

Winter Park studies fish to control weeds

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If Commissioner Don Wright has his way, the city of Winter Park may be using a hybrid grass carp fish to control weeds in the city's lakes.

"I've been concerned for a number of years about what we're doing to the lakes," the commissioner commented last week at a city council work session. "We poison them with chemicals, but the weeds are just as bad." Wright said that the only alternative to killing the weeds with chemicals was the use of fish.

Besides directing the city staff to prepare a presentation on the grass carp, the council also gave Wright its blessing to take a trip to Lee County to visit that county's fish farm with Orange County officials. Wright said costs could be cut if local municipalities get together and breed their own fish for use in local lakes.

Botanist Lowell Trent from the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission told commissioners that if the city did opt to introduce the fish into the six city lakes, the city should plan on gradually cutting back on chemicals used in the lake. "The most effective way is to reduce the weed mass chemically, then stock the fish. Get the weeds down to a level the fish can handle."

Trent told the commission that the fish has recently been stocked in neighboring Lake Sue. However, barriers prevent the fish from entering the Winter Park chain. Trent said concrete data on how the fish attack the weed problem in Lake Sue should be available this fall.

Mayor Hope Strong, who commented that he was "not as enthusiastic" as Wright in championing the fish, asked Trent if the state commission could guarantee that the newly developed fish would not harm the lakes if introduced. Trent told the mayor that he "can't say the fish doesn't have side effects." He also pointed out that the fish has proven only 60 percent effective in testing in different lakes thus far.

Chairman Clyde West of the city's Lakes Advisory Board also said his advisory group ex-

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pressed reservations about the fish. In a letter to City Manager David Harden, West asked that no action be taken until the matter was discussed with the Lakes Board "and until further testing insures us against the hazards of uncontrolled growth of the carp and the resultant pollution. This is an area where there is very little tangible knowledge and lots of speculation. It is our position that it might be a mistake to take action with the limited knowledge at hand today."

West added, "We place ourselves at the service of the city commission to further study the problem and to make a recommendation; however, we would like to point out that the lakes are in better condition today than they have been for ten years. We believe this is a direct result of the treatment program which has been in effect for most of that time."

The city spent \$180,486 in 1978-79, \$154,984 in 1979-80 and \$66,438 in 1980-81 for chemical treatment for the lakes. The lesser amount last year was due to weed reduction from natural causes.

However, Trent said that shouldn't be the case this year. "We expect a banner year for hydrilla," he commented.