

Lake (Huron)
Pollution

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Carl Bent Orange

Lakes becoming cleaner

Report: Winter Park still has a lot to do to improve waters

By Mark Andrews

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — The city's lakes are getting cleaner, but they are a long way from being out of danger from pollution, an annual state-of-the-lakes report says.

Some of the good news in the report is that Lake Virginia has much less bacteria in the once-popular Dinky Dock Beach swimming area than it did a year ago. If bacteria

counts remain low, the area will be reopened for swimming again this spring.

Overall, the clarity of water in the Winter Park Chain of Lakes finally seems to be improving after years of deterioration, according to the report by the city's lakes and waterways advisory board.

The bad news includes the sighting of oil slicks on the Lake Virginia side of the Sue-Virginia canal and in Lake Baldwin, the dumping of paint into Lake Osceola through a storm

sewer, the loss of a city nursery for aquatic plants, and a bleak outlook for the availability of lakefront land on which to develop badly needed drainage filtration ponds.

"The lakes are in pitiful shape," said James Madison, chairman of the lakes and waterways board, despite the recent signs of improvement. "We need to do more than just stabilize the situation."

Later this month, city commis-

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sioners are expected to discuss the lake board's proposal that Winter Park spend \$44 million for lake cleanup over the next several years. The panel's master plan encourages the city to raise the money through a bond issue and from state and federal grants.

The money would be used to build new drainage ponds to filter pollutants out of stormwater runoff before it enters lakes and to dismantle septic systems near the lakes and force those homeowners to connect to city storm sewers. It also would continue work to trap debris that enters the lakes through sewer pipes, and to plant more aquatic vegetation on lakeshores, among other projects.

The city's primary source of funding for lake improvements is its new stormwater utility fee, which charges all residents, businesses, government entities and institutions a monthly rate based on how much ground is covered by buildings and pavement.

The lakes board also wants the City Commission to enact several new laws to help protect the quality of lake water. They would:

- Prohibit leaves and lawn clippings from being swept or blown into streets where they can be washed into storm sewers. The sewers either dump into lakes or directly into the aquifer through drainage wells.

- Ban the dumping of gasoline, paint, other chemicals or any dis-

charge from campers or trailers into streets or storm sewer drains. This measure would reinforce a state law.

- Amend the city's boating ordinance to prohibit the passage of any "personal water craft," such as Jet Skis, through canals that link lakes in the Winter Park chain.

Madison said improvement in the lakes is coming because people are better informed today about pollution problems and government agencies are taking more steps to correct them. For example, there is now less wholesale clearing of lakefront vegetation, which filters out pollutants before they enter the water.

Also, screened traps on storm sewer pipes are catching more debris before it enters lakes. The city's beefed-up street-sweeping program is keeping more trash out of the storm sewers, and more property owners are collecting rainfall on their land and filtering it before releasing the water to drainage systems.

Part of the reason for clearer water in the lakes today is that there is less boat traffic to stir up mud on the bottoms than there was a year ago, Madison said. He said this is probably due in part to a large increase in boating fees that Winter Park and Maitland imposed last summer.

Although the decline in water quality has been reversed, Madison said Winter Park's lakes are a long way from becoming clean again. Years of work and millions of dollars will be required to reduce the sources of pollution and to clean up the dirty water that is in the lakes now.