



March 8, 2024

The Honorable Daniel Webster
U.S. House of Representatives
2184 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

City of Winter Garden

P: 407.656.4111

300 West Plant Street
Winter Garden, FL
34787
wintergarden-fl.gov

Re: Community Project Funding request for the Lake Apopka Shoreline Restoration Project

Dear Congressman Webster:

The City of Winter Garden would like to submit a Community Project Funding request for the Lake Apopka Shoreline Restoration Project for \$4M and certifies that it intends to meet all program requirements.

Stakeholders

Project stakeholders include:

- City of Winter Garden (submitter) – The City will manage the award and benefits from improved water quality, submerged aquatic vegetation, boat navigation, and enhanced ecotourism opportunities.
- St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) – This project supports its long-term plan to remove legacy nutrients from the lake and meet TMDL requirements.
- Friends of Lake Apopka (FOLA) – This NGO represents community residents and their desire for improved water quality and recreational use of the lake.

Project Description

Problem

Once lined with dozens of fish camps, Lake Apopka was formerly recognized as the bass fishing capital of the Eastern U.S. However, chronic nutrient overloading from agriculture runoff has led to degradation in water quality, toxic algal blooms, muck buildup, die offs of healthy, native submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), and the proliferation of Hydrilla, one of the fastest growing and most invasive species of nuisance plants that can clog canals and cause flooding in surrounding communities.

Much of the bottom of Lake Apopka is covered by a consolidated muck layer which is mostly decayed plant matter. Above the consolidated muck layer is an unconsolidated flocculant layer made up mostly of dead algae. These muck and flocculant layers, contribute to nutrient overloading, inhibit recovery efforts for SAV in the lake, and are a nuisance to boaters.

Native SAV is critical to the health of this ecosystem as it cycles out excess nutrients that can cause algal blooms, cleans and oxygenates the water column, stabilizes sediments to prevent flooding and sediment resuspension, helps to outcompete nuisance vegetation which must be sprayed with costly herbicides, and creates vital habitat for fish and other wildlife.

The muck layer on the bottom of the lake creates shoreline water depths too shallow for boaters to navigate without disturbing the muck layer. Suspended muck sediments cause two undesirable consequences: the presence of malodorous and aesthetically displeasing black plumes of muck, and damage to boat motor cooling systems from muck entrained in outboard engines.

Solution

To address the issue, in 2023, The City of Winter Garden and SJRWMD commissioned an engineering study to design and permit channel dredging and near shore habitat dredging and disposal of 60 acres of muck in the vicinity of the lake's Newton Park located at 31 W Garden Ave, Winter Garden, FL 34787. The park is near the rejuvenated historic downtown district that attracts locals, tourists, and West Orange Trail riders with its small-town atmosphere and trendy shops and restaurants.

The proposed dredging will provide water quality benefits to Lake Apopka by removing unconsolidated floc easily resuspended by wave energy. Dredging the channel also provides a benefit by removing sediment for improved boat navigation.

While the SJRWMD has made great strides in addressing the lake's issues, this plan is intended to support the District's long-term goal to fully restore the lake.

Funding and Phases

This is a multi-phase project aimed at dredging 60 acres (273,000 cubic yards) of organic muck and unconsolidated flocculant matter from the Newton Park area of Lake Apopka. Funding requested is \$4M to mobilize and dredge Phase 1 of this 5-Phase project. Future phases will focus on continuation of dredging as funding becomes available. The City will seek additional funding through federal, state, and county water quality improvement grants, state legislative funding, and NGO contributions. The City of Winter Garden and St. Johns River Water Management District have provided \$300,000 to design and permit the project in 2023.

Good Use of Taxpayer Dollars

This project is a good use of taxpayer dollars because it will:

- Remove a deep layer of organic muck and legacy nutrients that contribute to algal blooms and poor water quality
- Reduce sediment resuspension. Wind driven waves and boater disturbance frequently resuspend the muck layer.
- Prepare the sediment for expansion of native submerged aquatic vegetation which will help to clean and oxygenate the water column, stabilize the sediment, and restore habitat for fish and other wildlife
- Remove invasive vegetation, specifically Hydrilla, which spreads quickly and can pose flood control issues
- Reduce the need for costly spraying of herbicides to control Hydrilla

- Enhance boat access to the lake. Shoreline water depths are now too shallow for boaters to navigate without disturbing the muck layer.
- Enhance ecotourism, fishing opportunities, and surrounding property values

Budget Breakdown

If awarded, the \$4M would be used to administer and construct phase one of the project. Funds would be used to administer the award, hire a qualified contractor, secure a staging/dewatering site, mobilize the dredging operation, install erosion controls, dredge approximately 30,000 cubic yards of muck from the bottom of the lake, and dispose of the material. Funding would allow for all labor, materials, equipment, bonds, and insurance. Future phases would seek to dredge the balance.

Plans/Maps

The project is currently in design and permitting through engineers WSP. The final design plan can be made available upon completion. Below is a map of the intended dredge and disposal areas.

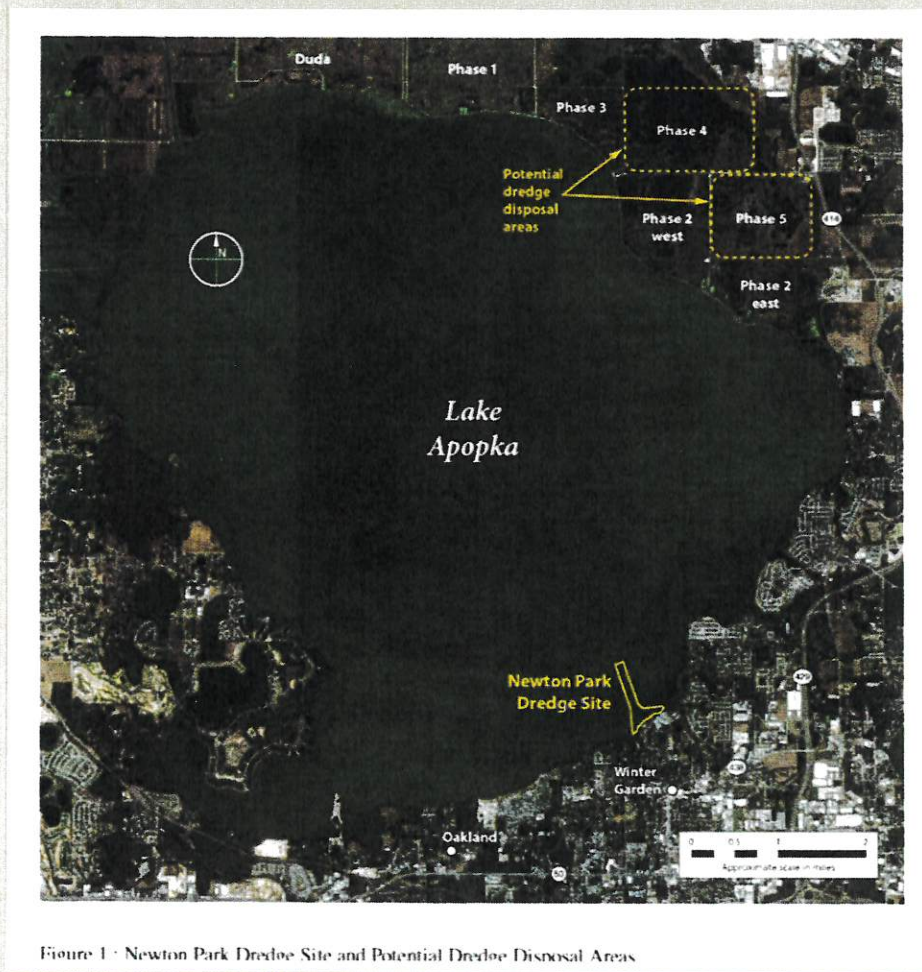
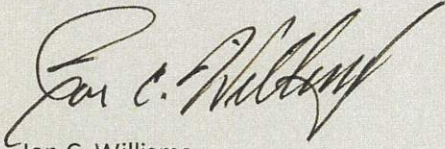


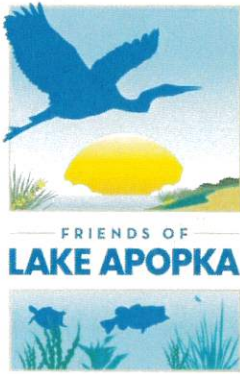
Figure 1 - Newton Park Dredge Site and Potential Dredge Disposal Areas

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our community and our nation. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon C. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

Jon C. Williams
City Manager
City of Winter Garden
300 W Plant Street, Winter Garden, FL 34787
407-656-4111 ext. 2267 | jwilliams@cwgd.com



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Re: Community Project Funding request for the Lake Apopka Shoreline Restoration Project

Dear Congressman Webster:

Founded in 1991 by local biologist Jim Thomas, the Friends of Lake Apopka (FOLA) is a citizen advocacy group that actively advocates for the continued restoration of Florida's 4th largest lake. As the headwaters of the Ocklawaha River Basin, Lake Apopka is a crucial water resource for the State of Florida.

FOLA fully supports the City of Winter Garden in their pursuit of improving water quality by dredging the shoreline near Newton Park, a critical access point to the lake.

The \$4M project will also improve submerged aquatic vegetation, boat navigation, and enhance ecotourism revenues.

Thank you for your consideration of this project and for your effective representation of our region in Washington. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

JP Dunn Jr

Joe Dunn
Executive Director
Friends of Lake Apopka

joe.dunn@fola.org
(352) 433-6975