

LAKE AVALON CLEAN-UP: FAQs

Hi everyone! This document is for the benefit of the lakefront owners, who recently received a ballot to vote on whether we should clean up Lake Avalon. Most of you have read my articles in the last two Avalon Home and Property Owners Association (AHPOA) newsletters; and/or attended the annual AHPOA meeting last July, where we had a presentation from, and detailed discussion with, Sergio Duarte, a scientist with the Lakes Management division of Orange County. So hopefully you already know the information that follows. But in case you missed all of it, below are some questions we have received, and the answers:

- 1) Last week we received a form from Orange County asking our vote on whether we would support the removal of vegetation from Lake Avalon in exchange for an additional fee of \$328 annually on our property taxes. Does the \$328 fee increase if the lakefront parcel is 60 acres instead of 1 ½ acres? *No, the fee does not increase for them – and here’s why: the only other option would be an MSTU, which would determine the fees based on a property’s tax base. Lakefront owners with 60 acres, but zoned agricultural, would end up paying MUCH less than we would (because their tax base would be negligible); and we would end up paying more, to make up the difference. Make sense?*
- 2) What is the process to rescind this annual fee? *We will set up a committee of lakefront owners that will be in charge of the money that comes in and the money that is spent. The money raised by this fee will go into a special account that can ONLY be used for Lake Avalon Cleanup, and only our committee will be able to access the funds. The committee we set up can decrease, or totally stop, the annual fee at any time – based on the lake’s cleanup needs. If, however, the committee feels that an increase in fees would be needed, you would receive another ballot in the mail, and the increase would have to be approved by the parcel owners, just like now.*
- 3) Since the North side of Lake Avalon is now considered within the City limits of Winter Garden – Are these parcels included or omitted in the added fees and weed removal process? – The entire lake needs to be treated or weeds from the untreated areas will simply re-infest the treated areas. *We agree! The entire lake needs to be treated. Some of the worst areas are in the northeast corner of Lake Avalon. ALL lakefront owners are included in the added fees, no matter what their jurisdiction is; and the entire lake will be cleaned up.*
- 4) Is the control and removal of weeds done by a department of Orange County or do they in turn contract out the work to some other company? Who is responsible for properly overseeing/managing this? *Here is how it works. If we get approval to establish funding for the cleanup of our beloved used-to-be-beautiful Lake Avalon, first there will*

be a public hearing before the Orange County Board of Commissioners for final approval. We will then set up a committee of lakefront owners (there will be someone from Orange County, too – hopefully Sergio Duarte, our scientist!), and this committee will be in charge of solicitation of bids from contractors, decisions regarding methods for cleanup, and responsibility for all funds collected and spent. Sergio has obtained bids from some contractors on his own, and those bids are what we based the annual fee on.

- 5) What weeds will be removed? *The troublesome weeds we have are torpedo grass and water lilies in all lobes of the lake; and primrose willows and cattails in the northeastern lobe. Torpedo grass is by far the biggest villain we have taking over the lake. It and water lilies will be the first attacked. (Although because water lilies are native, we are not allowed to remove them all.) You may have noticed on the ballot that hydrilla is excluded unless it gets out of hand and we have enough funds to pay for its removal. Hydrilla treatment is very expensive.*
- 6) What is the method of control? – (i.e. sterilized Triploid grass carp, chemicals, mechanical removal, etc.) *We learned all about the different methods of control via Sergio Duarte, and he presented this information at the annual AHPOA meeting last July. Rodeo or other chemicals would not be strong enough to get rid of the torpedo grass and water lilies at this stage of infestation. Mechanical removal will be needed to “recover” the lake, and then we can look at other methods for “maintenance”.*
- 7) How long will it take? *Do you mean how long will it take until our lake is as pristine as it used to be? The estimate is that it will take \$60,000 or more of mechanical harvesting to get our lake totally back to beautiful (and to raise your property values). If someone wants to donate \$60,000, it could be done within months. But since we didn’t want to overburden the lakefront owners in this economy with an enormous fee, we decided to aim for \$20,000 each year (~\$325 per year per lakefront parcel), and spread the work out over 3-4 years.*
- 8) How often will weeds be removed? *As you can tell from the above answer, each year they will do as much cleanup as they can within the \$20,000 that will be in the account. Once the lake has been thoroughly cleaned, it is estimated that there will be needed yearly maintenance – but that cost will be much less, and we anticipate being able to decrease the annual fee at that point to reflect the lower cost of maintenance.*
- 9) How long before we can expect the weeds to be removed directly adjacent to our property? *The committee will make the final decision of what areas will be mechanically harvested first. Generally, though, it is thought that we should start in the areas with the most lakefront owners (as they are the most affected by the invasive plants), and leave the undeveloped areas for later in the process. Please understand that the removal of plants may not go all the way to your shoreline. Sergio has*

emphasized that the cleanup needs to benefit the LAKE. Don't quote me on this, but I think I heard that the definition of lake will be ≤ 90 feet above sea level.

10) Lake Avalon is the 7th cleanest lake and one of the best fishing lakes in Orange County – What monitoring will be performed to ensure water quality or fishing quality isn't compromised during the weed removal process? *Lake Avalon IS awesome, isn't it? I love being out there on my kayak. There will be three methods of monitoring the water quality and fishing quality. One is through our scientist, Sergio Duarte. He will be personally going out on the lake on a regular basis and taking samples of the water and plants, testing them, and informing our cleanup committee. Another way is through the ongoing monitoring of our lake by our lakefront owners John and Nancy Deam. For years now, they have been taking monthly water samples and measuring water clarity for the State of Florida, and keeping graphs of the results. The Deams will be sure to let us know if there are any changes. And the third way would be through reports from you and other lakefront owners, letting us know of any questions, problems, or concerns. Do keep us updated!*

11) Transporting weeds from one lake to another occurs via animals, birds, and boats/boat trailers. The point I'm making is there are trespassers coming through the old orange groves along Marsh Rd. (now designated as City of Winter Garden) via paths to the lake – No trespassing signs are posted but are being ignored – trespassing boats/boat trailers are introducing weeds from other lakes. What is being done to stop this? *You raise an excellent point, and I won't pretend to know the answer to this right now. But I can raise it at our next Board meeting, which is next week and will be attended by our County Commissioner Scott Boyd, who spent a lot of time on our lake while growing up. Let's see what we can come up with. Any and all suggestions (other than loaded rifles!) are welcome. Email ahpoa4@yahoo.com !*

Thanks for listening.

- Jane Ferguson