

Keep grass clippings out of our lakes to keep them healthy and clean  
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Now that the cold winter months are over, spring has arrived and summer is on the horizon. Although the warmer weather is certainly a welcome change, grass is growing much faster and needs to be mowed more often. In addition to the change in our weather, the water in the lakes is also getting warmer. The combination of the increased mowing and the warm water in the lakes may result in some undesirable conditions.

Placing grass clippings and yard waste in the lakes may cause major imbalances to the water's makeup. These clippings are organic waste, and acting as a fertilizer will encourage excessive plant and algae growth. In addition to yard waste, storm water runoff along with commercial and residential fertilizer use can cause lakes to be out of balance.

Whether they are natural or man-made, lakes have a natural life cycle. They need a balance if they are to stay healthy. Increased nutrient levels such as fertilizer or organic waste will put a lake out of balance and decrease its natural ability to stay clean and healthy. Since every lake is unique and has its own characteristics, it is important to understand what keeps the lake healthy. Some of the factors that impact the lake's condition are oxygen, nutrients and temperature.

Oxygen supports the life in the ecosystem of the lake. It aids in breaking down organic matter and undesirable bacteria. Nutrients are an essential part of a plant's growth. In water however, too many nutrients cause algae and aquatic weeds to grow out of control. Once this happens, oxygen is depleted, fish die and the lake becomes out of balance. Temperature of water is also a variable. The surface temperature will usually be warmer than the deeper layers of the lake. These variations cause differences in density, which keeps the warm water on the top from mixing with the cooler water on the bottom. When an algae bloom occurs, it will grow in the warmer surface water.

Fortunately there are many things that citizens can do to combat these nutrient issues. We can all take steps to save our lakes and other bodies of water in our County.

- DON'T dump grass clippings and yard waste into the lakes or other bodies of water. These act as fertilizers and encourage algae and plant growth.
- DON'T litter. Trash on the ground is washed or blown into lakes, which harm the fish and wildlife that live there.
- DO fertilize and spray carefully. Don't overuse chemicals and follow directions carefully. Do not spray on the driveways because these excess chemicals will be washed into the storm drains, which lead directly to the lake.
- DO use Florida Friendly landscaping. By using plants that are native or adapted to Florida's environment, the need for pesticides and herbicides is reduced, which reduces the amount that goes into the water bodies. Maintain lakefronts with vegetation which helps to filter water draining into the lake and provides fish and wildlife habitat.
- DON'T dump ANYTHING down a storm drain. Almost everything that finds its way to the ground will end up in a storm drain or in the water.

- DO maintain your septic tank. The tank itself should be pumped every 3 to 5 years to remove settled solids.
- DO be a responsible boater. Always bring a litter container on your boat. Make sure to follow the signs regarding idle speeds. If a boat is operated faster than the posted speeds close to shore, the waves created will erode aquatic vegetation and disturb wildlife. Make sure to remove any and all aquatic weeds from your boat before you leave the area. It is easy to transport exotic plants from one lake to another just by carrying a hitchhiker!
- DO conserve water. All water resources are connected – by overusing water, groundwater will be depleted, which in the long run, can lower lake levels.

These steps are easy to follow and will help keep our beautiful lakes healthy and clean. For more information on our lakes and how to maintain them, give us a call at (863) 402-6545 or visit our website at [www.highlandsswcd.org](http://www.highlandsswcd.org).