

City of Winter Park
Lakes Virginia
Pollution

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Drain, animals pollute lake

Study: Winter Park must clean up perimeter of Lake Virginia

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — The pollution that has prevented swimmers from using Dinky Dock beach primarily is caused by a nearby stormwater drain into Lake Virginia and animal and wildlife wastes, an engineering consultant told the city.

Tom Kelley, president of Professional Engineering Consultants Inc., said if the city wants to reopen the swimming area it must take steps to

rid the lake's perimeter of pollution.

Those include rerouting the stormwater drain, strictly curbing dog-walking in the beach area, and creating stormwater ponds throughout the city.

The Orange County Health Department began closing the swimming area five years ago because of high coliform bacteria levels. It has not been open at all this summer.

Recent tests conducted by Rollins College showed that fecal coliform bacteria levels along the lake's perimeter were more than twice what

is considered safe.

High levels of coliform bacteria can cause eye and stomach infections in swimmers.

At first the city was concerned the waste could be coming from old, leaking septic tanks, but further study since has pinpointed animals and wildlife as the primary culprits, Kelley said.

However, Kelley said, some contamination could be coming from human waste in the lakes. For exam-

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ple, recent tests done in Lake Osceola show the presence of fecal coliform, but more detailed analyses need to be done before that can be verified, he said.

A large stormwater drain close to the Dinky Dock swimming area is a heavy contributor to the overall contamination and needs to be rerouted, according to a report prepared by Kelley's firm.

Strict measures to curb walking dogs in the beach area also would have to be implemented.

The city commissioned the \$18,000 evaluation of the Winter Park Chain of Lakes to get a comprehensive look at

the condition of the waterways, the factors that contribute to their deterioration and measures to stem them, and ways to improve the lakes' condition.

In looking at the available data on the lakes, Kelley said there is no indication the water quality has declined over the past 15 years. Neither has it improved.

Besides the pollution from animals, a variety of pollutants come through the 69 stormwater drains that empty into Lakes Virginia, Osceola, Maitland and Mizell. Leaves were named as a culprit contributing to the sediment buildup in the lakes.

The report recommends that Winter Park begin, as soon as possible, creating stormwater ponds around the city. Water from storm drains would be diverted to the ponds before running into the lakes. That way most of the

leaves, garbage and other pollutants can be removed as the water filters through the ponds.

Kelley suggested that possible sites for those filter ponds could be the old Winter Park Junior High School site on Huntington Avenue and Sterling Swamp in Mead Gardens. Drainage ponds also could serve as water hazards on the city's golf course, he said.

Also, actions taken by the city to stem one problem could be steadily creating another.

Aquatic vegetation such as hydrilla regularly is sprayed to prevent it from choking the lakes and canals and absorbing so much oxygen from the water that other life is killed. But the dead vegetation falls to the bottom and helps build up sediment.

The report also urges that the city expand its street sweeping program,

build reinforced concrete leaf and debris traps on its sewer pipes and evaluate the condition of septic tanks still being used in the city.

The buildup rate, source and age of sediment accumulating on the lake bottoms should be studied and, based on those results, the city could decide whether dredging or a lake drawdown is needed to remove sediment.

The report also urges the city to undertake a major public awareness campaign to get residents involved in the effort to keep lakes free of leaves and debris.

Commissioners got their copies of the report just before their Monday afternoon meeting and asked Kelley to meet with them after they have had time to read it. They also plan to discuss how to fund some of the improvements.