

# Winter Park Waterways

THE NEWS OF WINTER PARK'S LAKES

March 2001



## Facts About Toxin Producing Algae

### What Are Toxic Algae?

Cyanobacteria are single-celled, chlorophyll producing planktonic or filamentous organisms that, until recently, were called blue-green algae. Several types of cyanobacteria are known to produce hepatoxins (toxins that affect the liver), and at least one type has been found to produce a neurotoxin (affecting the brain and/or nervous system). These organisms occur naturally in Florida's lakes and waterways but usually occur in low concentrations. Cyanobacteria usually increase in concentration as nutrients levels increase; very high concentrations of one species (*Cylindrospermopsis raciborskii*) have been found in several central Florida lakes. Experts are unsure what has caused this species to proliferate. Recent newspaper articles, citing animal deaths in Lake Griffin (in Lake County), have suggested that *Cylindrospermopsis*, and other cyanobacteria, pose health risks to recreational lake users. While cyanobacteria are suspected in the Lake Griffin animal deaths, the exact cause has yet to be determined. Scientists say they do not know enough about these organisms to say what causes them to release toxins, or what level of exposure is harmful to humans. The State of Florida has assembled a toxic algae task force to develop more information on the subject.

### Is it Safe to Swim in Our Lakes?

While residents should be concerned with water quality issues, and common sense should be used when using natural waters, the risk to recreational users appears minimal. Scientists from the St. Johns River Water Management District who are studying the problem for the state are unaware of any human illnesses caused by the recreational use of Florida lakes. No health department warnings (state or county) have been issued related to cyanobacteria in lakes. Scientists do believe that higher concentrations of cyanobacteria pose higher risks but have not

determined any threshold levels. Algae levels in the Winter Park chain of lakes are usually much lower than in Lake Griffin, and no problems attributable to the cyanobacteria have been



Lakes crews collect samples from Lake Osceola

observed. There is no way to guarantee against risk when using natural waterways, but there is no evidence that the risk of using the Winter Park Chain of Lakes has changed significantly over the last 25 years.

### What is Winter Park Doing About the Problem?

Specific treatments for cyanobacteria are not practical. The best way to control them is to control algae populations in general by limiting nutrient loads to the lakes. The Cities of Winter Park, Orlando, and Maitland (all of which affect the chain of lakes) all have proactive stormwater and lake management programs designed to reduce nutrient loads to our lakes. Residents can also help to reduce the risk by following the lawn care tips included in this newsletter. Additionally, the Cities of Winter Park and Maitland have implemented an algae monitoring program with the assistance of the St. Johns River Water Management District. The program is designed to supplement quarterly monitoring already performed

✂ Clip and give to your lawn service representative

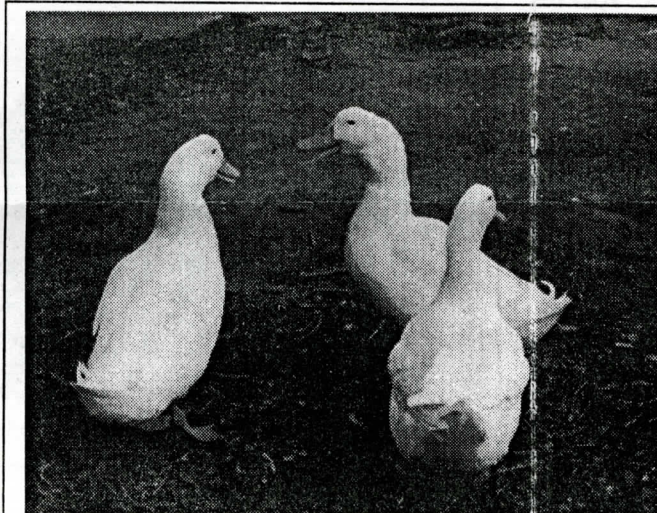
### Help Save Winter Park Lakes With These Nutrient Reducing Lawn Tips:

- Use phosphorus free fertilizers
- Sweep fertilizer off of sidewalks or other paved surfaces
- Keep leaves and grass clippings off of paved surfaces
- Don't blow leaves or debris into the street, or the storm drains

by Orange County. As more information is gathered, and as scientists learn more about these organisms, updates will be published in this newsletter.

### Domestic Waterfowl Can Harm Your Lake

Feeding the ducks on a sunny afternoon can be a fun and relaxing way to pass the time, but did you know that you could also be contributing to pollution problems of your lake? Domestic birds that are released into a lake spend their entire lives on the lake, and all of their wastes end up in the water column. These bird wastes contain high levels of fecal coliform bacteria and nutrients (such as nitrogen and phosphorus) that can pose human health risks and fuel unwanted algae growth. When people feed bread or grain to these birds, they are effectively importing nutrients into the lake basin, and because the birds are often overfed, they produce many times more waste than native birds. Non-native species also displace native wildlife by destroying feeding areas, competing for nesting space, and spreading disease. In addition to being bad for the lake, *introducing exotic wildlife into any area is against state law!* We have many beautiful, native birds in Winter Park. They won't always be where you are, waiting to be viewed, but catching a glimpse of a stately great blue heron or a colorful wood duck can be much more rewarding than looking at farm birds. Lets resist the urge to feed the birds and learn to enjoy our native wildlife.



Domestic waterfowl can harm your lake

### News Notes

**Quarterly Lakes Meetings Set:** The Central Florida Lakes Management Society has set dates for their next three quarterly meetings. The next meeting will be held April 19 at 7:00 p.m. in the County Commission chamber at the Orange County Administration Building, 201 S. Rosalind Avenue. There will be presentations on low water levels and toxic algae (cyanobacteria) followed by a questions and answer session. Anyone interested is welcome. Next meetings are scheduled for July 19 and October 11 (location and discussion to be announced).

**Canal Wall Project Kicks Off:** The City of Winter Park has selected American Bridge, Inc. to perform the canal wall replacement project on the Venetian Canal (between Lakes Maitland & Osceola) and the Fern Canal (between Lakes Osceola & Virginia). Construction will begin in early March and is expected to last 150 days.

**Water Levels Continue To Fall:** The twelve-month rainfall deficit is currently at 20 inches. The Winter Park chain of lakes is 2.8 feet below the ordinary high water elevation.

Watering restrictions: Odd addresses - Wednesdays & Saturdays. Even addresses - Thursdays & Sundays. **NO WATERING BETWEEN 10:00 AM AND 4:00 PM.**

**DON'T FORGET  
TO CLIP AND SHARE THE LAWN  
TIPS WITH YOUR LAWN SERVICE.**

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