

L. Apopka Woes Not Answered

By DON RIDER
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WINTER GARDEN — State Board of Health officials have problems instead of answers on the question of why fish die in Lake Apopka.

K. K. Hufstutler, SBH director of water pollution control, this morning told a public meeting here that his and other state agencies don't have the solution to the pollution of the big lake in West Orange County.

Studies since the mysterious kill of millions of shad last May and June show the lake is not chemically polluted, Hufstutler said. He said he still holds the theory advanced at the time of the fish kill that an algae explosion was responsible.

"The trouble is organic, but how to cure it, I don't know," Hufstutler said.

Fastest way, he said, would be to drain the 30,000-acre lake and refill it. Another idea advanced from the audience of 46 was to reintroduce hyacinths into the lake.

The man with this idea blamed hyacinth and rough fish eradication programs for the lake's present condition.

Hufstutler said that hyacinths would reduce the algae in the lake but only if the hyacinths themselves were mechanically removed from the lake.

If the lake could be drained, Hufstutler explained, the sun would oxidize the muck and form a solid surface on which grasses could be planted before refilling it. It would also flush out all the nutrients suspended in the lake at

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present, producing too much algae.

At the time they killed the hyacinths it seemed like the thing to do, and immediate effects were good, he said, but now it is being discovered that new problems were created.

Hufstutler's theory is that the lake is its own worst enemy — that it is a dying lake almost filled with muck. He called it a "crying shame" that the million and a half pounds of rough shad killed last spring were not removed from the lake.

He said that their decaying bodies put back into the lake a half-million pounds of nutrients and a hundred thousand pounds of oils, all of which added to the reproduction of algae.

Ed Zagar, State Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission biologist, said that the algae suspended in the water keep the sunlight off the bottom and thereby prevents the growth of grasses that would help keep the water in balance.

He also said that the bottom has three inches to six feet of a moving sludge that shifts with the wind and below this a muck bottom maybe 30 feet deep. It is impossible, he said, to grow bottom vegetation under these conditions.

Stressing his belief that the pollution of the lake is negligible, Hufstutler promised to eat any fish taken from Apopka. He suggested that in order to restore the confidence of the public in the cleanliness of the lake that fish camp operators hold a fish fry on the shore.

Bob Sherman, spokesman for the camp operators, said they would like to oblige except that fishing had been so poor lately they can't fry enough fish for a fish fry.

Hufstutler's division of the SBH in co-operation with a new water pollution department set up by Orange County will intensify their efforts to police the introduction of

wastes from agriculture, industry and municipalities into the lake.

The SBH official said they were receiving good co-operation from all those who had interests around the lake.

To those who blame the muckland farmers in the Zellwood area Hufstutler said that the SBH has ordered spraying over the lake to cease under threat of arrest and loss of pilot's license for violation.

C. W. Sheffield, director of the new county pollution control, added that the Beauclair Canal is considered part of Lake Apopka and comes under the SBH prohibition on spraying.

Hufstutler concluded that they needed to bring in a lot more experts before seriously considering draining the lake or reintroducing hyacinths or any of the other radical ideas that were discussed.

The SBH called this morning's meeting to report on progress toward solving the problem of the lake's deterioration.