January 2022, Save Lake Weir Association

Background

Marion County staff secured a grant from Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to perform a Countywide septic to sewer feasibility study. The study was completed, presented to the county commissioners and FDEP. The results of the study are available online here - https://environmental.marionfl.org/utilities/wastewater-feasibility-study . Save Lake Weir has been very interested and actively participated in the study, which was demonstrated by the survey results. Unfortunately, funding is limited and the Lake Weir area is not a part of a septic to sewer conversion plan anytime in the near future. Rather than sit idle and allow further deterioration of our lake, Save Lake Weir, in coordination with Marion County staff, would like to promote a plan to begin a process to convert the surrounding area septic tanks to a county maintained sewer system. We know this will raise many questions and the following information is intended to address the why, where, how and when of the initiative.

Why?

Lake Weir has the unfortunate distinction of having been placed on the Verified List of impaired waters as defined by The State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection. What this means is the Department is mandated to develop a plan to manage the total maximum daily loads of nutrients that flow into our lake. Studies conducted on multiple bodies of water, lakes and springs across Florida has confirmed that a primary contributor to water degradation – high levels of nutrients and phosphates – correlate directly to surrounding area septic tanks. There are well over 2000 septic tanks in the Lake Weir Watershed area (Figure 4.4 below). A project to systematically move current septic users to sewer just makes sense.

Actual Photo, North Shore December 6, 2021 – if we do not initiate this change it will be too late for Lake Weir.

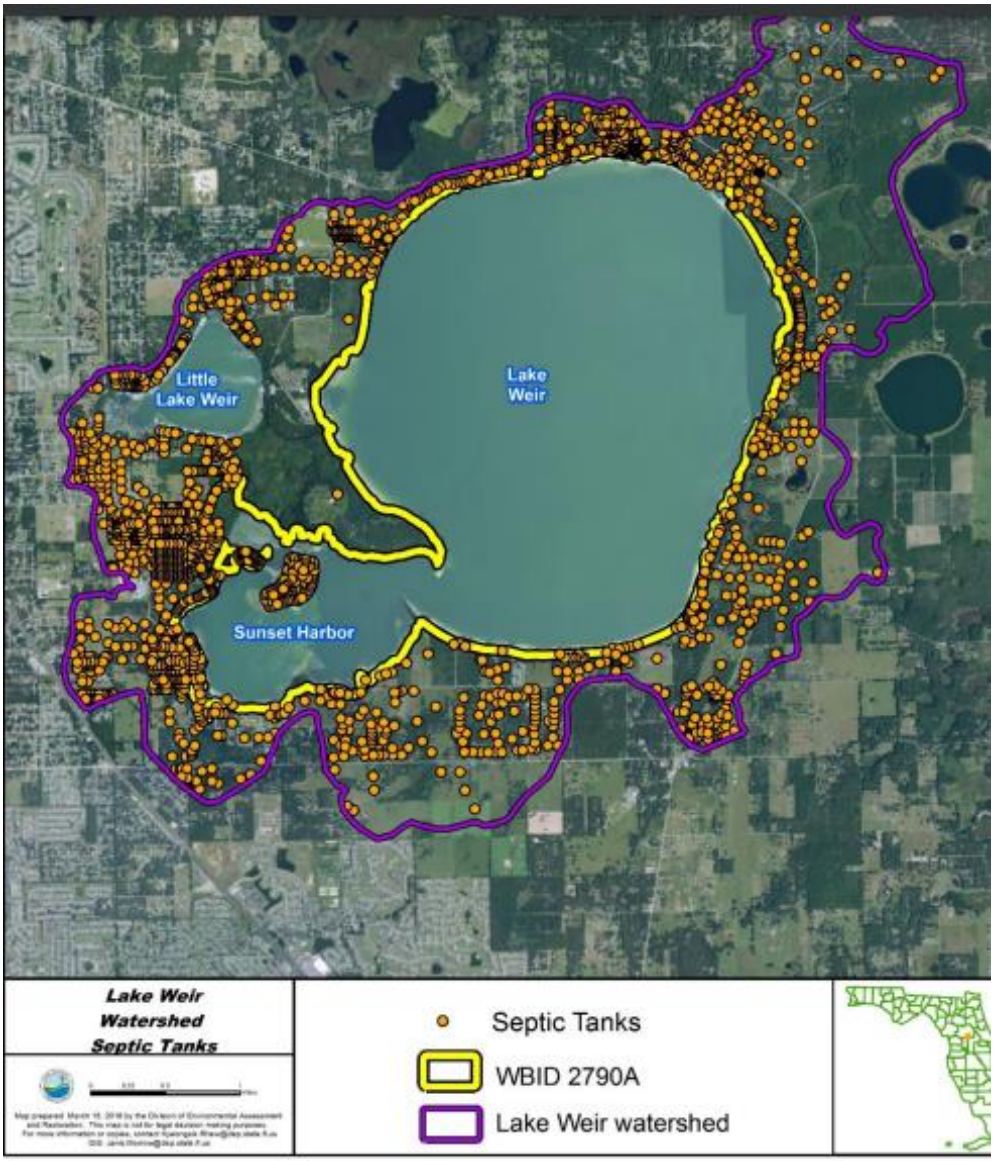
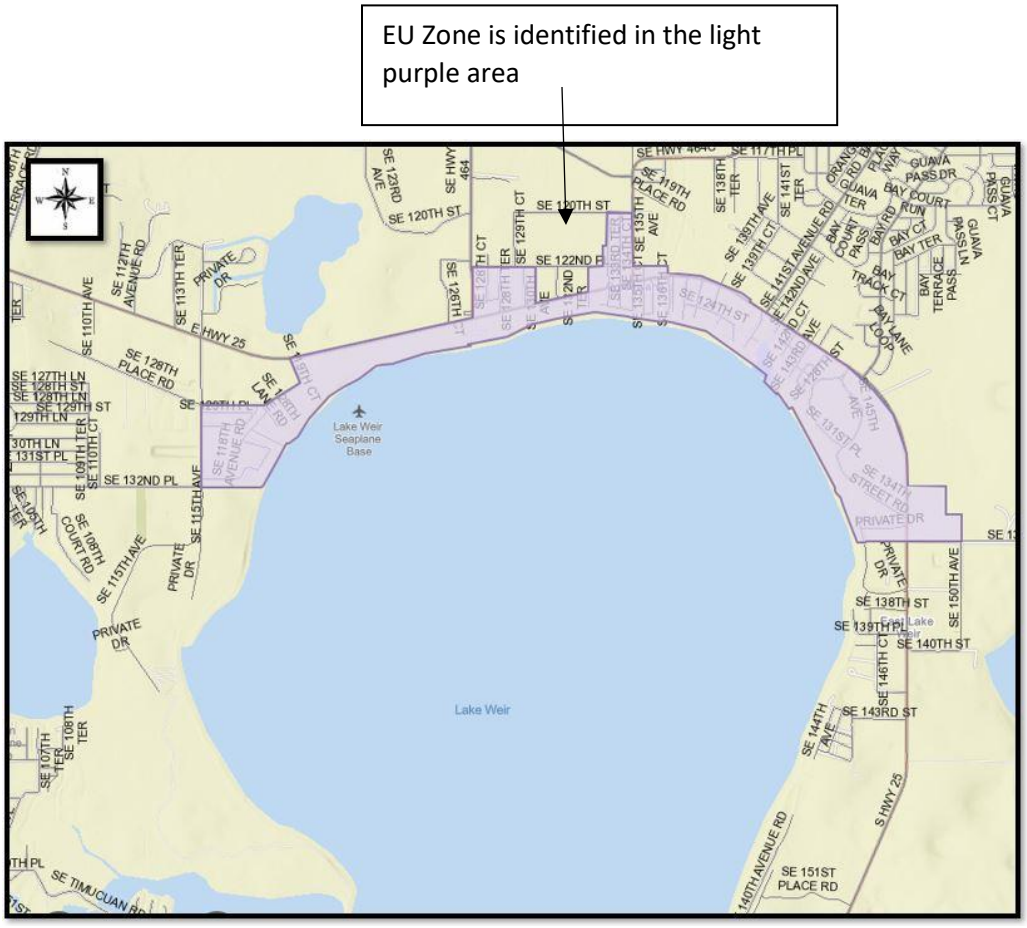


FIGURE 4.4. LOCATION OF SEPTIC TANKS IN THE LAKE WEIR WATERSHED

Where?

An area has been identified as the EU zone (a designation given by the State of Florida) of the spring's basin which is the north side of Lake Weir between Carney Island and Hampton Beach including Ocklawaha. This zone has been selected as the starting place for the Septic to Sewer transition because; a) it is one of the more cost effective areas due to the proximity to existing utilities and b) it is one of the more impactful areas due to the septic tank density. You are receiving this informational brochure today specifically because you are one of 630 property owners in this zone.



How?

The Marion County staff we are working with recommend the establishment of a Municipal Services Benefit Unit (MSBU) to supplement the funding of this project to minimize and manage impact fees associated with the Septic to Sewer transition. An MSBU is a legal financing mechanism wherein a local government establishes a discrete area within which to provide for the delivery and funding of essential services or improvements through the imposition of special assessments (sometimes referred to as non-ad valorem assessments) against real property located therein. In other words, it gives a group of property owners a way to finance improvements that they desire by paying a pro rata share of the cost through a special assessment. The steps in bringing an MSBU project to fruition is time consuming. The process involves petition validation, engineering design, permitting, land acquisition, construction, bond validation, financing and the MSBU "legal process" which is why our county and those keenly interested in improving Lake Weir's water quality are anxious to get started.

The next step in the process will be the circulation of the petition by Save Lake Weir Association (a copy will be available at the Save Lake Weir annual membership meeting at the Lake Weir Yacht Club February 27th). Any further consideration for the project requires a

minimum 10% response to the petition. We urge you to voice your opinion to support a Septic to Sewer transition plan so we are able to proceed to additional due diligence. A supportive response in no way commits you to a plan as future steps will include 1) an official petition containing estimated cost information sent from the Marion County MSTU Department, and 2) a public hearing to assess community support and to review more details about the per property and overall cost estimates for the project.

When?

The when is NOW! The process is extensive and it will be not months but years before our lake will gain benefit from a Septic to Sewer transition. Hopefully we will have positive impact before the lake deteriorates any further. If we are successful in implementing a north shore transition, the rest of the surrounding lake area will have a high probability of success in facilitating the Septic to Sewer transition.

Many counties have facilitated this same Septic to Sewer transition using this process – Port St. Lucie, Brevard, Martin, Hernando – just to name a few. It's common knowledge in Florida that the elimination of septic systems is one way we can proactively protect our waterways.

Thank you for your support. Email comments or questions savelakeweirclub@gmail.com

Save Lake Weir Association (www.savelakeweir.com)

Top 3 reasons to convert from septic to sewer

1. Private vs. County maintenance

On average, a septic tank generally needs to be pumped out every three to five years to prevent backups and overflow. The costs of septic system maintenance must be paid for by the homeowner. With a County sewer system, the maintenance is managed by the county.

2. Health

Septic systems will eventually fail, allowing untreated sewage to leach into surface waters and private groundwater wells, which some people use for drinking water. Raw sewage from a failed septic system can even make its way to the surface of a yard where puddles of sewage can cause an increased health risk for residents if they come into contact with it. Enteric bacteria health risks associated with insufficiently treated wastewater include upset stomach, diarrhea, eye irritation and skin rashes. Malfunctioning septic systems release bacteria, viruses and chemicals toxic into Lake Weir**.**

3. Recreation

The Florida Department of Health in Marion County has, on several occasions, had to issue health alerts for a blue-green algal bloom impacting Lake Weir in Ocklawaha and other areas advising Lake users not to recreate in the water. The alerts warn individuals not to swallow, swim, wade, use personal watercraft, water ski or boat in the affected waters. High levels of nitrogen and phosphorus cause algae growth which discolors the water and causes widespread fish and wildlife mortality. All those that enjoy fishing, swimming, skiing, boating etc. on Lake Weir are negatively impacted.