

Ball Pond Stocks More Carp For Ongoing Weed Control

~ Cynthia Stevens, Ball Pond Advisory Committee Chair

At 5:30 a.m. last Wednesday a trailer truck hauling fish lumbered into the State boat launch on Ball Pond to deliver 75 sterile triploid grass carp raised in Arkansas. Ball Pond Advisory Committee (BPAC) member George Buck had been awake since 3 a.m., waiting for the call from the driver.

The 58° temperature in the truck's oxygenated holding tank matched that in Ball Pond so the frisky young newcomers had a comfortable transition to their new home when Buck, wearing chest waders, released them in about three feet of water. And so went the fourth successful stocking since 1997 when we initiated the program to use carp to control Eurasian Water Milfoil by acting as virtual lawnmowers. About 700 carp in total have been introduced under State permits, using a delicate balancing act that ensures the carp will leave enough plant material in the lake for a healthy ecosystem.

Some summers have been better than others, but most residents would agree the carp did well enough this year that by mid-August, Ball Pond was spectacular. The carp had munched down weeds to an acceptable level for swimmers and boaters and the water was clear.

State of the lake

But don't let this good news mislead you about the state of the lake. The carp can only do so much. In fact, annual water quality studies show that Ball Pond is precariously teetering on the cusp of the final stage in the natural eutrophication process by which lakes can transform into swamps. In this process--accelerated by the impact of man-- a body of water becomes rich in dissolved nutrients (such as phosphates) and often becomes shallow with a seasonal deficiency in dissolved oxygen.

Why should we care? Apart from environmental, aesthetic and recreational sensitivities, the value of our homes directly correlates to the condition of Ball Pond.

Lakes surrounded by dense development age faster than those that are forested because fertilizers, oil products, septic, road sand and other by-products of humanity affect water quality. (Geese feces don't help either.) Watershed residents must help us hold the line by limiting the amount of runoff from properties because runoff carries nutrients into Ball Pond that accelerate weed growth. First, we would ask all watershed residents to avoid using phosphates in dish liquids and fertilizers and additionally request that all lakefront property owners install healthy vegetative buffers at the shoreline. No one should blow nutrient-rich leaves and grass clippings in the streets because they will clog up the storm drains and find their way into the lake. And dog walkers should take along their poopy scoopers when they leave home.

BPAC Priorities

BPAC, now focused on storm water management, is working with the Town and State to figure out how to improve the current drainage system. Geologist Jim Mellett has taken core samples from a delta in the northwest end of Ball Pond that stretches at least 150 feet into the water and creates shallow areas less than six feet deep. Preliminary findings indicate that the delta was formed by road sand and runoff from Route 39. As the lake fills in and becomes shallower, plants are given an opportunity to root and take over; therefore, we will want to excavate this delta as we did one a few years ago in front of properties on Ball Pond Road East.

Another key element of our lake management plan is eradication of the beautiful, but unwelcome, pink water lilies. BPAC had many removed this summer but next year will need to launch a stronger attack. While the carp have eliminated most of the Eurasian Water Milfoil to allow native species like Coontail to thrive, invasive pink water lilies have been gaining on us. At the same time, residents will have to be vigilant to eradicate other invasive species on their properties, i.e. Fragmite, Japanese Knotweed, Japanese Stilt Grass and Purple Loosestrife to name a few.

Work Goes On

And so the work to ensure a healthy lake is never done. We continue to seek and get advice and support from the State Department of Environmental Protection on our range of issues. Meanwhile, we can only hope that the carp will enjoy eating the native species as much as they did the milfoil. We do know the latest batch, all about 12" in length, arrived healthy with their scales intact and quickly began to explore Ball Pond. After escorting the truck driver to Route 84 to continue his fish deliveries further north, BPAC's George Buck returned to the State boat launch within 30 minutes and found the carp already gone from the stocking site.