



## The Birmingham News

### **Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford said mistakes were made in city draining of a pond that killed thousands of the endangered watercress darters**

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Mistakes were made that damaged the habitat of an endangered fish and the city will make amends, Mayor Larry Langford said Wednesday.

Langford toured the habitat of the watercress darter at Roebuck Springs-Hawkins Park and promised U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials that the city would preserve the spring and educate the public about its importance.

Langford proposes building a nature trail around the spring, and adding signs and photos describing the rare fish that lives there. He called the site a hidden asset to Birmingham that should be touted and protected.

"This is my first tour and I've received an exceptional education," Langford said. "This is very serious business."

Thousands of watercress darters were stranded and killed last month after city employees removed a dam at a Roebuck Springs pool filled with the rare fish at the park. The city could face federal penalties for draining wetlands and for killing endangered species.

Fish and Wildlife Service is investigating the killing of the endangered species. Langford said the city would work with officials on the plan to protect the site.

The Army Corps of Engineers also could have investigated the incident, but spokesman Pat Robbins said Wednesday the Corps has decided against taking action.

The darter's only habitat is in five urban springs in Jefferson County.

"We take so many things for granted but we understand the seriousness of the matter and I want to be proactive in this matter," Langford said. "This is not some laughing matter with us. Tell us what we need to do to make sure this never happens again."

Langford's comments represented a softer position from his previous statements. In a press conference Tuesday, the mayor had taken a sterner stance on the fish kill, defending city workers and assailing the idea of any prosecution.

Both city and wildlife officials have worked to raise the level of the spring and added more six inches Wednesday by restoring a destroyed dam.

The fish population can rebound, but the extent of the damage done remains unclear, said Eric Spadgenske, a biologist for Fish and Wildlife in Birmingham.

"There are watercress darters still in this pool," Spadgenske said. "We don't know what the inbreeding problems could be down the road, and it may take several generations to figure out what those implications

are. The question long term is, what kind of hit did the population take?" News staff writer Katherine Bouma contributed to this report. [jbryant@bhamnews.com](mailto:jbryant@bhamnews.com)

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