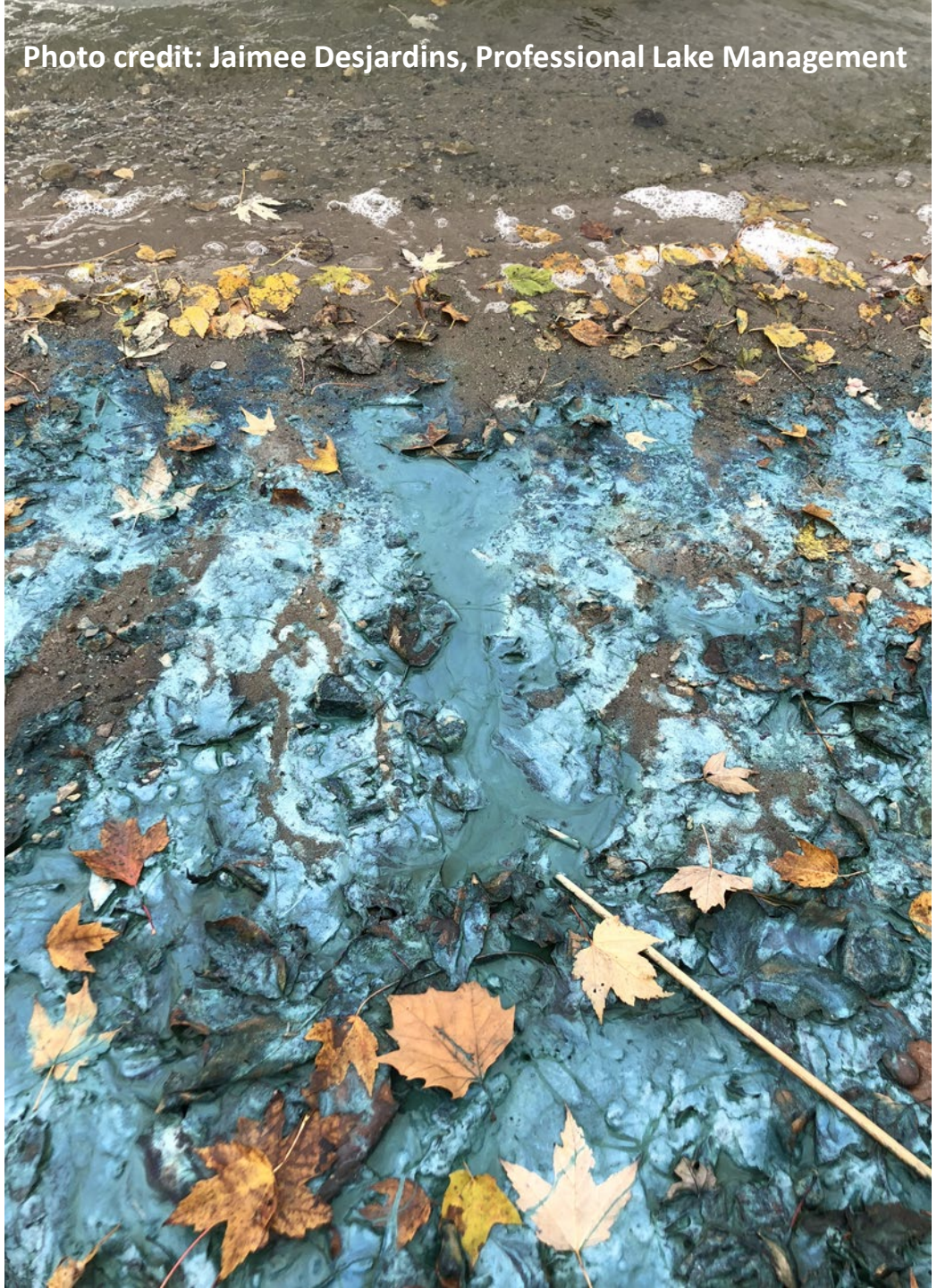
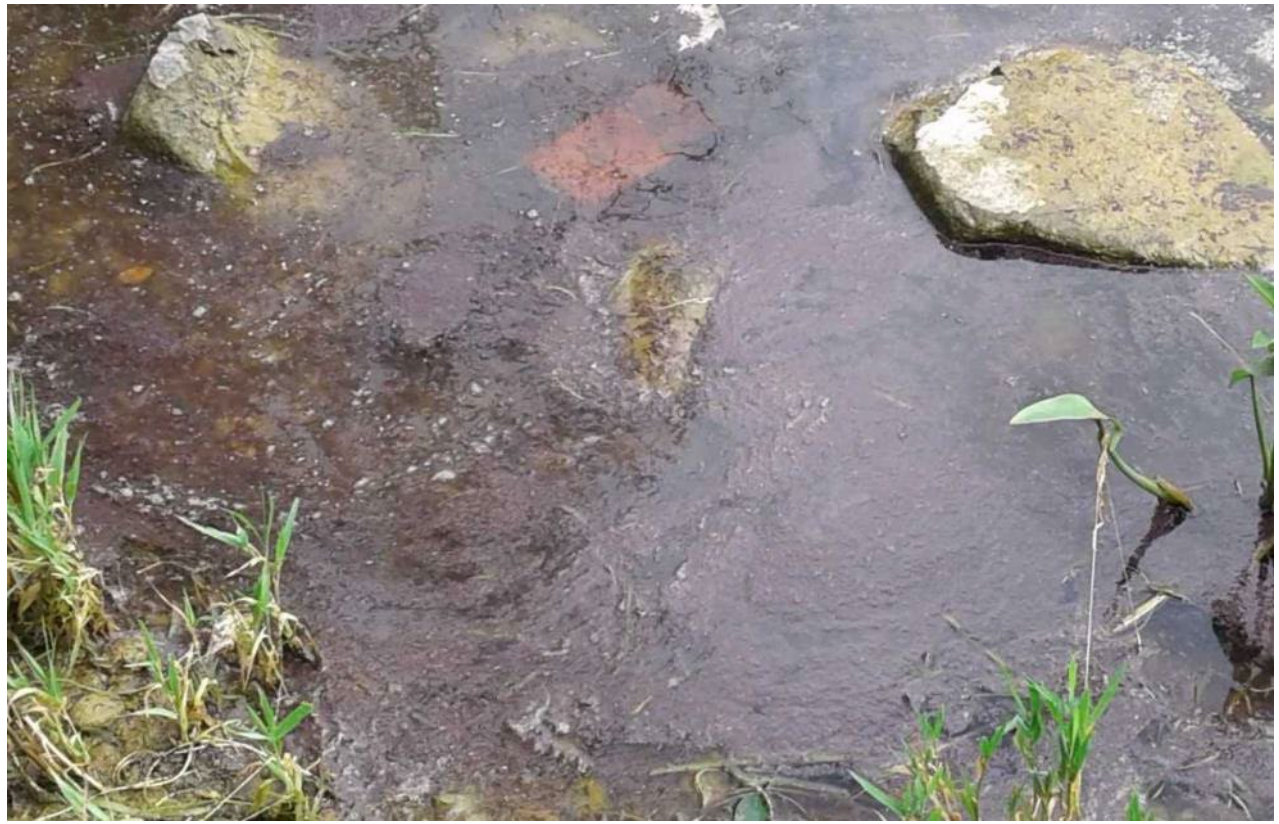
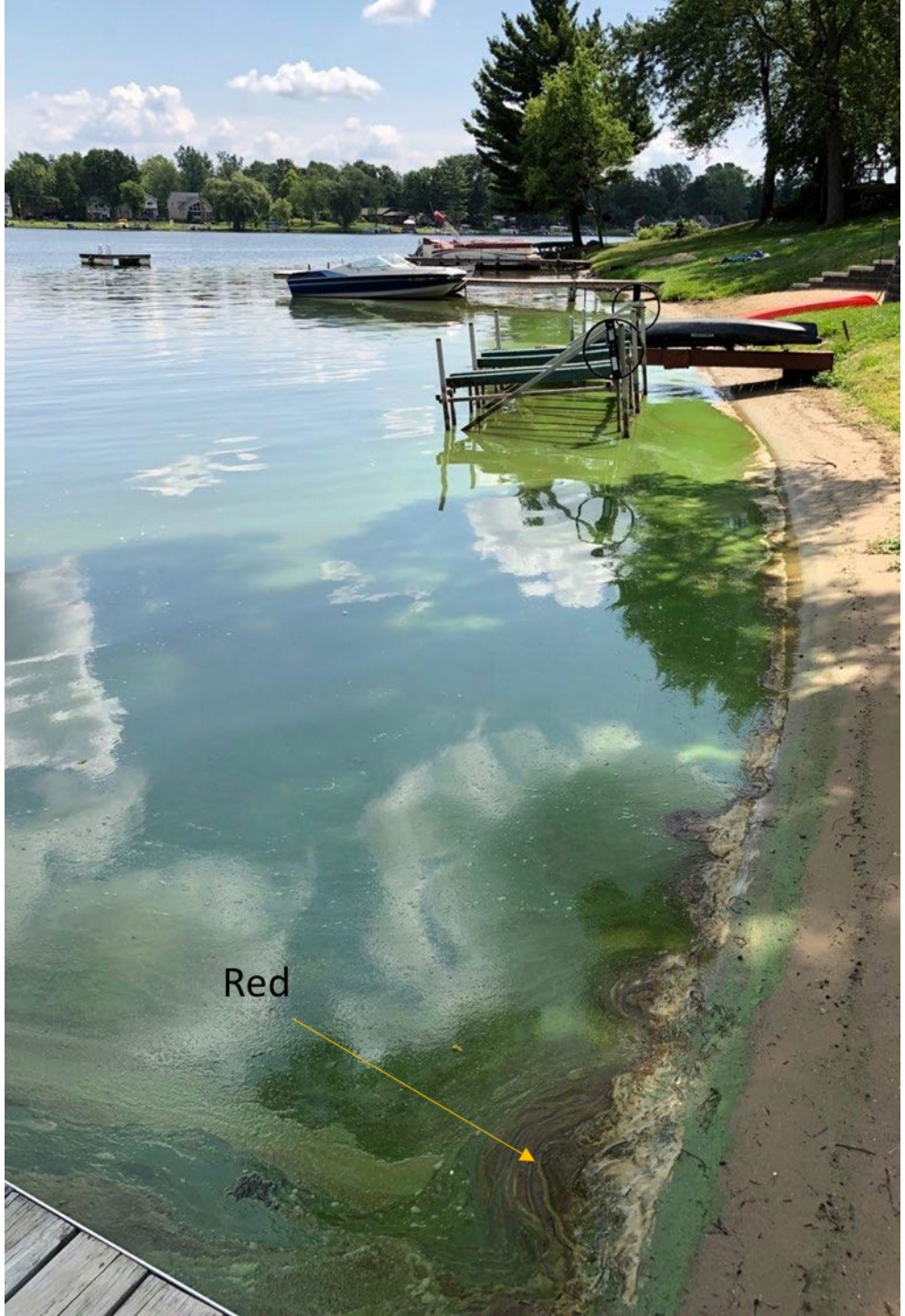


Photo credit: Jaimee Desjardins, Professional Lake Management

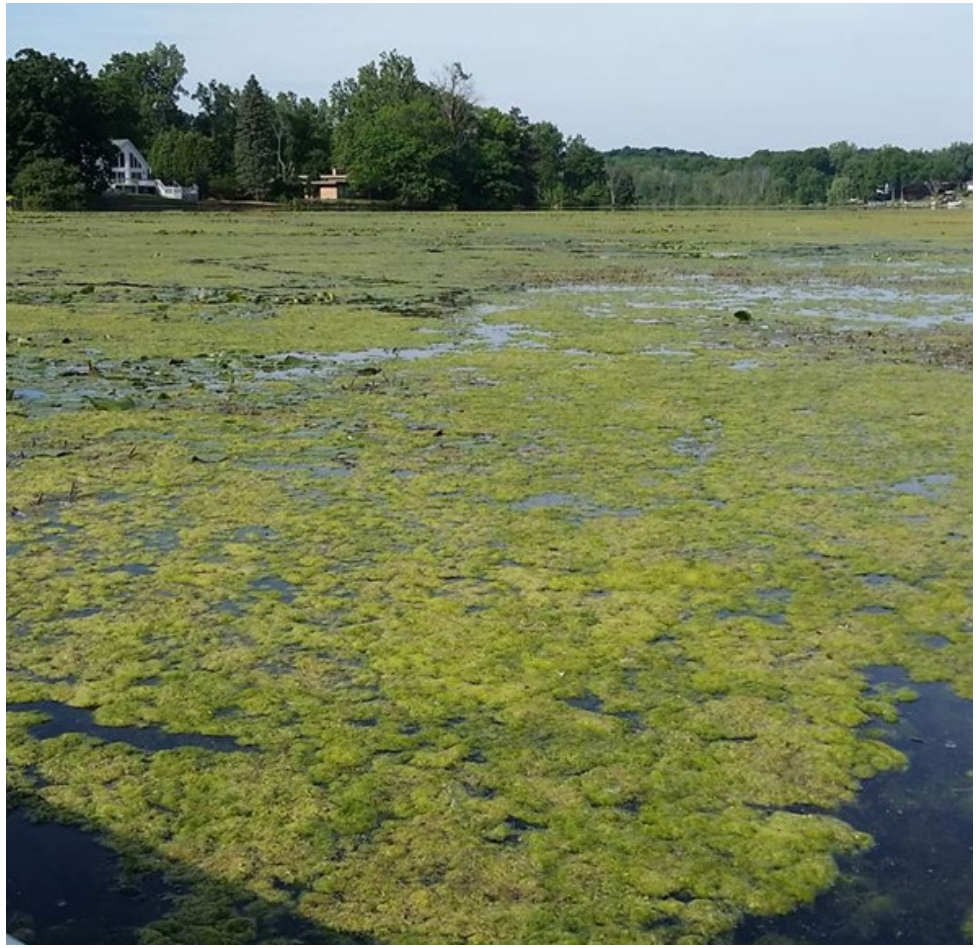
Examples of red or purple cyanobacteria

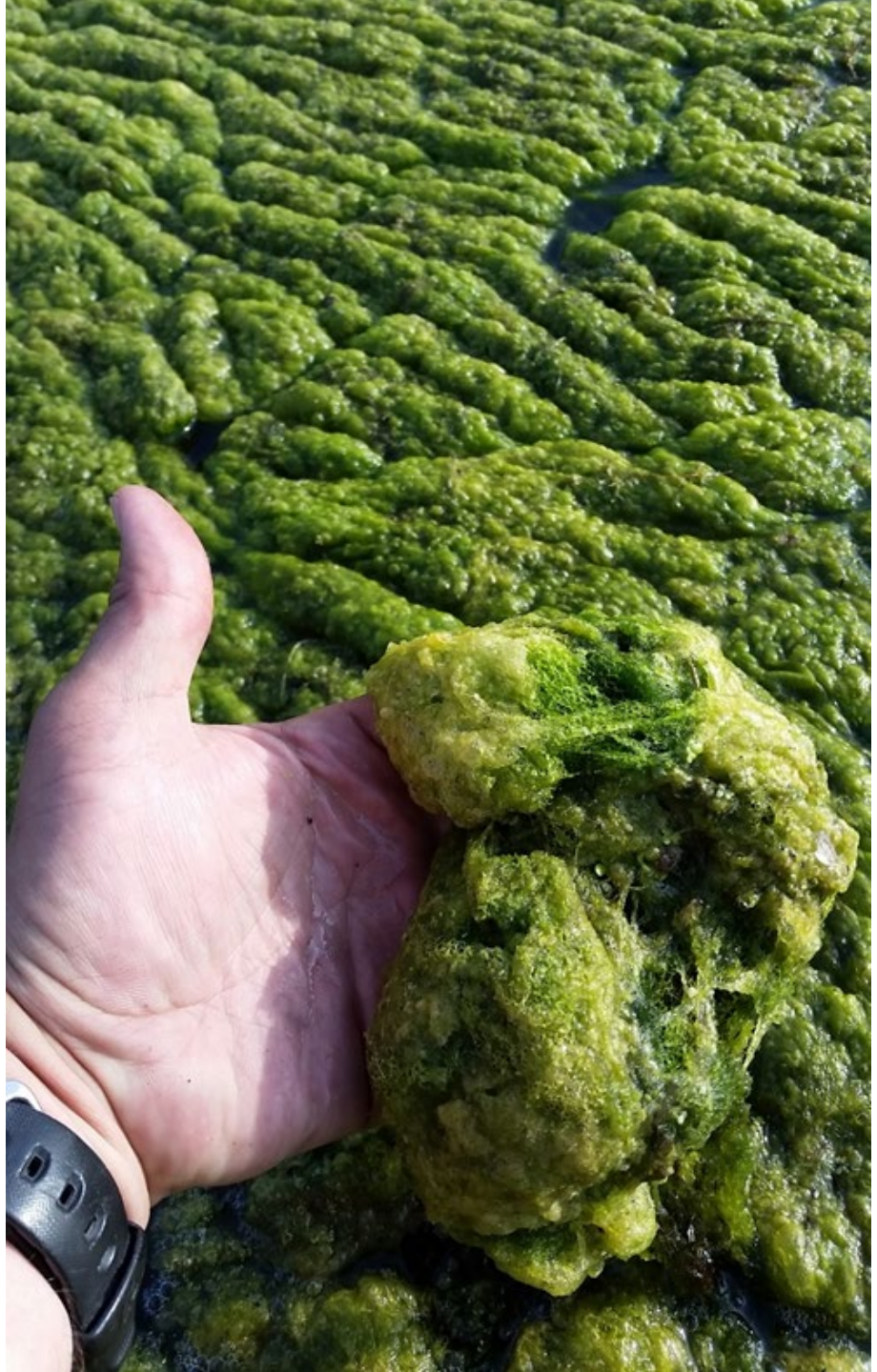




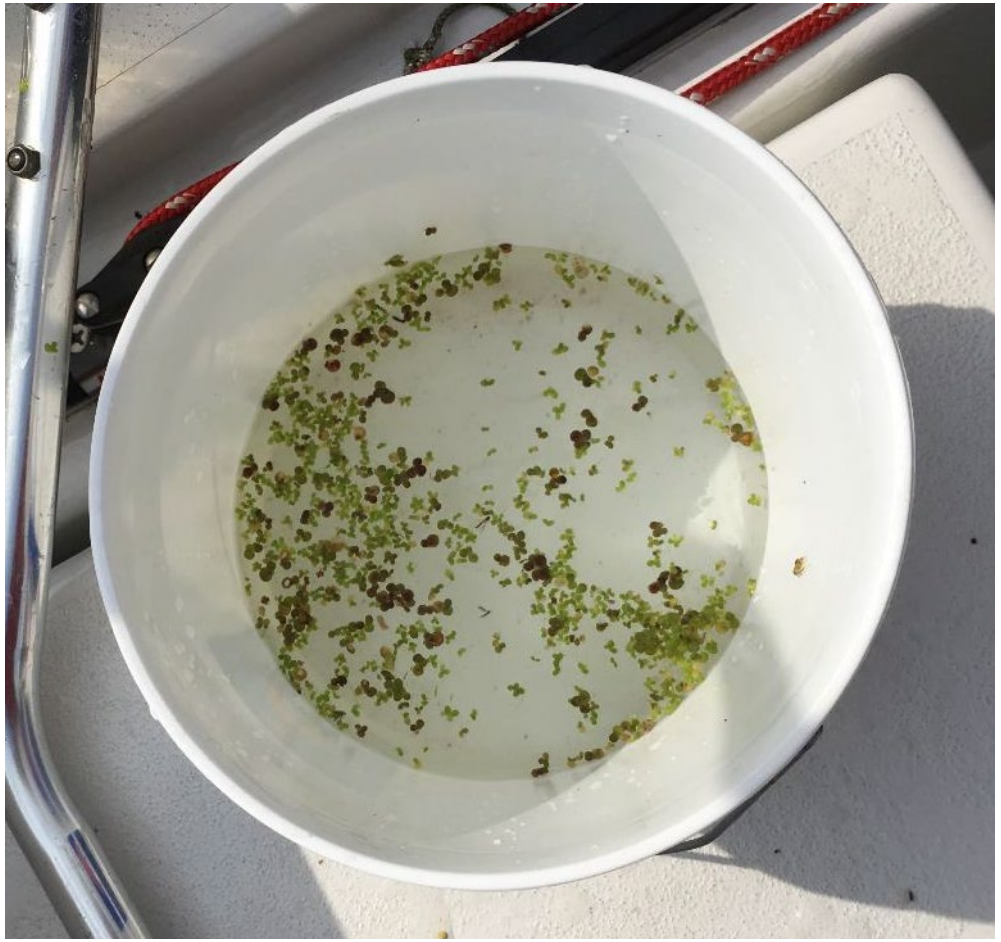
Examples of lake conditions commonly mistaken for cyanobacteria

Filamentous green algae

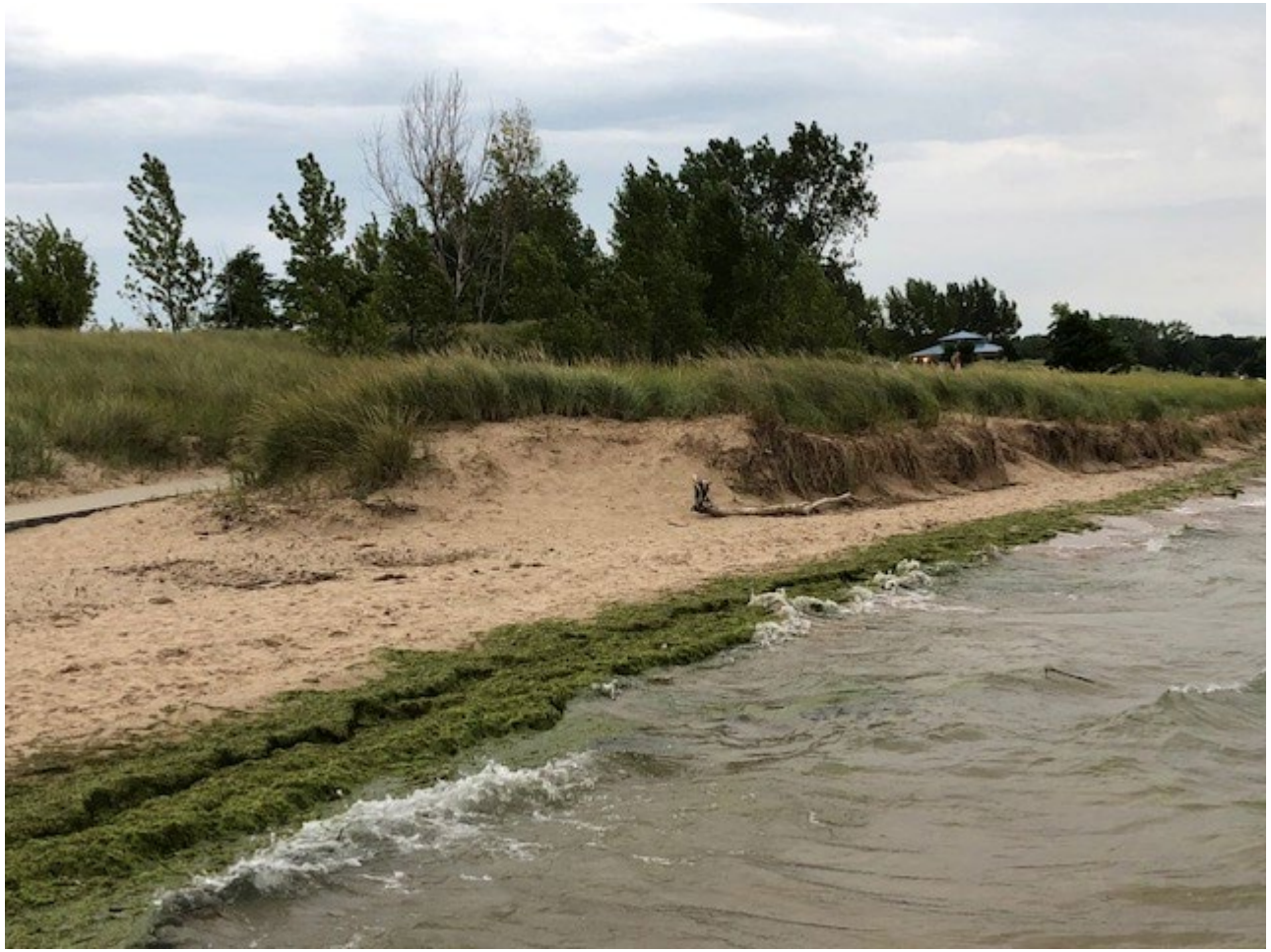


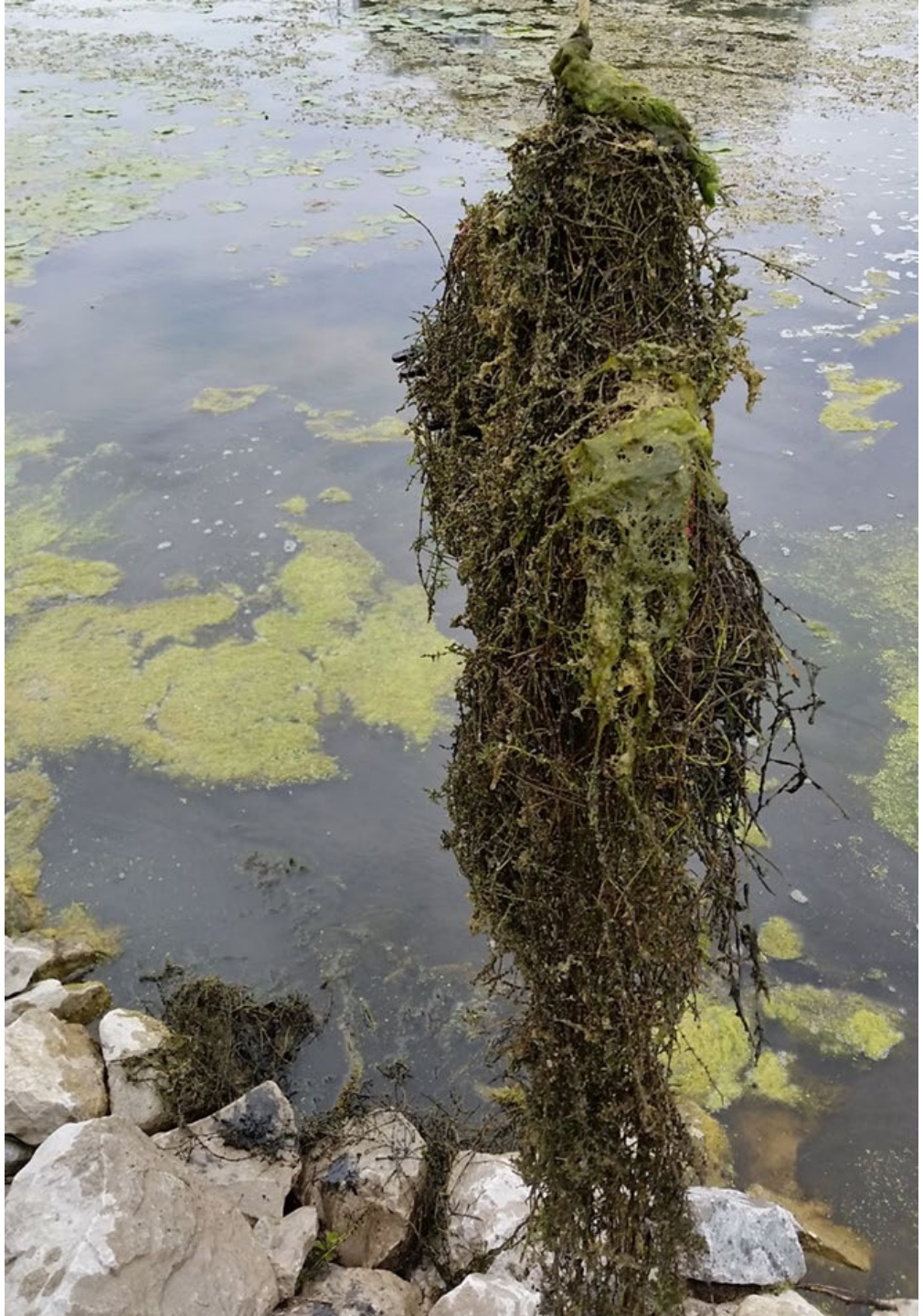


Duckweed

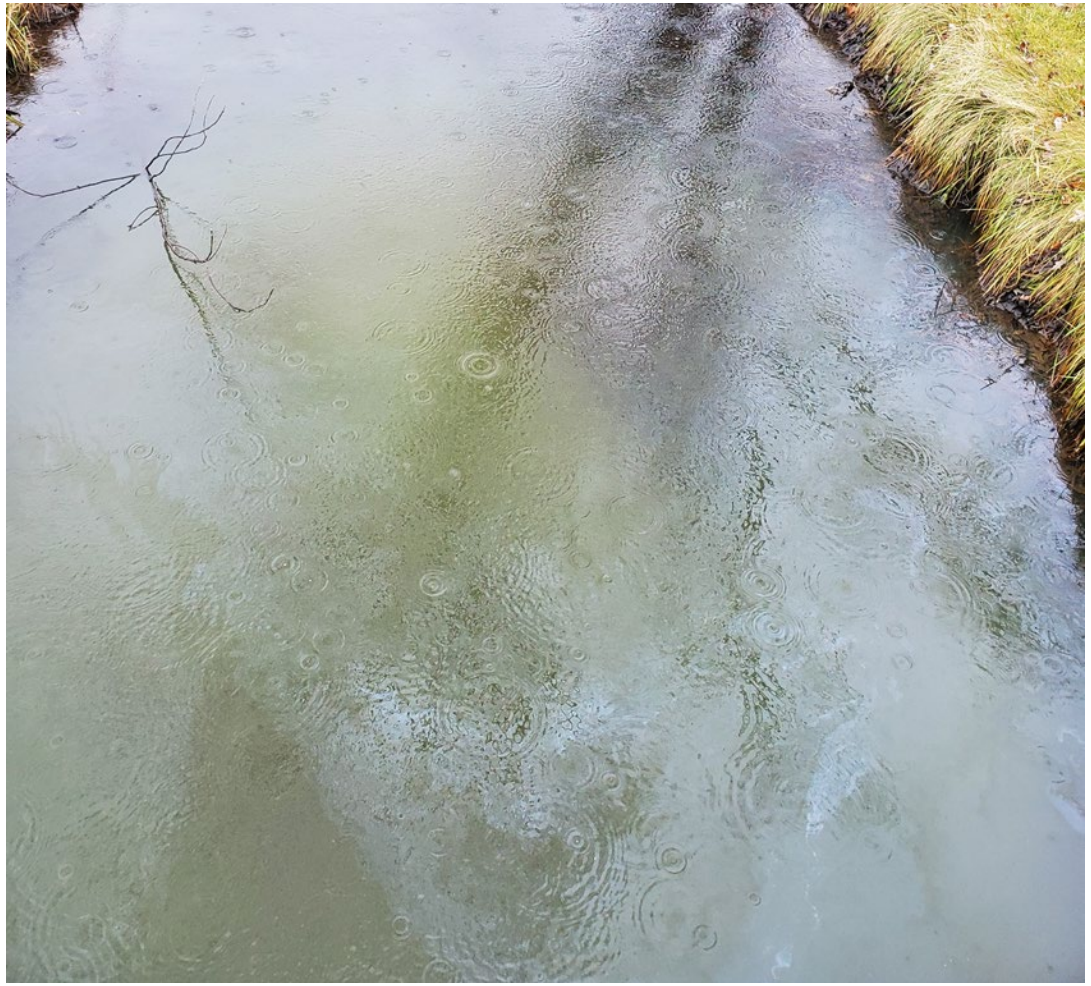


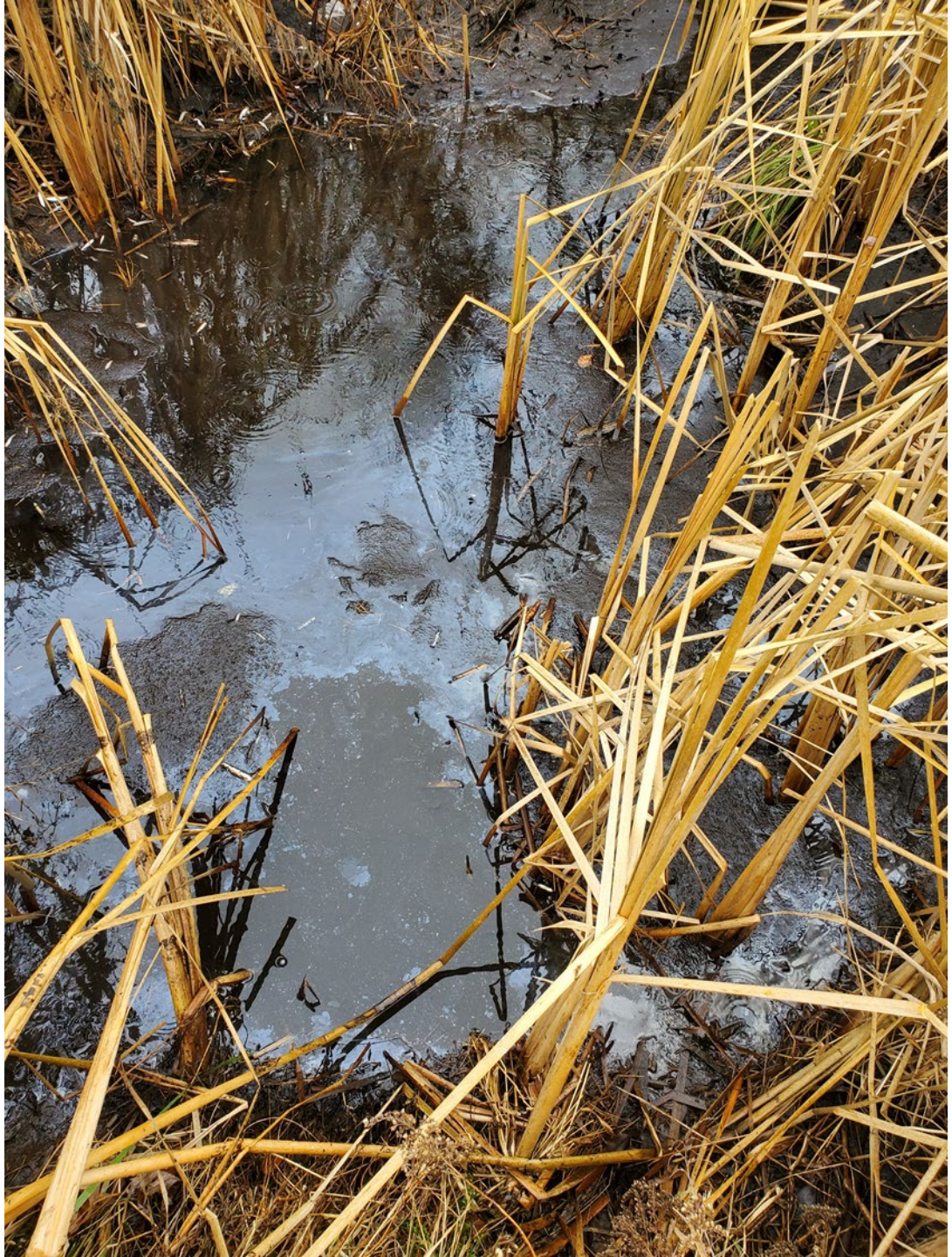
Aquatic plants





Oil sheens





Insect exuvia (cast-off outer skins)