



GHS Environmental
PO Box 55802
St. Petersburg, FL 33732-5582
727-667-6786

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Mr. Robert Rivera
Public Works Director
New Port Richey Public Works
6132 Pine Hill Road
Port Richey, FL 34668

City of New Port Richey
Muscovy Duck Public Survey Response Summary
Orange Lake and Pond at Azalea Drive

GHS Environmental on behalf of the City of New Port Richey conducted an online survey regarding the effects of the Muscovy duck population at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive. The information regarding how to access the survey and an informational pamphlet on Muscovy Ducks were sent via the postal service requesting those residents to complete the survey. The link to the survey was also published on the City's website. The survey was conducted from October 12 to October 27, 2023. This letter summarizes the responses collected. In total, there were 104 responses. Most of the questions were answered by each participant.

The survey inquired if the participant was a resident living within the city limits, how often the participants visit Orange Lake/Sims Park, and if they live on a water body. Of the 104 participants, 91 participants (or 88%) were residents of New Port Richey. Approximately 60% of the participants indicated that they visit Orange Lake/Sims Park on a weekly basis, 12% visit every other week, 20% visit monthly, and 8% visit less often. Just under half of the participants (44% or 45 participants) reported living on a water body, i.e., retention pond, pond, lake, or canal.

The participants were asked if they enjoy seeing ducks at these locations, if they feed the ducks, and if they can determine which ducks are native and which ducks are a "nuisance" or invasive species. Over half (61%) of participants reported that they enjoy seeing ducks while 24% said they enjoy seeing the ducks, but there are too many. Only 15% reported that they don't enjoy ducks at Orange Lake or the pond on Azalea Drive. Several people (9%) reported they feed the ducks. Signage to not feed the ducks is posted at Orange Lake but not that pond at Azalea Drive. Over half (57%) of the participants were in support of more signage and of the City establishing an ordinance that forbids feeding ducks within the city limits. Most participants (99 people or 96%) know what a "nuisance and exotic" species is, and all but three participants can identify a Muscovy duck. Close to 75% of the participants know that the Muscovy duck is a nuisance and exotic duck species.

The survey continued with questions regarding if participants had noticed a transition or increase in certain duck species in these areas recently. More than half of the participants have noticed an increase in a certain species of ducks over time (58%). This is due to the invasive Muscovy ducks taking over the native ducks' habitats. Participants were asked if they knew that Muscovy ducks reproduce at a faster rate than native species and if they have ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive. Approximately 54% of the participants knew that these ducks reproduce faster, and 38% have seen these ducks act in an aggressive manner.



The next portion of the survey inquired about the damage and “mess” the Muscovy ducks cause at these properties. Participants were asked if they believe the ducks damage the landscape, if the ducks leave a mess on their property, if a smell can be noticed near large groups of the ducks, or if algal problems are noticed in water bodies where the ducks are present. Slightly more than half of the participants believe the ducks do damage the landscape (57%), and that ducks leave a mess or generate a smell on their properties (56%); however, participants didn’t report noting algal problems in water bodies with large duck populations.

The last section of the survey asked if participants know that the Muscovy ducks can transmit diseases to other native duck species, and that they can pollute the water and be harmful to the surrounding environment. Just under half of the participants (42%) were unaware that the Muscovy ducks could transmit diseases to other native species, but they did know that large Muscovy populations could pollute the water and harm the surrounding environment (51%). Two-thirds (67%) of the participants didn’t realize that the water quality of Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive have been declining with the increase of Muscovy ducks as well. Over half of the participants (61%) knew that the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) regulates the control guidelines of the Muscovy ducks; however, 51% do not know what FWC’s definition of control is. After reading the rule (USFWS 50CFR 21.54), participants were asked if they favor the capture and euthanizing of the Muscovy ducks. It was almost an even split with 47% in favor of capturing and euthanizing the ducks and 53% not in favor.

USFWS 50CFR 21.54 states "Anywhere in the contiguous United States except in Hidalgo, Starr, and Zapata Counties in Texas, and in Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. territories and possessions, landowners and Federal, State, Tribal, and local wildlife management agencies, and their tenants, employees, or agents may, without a Federal permit, remove or destroy Muscovy ducks (*Cairina moschata*) (including hybrids of Muscovy ducks), or their nests, or eggs at any time when found. Any authorized person may temporarily possess, transport, and dispose of Muscovy ducks taken under this order." This rule shows how serious the invasiveness has become, in that any landowner may remove or destroy Muscovy ducks with no permits needed.

According to the results of the public survey, local residents agree that the Muscovy duck population existing at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive are too large for those areas to maintain a healthy ecosystem, and that the large Muscovy duck population existing at Orange Lake and the pond on Azalea Drive has become a problem. The ducks generate large amounts of waste in the form of urine and feces, causing foul odors and large messes that must be regularly cleaned from sidewalks, driveways, boardwalks, and grassy areas.

Muscovy ducks interbreed with native duck species as seen at Orange Lake with hybrid duck species. Muscovy ducks are known to transmit diseases to native species. Muscovy ducks are considered invasive in that feral populations quickly dominate the local habitat and can reduce the native bird population within a few breeding seasons. This appears to have occurred already at the pond on Orange Lake as the Muscovy duck population between surveys tripled where the native duck species only doubled. During breeding season, male Muscovy ducks can act in an aggressive manner as part of the courtship ritual, and female Muscovy ducks become aggressive to protect their brood. This aggressive behavior by Muscovy ducks has been documented to cause injury to small children.

Based on the division of public opinion on how to address the overpopulation of Muscovy ducks, GHS recommends to begin regular egg collection and removal in an effort to reduce the



population over time. At a later date, the Muscovy duck populations should be reassessed along with water quality. Another public survey should be completed to determine if the public opinion has changed over time.

If these all of these efforts fail to reduce the Muscovy duck population over time, GHS recommends full capture and euthanization of the Muscovy duck population at both locations. Regular thinning of the Muscovy duck populations conducted once per year at a minimum will decrease competition for food and habitat for the native bird populations, improve the water quality within both water bodies, and reduce fecal remains, foul odors, and additional maintenance of the public areas by the City.



Survey Question	Total	Yes	No	Weekly	Every other week	Monthly	Less often	A	B
Are you a resident within the City limits of New Port Richey?	103	91	88%	12	12%				
Do you live on a water body like a retention pond, pond, lake, or canal?	102	45	44%	57	56%				
How often do you visit Orange Lake/Sims Park in a year?	103			62	12	21	8		
Do you enjoy seeing ducks when you're at a pond, lake, or canal?	103	63	61%	15	15%			25	0
Do you feed the ducks?	103	9	9%	94	91%				
Would you support with the City establishing an ordinance that forbids feeding ducks within the city limits and posting signage?	103	59	57%	44	43%				
Do you know what a "nuisance and exotic" species is?	103	99	96%	4	4%				
Can you identify a Muscovy duck?	103	100	97%	3	3%				
Do you know that the Muscovy duck is a nuisance and exotic species?	102	73	72%	29	28%				
Have you noticed an increase in a certain species of ducks over time?	103	60	58%	43	42%				
Do you know that Muscovy ducks reproduce at a faster rate than native duck species?	103	56	54%	47	46%				
Do you know that the Muscovy ducks transmit disease to other native species?	103	60	58%	43	42%				
Have you ever seen the Muscovy ducks be aggressive?	103	39	38%	64	62%				
Are you aware that the ducks damage the landscape?	102	58	57%	44	43%				
Do the ducks leave a mess or generate a smell on your property or on public property?	103	58	56%	45	44%				
Have you noticed higher algal/green film cover in the mentioned water bodies where large duck populations are present?	103	39	38%	64	62%				
Do you know that large populations of Muscovy ducks pollute the water and are harmful to the surrounding environment?	103	53	51%	50	49%				
Do you know that the water quality of Orange Lake and the pond at Azalea Drive have been declining since the duck population have increased?	103	34	33%	69	67%				
Do you know that the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) regulates the control guidelines of the Muscovy ducks?	103	63	61%	40	39%				
Do you know what the FWC's definition of control is?	103	49	48%	54	52%				
USFWS 50CFR 21.54 States "Anywhere in the contiguous United States except in Hidalgo, Starr, and Zapata Counties in Texas, and in Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. territories and possessions, landowners and Federal, State, Tribal, and local wildlife management agencies, and their tenants, employees, or agents may, without a Federal permit, remove or destroy Muscovy ducks (<i>Cairina moschata</i>) (including hybrids of Muscovy ducks), or their nests, or eggs at any time when found. Any authorized person may temporarily possess, transport, and dispose of Muscovy ducks taken under this order."	104	49	47%	55	53%				
Do you favor the capture and euthanizing of the Muscovy ducks by a contractor hired by the City?									

A-It's nice to see some, but there are too many.

B-I don't see ducks regularly.