

city of Winter Park  
Lakes (pollution)  
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# Continuation of Winter Park lake environment study approved over opposition

By MISSY CLARK

The Winter Park City Commission has approved two environmental studies designed to develop plans for improving Winter Park's lakes, parks and wildlife habitats. One is a continuation of a study by Rollins College Biology Department on the Winter Park chain of lakes, which includes lakes Virginia, Mait-

land, Mizell, and Osceola. The other is a study to develop a master plan for the Lake Island Park, the site of the infamous "sinkhole" and the new Winter Park Civic Center currently under construction.

Both of the plans are somewhat controversial in that they have invoked the wrath of the Good Government Group, an organization

who monitors and frequently criticizes the city government.

Rollins College was contacted last year by the city to study conditions in the lakes which have been deteriorating over the past several years. According to Dr. James Small of the Rollins Biology Department, the deterioration is due to urbanization of the shorelines, storm water run-

off and the rapid growth of bacteria and other organic material.

By studying bi-monthly samples from the lakes' surfaces and bottom sediments, the study is supposed to assess the changes and recommend a plan of action for improving the quality of the lakes. The one year study, which cost the city about \$25,000, has been completed but re-

sults and recommendations have not been compiled yet. Instead, Dr. Small submitted a proposal to the city commissioner last week for a continuation of the study for another year.

At the commission workshop, Mayor Hope Strong questioned whether it would be in the city's best interest to pay for an additional year of a study when it is still not known what the first year's study has found, if anything. "I'm all for improving our lakes," he said, "but I just don't want to spend money on something unless we're going to see results," Strong said.

Small said results will be submitted as soon as they've been calculated but he feels an additional year of study is necessary to accurately assess the changes and make recommendations for the lakes. His plan is to continue taking samples from the lakes, but increasing the sampling in Lake Virginia to a monthly rather than bi-monthly basis. This will cost the city an additional \$4,000, according to Small's proposal.

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Strong and Commissioner Tom Ivey suggested that the city delay the approval until results from the current study have been submitted and reviewed. The other commissioners however, voted to approve the plan, which will cost the city \$32,670.

J.J. O'Donovan, a member of the Good Government Group said the study of the chain of lakes is an example of wasteful spending on meaningless projects. "There are no real problems or solutions," he said, "It's like studying the weather from one year to the next and saying 'this year was hotter than last year. End of study.' "

O'Donovan, as well as other members of the Good Government Group are also opposed to the city spending \$4,700 for a plan to develop the Lake Island Park. Natural Systems Analysts are conducting the study, which will actually cost twice as much as what the city is paying for it.

"We're willing to donate the rest of the work, because we stand to benefit from it as much as the city," said Pete Gottfried, president of the company. His company overlooks the park, as will the new civic center when completed in December. The city feels the environmental, aesthetic and recreational value of the park should be assessed and utilized to the fullest extent.

"We're looking at all the options," said Gottfried. He explained that the study will include making a full-scale map of the property, designing adequate stormwater retention and reduced maintenance requirements, improving wildlife and vegetation

habitat, landscaping the area with native trees and shrubs, and developing plans for recreational usage. A major part of the study will be to determine whether the marsh caused by the sinkhole, called Lake Mendsen, should be deepened and converted into a reflecting pond or

retained as a marsh with only minor improvements.

The Environmental Information Center has recommended that the marsh be retained because it is an essential habitat for certain wildlife and vegetation, and it will require far less management and improve-

ment efforts than would an artificial lake.

Lake Island is one of the largest open areas remaining in Winter Park and therefore is of considerable recreational and environmental value to the community, according to Gottfried. Because it is the site of the million dollar civic center, the commissioners agree that the aesthetic quality of the marsh and surrounding area is important.

Buck Harris, another member of the Good Government Group, says the citizens of Winter Park never wanted the civic center and the Lake Island study is just adding an unnecessary and unwanted expense for the taxpayers.

"We're being studied to death," he said.