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# City studies liability for lake muck

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OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Winter Park will await the results of studies being done on Howell Creek and Lake Waumpi before committing itself to help pay for their cleanup.

Representatives of Orange and Seminole counties, Winter Park, the state Department of Environmental Regulation and the St. Johns River Water Management District met in late June to discuss the potential cleanup of the two waterways.

After that meeting, the city commission discussed the issue but took no action.

Lake Waumpi is northeast of Winter Park, north of Howell Branch Road. Howell Creek runs from Lake Maitland through the 15-acre Lake Waumpi and then to its Lake Jessup basin.

A June 20 memo from utilities director Hoyt Owens says Lake Waumpi contains numerous cat-tails and alligator weed. "There is an extraordinary amount of solids accumulated on the bottom of the lake. Estimates are that the sediments are six to 20 feet deep," wrote Owens.

City Manager David Harden said that he has seen no studies that conclusively prove that Winter Park's discharge of treated wastewater into the creek and lake caused the muck buildup.

"What you've got is yes, we did discharge treated wastewater into the creek. We did it according to permits from the DER (state Department of Environmental Regulation) and its predecessor agencies," said Harden.

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Harden said those who are pointing the finger of blame at Winter Park are really saying: "After the city discharged effluent there was a buildup of muck so therefore Winter Park is to blame. To me that does not prove responsibility."

The city stopped discharging wastewater into the creek and lake three years ago when the state DER ordered it to hook into Orlando's Iron Bridge sewage treatment facility. Since then the city's sewage treatment plant near the Howell Creek has been inactive.

Although the city's discharge into the waters has been mentioned as a cause of its current problems, a related problem is the reduced flow of water going into the creek and lake since the city closed the treatment plant. The lack of water circulation in the lake is being blamed for contributing to the buildup of muck, algae and an offensive odor.

Owens said floodplain, socioeconomic and feasibility studies on the cleanup will be done by the University of Florida and will not be completed for 1½ years. In addition, Orange County will analyze the depth of sediment and those results will be given to the DER in August.

Harden said the city is paying attention to how any suggested remedies will affect the city's chain of lakes. One suggestion — to allow more flow from the Winter Park lakes into Lake Waumpi — could mean reduced water levels in the city's chain of lakes, Harden said.

Although there would be some minor benefit to the city from any cleanup, Harden said he would suggest the city bear some of the financial cost "only if there were some other benefit to the city" and also if it is shown that the city caused all or a substantial part of the problem that exists.

The DER has said it has about \$50,000 to help with the restoration projects but is asking both counties and Winter Park to help with the costs. Those costs will not be known until all studies have been completed and a method for the cleanup is chosen.