

Editorial: Political science

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For years scientists with the University of Florida's Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences have been advising homeowners to go easy on the use of lawn fertilizers and pesticides lest they contribute to the pollution of local water bodies.

But when cities and counties around the state began enacting ordinances to regulate and minimize lawn chemical use — often citing IFAS research to justify their action — they encountered surprising resistance.

From IFAS itself.

The institute has produced a publication titled "Urban Water Quality and Fertilizer Ordinances: Avoiding Unintended Consequences: A Review of the Scientific Literature."

That publication has been seized upon by opponents as evidence that local fertilizer ordinances are neither needed nor helpful.

This seeming contradiction prompted the Sierra Club to ask for clarification about the science behind "Unintended Consequences." Just who reviewed and approved the "Scientific Literature." the club wanted to know.

To which the University of Florida replied "none of your business," or words to that effect.

More precisely, UF has proclaimed that much of the information the Sierra Club wants is exempt from the state's public records law. Moreover, UF has indicated it would charge an astounding \$24,000 to produce the records it is willing to share with The Sierra Club.



File photo



This week the Sierra Club filed suit against the university alleging a violation of the public records law.

It's a shame that this matter has to be resolved in court. At heart the Sierra Club wants to know whether "Unintended Consequences" was produced to serve the public interest or the interests of the lawn chemical industry.

We would think the University of Florida would be eager to demonstrate that it is solid science that guides the actions and work of its researchers. By turning this matter over to their lawyers, UF only feeds the suspicion that "Unintended Consequences" is less about ecological science than about political science.