

What's Going on with Our Lakes (Summer 2024)??

It is August 2024, and our lakes have gone through drought, then substantial rainfall and runoff from 'Debby' and other storms. Currently, water levels are back to normal with no substantial fish kills or algal blooms to date, and no damaging flooding experienced in Heritage Oaks. The picture to the right shows how our lake levels rose and fell within a 48-hr period following 'Debby'. The water level rose 8 to 10 ft beyond the bank then receded quickly because our outflow discharges were free and clear of debris.

While we are back to normal water level, some of our lakes are struggling as we go through the heat of the summer and our prime growing season. We have experienced an explosive growth of grasses (called Torpedo Grass) and weeds (called Alligator Weed) extending out from the shore into the lakes that have posed a

challenge to manage some of our lakes. Retrieval of golf balls in the Driving Range lake has been hindered from this vegetative growth. Our Pond Management Firm (Solitude) has had to use more herbicide in those lakes with extensive growth of the invasive plants. This is particularly noticeable in the lakes where we have Spatterdock (lilies with yellow flowers along the shoreline). While Spatterdock has not been planted in our Healthy Lakes Initiative, it is considered by the County to be a beneficial plant. However, Spatterdock has not been effective in assimilating nutrients from runoff and has become intertwined with Torpedo Grass and Alligator Weed. Solitude has had to do broadcast spraying as a temporary measure which is also killing our beneficial plants. Although our beneficial plants will grow back, the aesthetics of dying plants will be with us a while longer.

The good news is that those lakes where we have applied the Healthy Lakes Initiative, for example, the lakes around the 14th fairway, 11th fairway, and the 4th and 5th fairways, have had less problems than other lakes. Recognizing that residents prefer clear water in our lakes, we have only two ways to manage to get that water clear of the algae that makes the water turbid: (1) we use a substantial amount of herbicide (to kill the algal cells) and dye (to prevent photosynthesis of remaining cells), or (2) continue with our Healthy Lakes Initiative to naturally assimilate the nutrients that contribute to vegetative growth. The second approach is the means to acquire ecologically sustainable stormwater ponds and a reduction in the need for extensive herbicide use.

Lake Water Levels from Tropical Storm I as it passed by Sarasota on Aug 4, 2024

