

February 2006

# The Istokpoga Newswire

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.



## Navigating on Istokpoga—The Responsibility Maze

Who is responsible for what on Istokpoga? That question comes up often in conversations with lakefront residents, concerned citizens and even the agencies that are charged with managing the lake's resources. The Lake Istokpoga Management Committee is wading into the fray, proposing to develop a management plan for the lake. One of the first steps in this process is to find out what the areas of responsibility are for Istokpoga, and then to find out who actually is responsible that area. After that, a decision on how far from the lake shore to carry the question has to be made, but that is a discussion for another day.

First on the responsibility list is aquatic plant management. Few people familiar with the lake for the last two decades would disagree that aquatic weed control has been the major area of contention in the management of Istokpoga's resources. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Aquatic and Invasive Plant management is responsible for approving all aquatic plant management activities, and they are responsible for the large-scale control of *Hydrilla* on Istokpoga. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for habitat management – removal and revegetation – of aquatic vegetation. The County Aquatic Weed Control Program, manage aquatic plants using FDEP approved plans.

Management of lake water levels has been critical to Florida's government and business leaders literally since statehood in 1845. We continue to battle against nature to make it possible to live in a very wet state. Istokpoga is no exception – in fact without control of water levels, both

the residential development around the lake and the agriculture south of the lake would be flooded on a regular basis. As most folks realize, water level control is made possible by the S-68 structure and the C-41A canal southeast of the lake. These were installed in 1962 by the Central and South Florida Flood Control District, part of the larger series of canals and flood control structures built by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The CSF District, now called the South Florida Water Management District, manages the lake levels following the USACE regulation schedule approved by the US Congress.

Water quality is always at the top of my list of important issues, but the FDEP's Bureau of Watersheds, SFWMD and USACE are actually responsible for protecting water quality in Istokpoga. Add in the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services when discussing water quality throughout the Istokpoga watershed. Istokpoga has made the FDEP's "verified list" of water bodies in which water quality is poor and for which nutrient limit rules will be developed. The form that these total maximum daily loads, or TMDLs, will take is to be worked out over the next couple of years. You will be hearing a lot more about TMDLs in the very near future.

Responsibility for the fishery and other aquatic organisms on Istokpoga is well defined. The FFWCC, working with the County, established the Istokpoga Fish Management Area in 1998. FFWCC makes and enforces fishing rules for Istokpoga. The US Fish and Wildlife service also plays a role in protection of fish habitat, but only for that affected by federal projects. They become much more involved with the protection of wading birds and threatened (T) and endangered (E)

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Inside this issue:

<i>Navigating on Istokpoga—the responsibility maze</i>	1-2
<i>Revegetation of "Drawdown" Islands</i>	2
<i>Residential Canal Update March Bass Tournament Alligator Hotline</i>	3
<i>Annual Dues Notice</i>	4
<i>February 16 Meeting Phosphorus Problem</i>	5
<i>Mailing address Website address Associate Member List</i>	6

### Special points of interest:

- *Mark your calendar for our Winter Meeting on February 16<sup>th</sup>*
- *Be sure to visit our Web site*

## Revegetation of Islands to Begin this Spring

species – FDEP, FFWCC and even the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service have responsibilities for protecting what are known T and E species. The Snail Kite, on the federal endangered species list, is the most recent species observed on Istokpoga.

Dredge and fill of wetlands in and around Istokpoga, including maintenance work in navigation channels, is regulated by the FDEP's Bureau of Submerged Lands for individual homeowners, by SFWMD for residential developments, by the NRCS for agricultural projects and by the USACE. Any land owner who builds seawalls, dig channels or fills wetlands without permits from the proper agencies faces a fine and having to pay to have their expensive work undone.

There are several other groups that do work on Istokpoga, but who must go through these other agencies for proper permissions. Highlands County departments responsible for various projects on the lake include the Natural Resources Department, Engineering Department and Aquatic Weed Control program. Ultimately the responsibility for protecting Istokpoga is up to all of us – we are the stewards for this lake and all its resources. If you see things happening that you know should not be, don't be afraid to let the proper authorities know – call our office, the Highlands County Natural Resources Department (402-6545) and we will do what we can to guide you through this maze of bureaucracy.

*Clell Ford is the lakes management specialist for Highlands County. He is located in the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District / County Natural Resources Department office and can be reached at 402-6545, or by e-mail at [cford@bcc.co.highlands.fl.us](mailto:cford@bcc.co.highlands.fl.us). Visit our web site at [www.highlandsswcd.org](http://www.highlandsswcd.org).*

Starting in spring 2006, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) will begin enhancement of eight of the in-lake islands constructed during the 2001 Lake Istokpoga Aquatic Habitat Enhancement Drawdown Project. The objective of this project is to enhance the wildlife functionality of selected islands by planting several species of trees and shrubs to improve the monotypic landscape currently found on the islands. Although there are very few natural tree islands within Lake Istokpoga (Big Island and Bumblebee Island are the most obvious), tree islands in the Everglades are characterized by diverse vegetation communities that serve as important wildlife habitat. One of the major roles tree islands perform is as a "nursery" for reptiles (alligators, snakes, and turtles), amphibians (frogs), birds, and many other species. Several species of wading birds use the woody vegetation present on tree islands for nesting substrate.

Islands to be re-vegetated range in size from 0.41 acre to 2.41 acres. Although the islands selected for this project can be found along several areas of the shoreline, half of the eight islands are located between Spring Lake and Arbuckle Creek. Two islands are between Rutledge Canal and Ivy Drive, one is south of Istokpoga Canal, and one is located just west of Henderson's Fish Camp.

To prepare the islands for revegetation, we treated each island with herbicides labeled for aquatic use (if a herbicide is not labeled for aquatic use, it may not be used around water) to get rid of invasive exotic vegetation in early December 2005. That's why you will see eight islands completely brown and answers the common question I've received as to "What's that helicopter doing around those islands?".

Starting around April, we hope to have the contractor out on the islands

starting to plant trees and shrubs. The vegetation will be planted to take advantage of their tolerance of flooding or tolerance for dry conditions. Specifically, flood tolerance decreases and drought tolerance increases as vegetation species transition from the outer edge of the island to the center, especially as island height increases. Therefore, those species less tolerant of flooding (and more tolerant of dry conditions) will be planted within the head community (the highest and driest portion of the island), while those species more tolerant of flooding will be planted within the tail and fringe community (the low gradient that extends from the head into the surrounding marsh or lake community). "Head community" plants we plan to use include dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), and live oak (*Quercus virginianus*). "Tail community" plants include sweet bay (*Magnolia virginiana*), Carolina willow (*Salix caroliniana*), pond apple (*Annona glabra*), and cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). About 2,000 trees and shrubs will be planted during this project. To maximize survival, plants will be fertilized during planting with a slow-release fertilizer, watered every two days for the first two weeks and placed within welded wire enclosures to protect the newly planted trees and shrubs from wildlife damage.

If you have any questions about this project or would like more information about other projects the FFWCC is doing in or around Lake Istokpoga, please give Beacham (863-462-5190) or Mike (863-699-3740) a call.

*Written by Beacham Furse and Mike McMillian Division of Habitat and Species Conservation Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

## Residential Canal Evaluation Getting Started

The long-awaited evaluation of residential canals on Istokpoga is scheduled to begin the last week in January. This project is funded by the South Florida Water Management District, managed by Highlands County and is being performed by the engineering firm of Chastain-Skillman. The project will evaluate several residential canals on Istokpoga to determine the current canal depth and type of sediment on the bottom of the canal. This information will then be used to determine the total amount and type of material that may have to be removed in order to restore boat access to these canals at low water. The

South Florida Water Management District and the County will prioritize future work in these canals based on the results of this evaluation.

**Don't be surprised if you see survey crews in the residential canal behind your house.**

Field work will begin soon - don't be surprised if you see survey crews in the residential canal behind your house. If you have ques-

tions, or want to know when survey crews for this project might be working in your area, call the County Natural Resources Department at 402-6545.

## March Bass Tournament

One of the biggest Bass tournaments of the year will take place out of the Windy Point Boat Ramp on Sunday, March 12, 2006. This tournament will be ninth Tournament put on by the Chamber of Commerce in Lake Placid. Information or Applications can be obtained by calling the Chamber at 465-4331 Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The Chamber is also a wonderful source of information for everyone, residents and visitors alike. There is information about fishing, things to do in the area, various events, and a whole gallery devoted to the town's murals, including the original artwork and a short video.

## Friends of Istokpoga Fall Meeting

The last General Membership meeting of Friends of Istokpoga was held on November 17, 2005. About 85 members and guests listened to an informative presentation by Beacham Furse, biologist and Aquatic Resource Conservation Manager for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on the changing aquatic habitats around Lake Istokpoga. His slide presentation showed pictures of different areas around the lake and described how each is being maintained to optimize native habitats for fish and aquatic plants, animals and birds. Currently it is unlikely that further weed spraying will be done on these areas. Mechanical harvesters may be used in select areas as needed.

Clell Ford, Highlands County Lakes Manager, also gave a presentation covering the nutrient sampling study currently underway on the lake. The sampling will be completed in February of 2006 and will

provide South Florida Water Management District with more water quality information regarding additional sources of phosphates, nitrates and other pollutants entering the water system of Lake Istokpoga. Clell's data also showed how the hurricanes of the past season can affect water sampling. Most of the documented phosphates seem to be entering through Arbuckle Creek.

A special membership option was available to encourage members to extend their membership to three years. While dues have not changed, a free t-shirt with the Friends of Istokpoga logo was offered to anyone renewing for 3 years or more. The t-shirt offer will continue as long as the supply lasts.

A special thank-you to the volunteers who took charge of the membership table; Gary Albin, Peggy Heskell, Alice Oxford, and Lil Wilburn.

## Alligator HotLine

Recently the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) announced it has launched a new toll-free telephone number to report nuisance alligators. The number is 1-866-FWC-GATOR and is the primary number for alligator complaints, answered 24 hours a day.

Many of us who enjoy Florida's natural environment are aware on the increased sightings of this ancient crocodilian and the growing interactions between alligators and water front property owners. The FWC reported it receives more than 15,000 alligator-related complaints annually and removes more than 5,000 alligators each year when the reptiles become threats to the public or their property.

In an effort to inform people on how to reduce potential conflicts with alligators, FWC has a brochure dealing with "dos and don'ts" that you can download. "Living with Alligators" can be downloaded at [MyFWC.com/alligator](http://MyFWC.com/alligator). Alligators are an important part of Florida's heritage and play a valuable role in the ecology of our wetlands.

# Annual Dues Notice

Your Annual Dues Expired December 31, 2005

We want to remind you that your dues were due by January 1, 2006. If you haven't already renewed your membership, please do so now.

For only \$7.00 for an individual member or \$12.00 per family per year you can help the environment and continue to receive our valuable newsletter about your lake. Bottom Line: **We Need you!**

*While supply lasts, renew your membership for 3 years and we will give you a free t-shirt with the Friends of Istokpoga logo on it. You can pick up your free shirt at our annual meeting.*

Send your payment now, and you will not miss a single issue of the Istokpoga Newswire.

For more information call (863) 219-0082 and leave your phone number.

Make your check payable to: Friends of Istokpoga

Mail your check payable to:

Friends of Istokpoga  
P.O. Box 578  
Lake Placid, FL 33862

Or,

Bring your payment to our annual meeting on February 16, 2006 at the Lorida Community Center, Lorida, Florida.

# Lake Istokpoga Watershed Phosphorus Problem

Lake Istokpoga is Florida's fifth largest natural lake at 27,609 acres. In the past few years South Florida Water Management district has been doing a study of the phosphorus loading that the lake is receiving from Arbuckle creek which is the major source of water supplying Istokpoga. It is estimated that over 90% of the phosphorus that Istokpoga receives comes directly from Arbuckle creek.

At the present time Mr. Paul Ritter of the South Florida Water Management District has 16 monitoring sites in the Arbuckle Creek watershed. Starting at Neibert's fish camp on US. 98 and as far north as lake Ready in Frostproof. He does weekly samplings at all the sites with hopes of locating the source of the phosphorus. He does from time to time move the sampling sites as he tracks the source of phosphorus. Most of the sites are in small tributaries that supply Arbuckle Creek.

The job of identifying all the sources of phosphorus is not going to be an easy task. There are a few locations that you would call large

sources but for the most part the pollution is coming from someone fertilizing there lawn, to a bad septic tank or drainage ditch on County road 64. South Florida Water Management is helping land owners with better land management techniques (called BMP's or Best Management Practices) help

**We need the efforts of all the agencies and citizens to make Istokpoga a shining example of people being good custodians of our lake.**

in cleaning up some of the problems. They have also enlisted the help of the State of Florida's Agriculture department to help farmers with grants for digging retention ponds and providing them with better methods of fertilizing there lands.

At present Lake Istokpoga and its watershed are going in the wrong direction. Reducing phosphorus loading to the lake from Arbuckle Creek watershed is the only

way to meet restoration goal's to Lake Istokpoga and also a reduction of phosphorus exports to Lake Okeechobee. Providing incentives and implementation of better management practices for all residents and property owners of the watershed must be a high priority for future work. Wetland restoration for small tracts of Arbuckle Creek would provide a tremendous lift to Istokpoga watershed. We need the efforts of all the agencies and citizens to make Istokpoga a shining example of people being good custodians of our lake. This will insure that Lake Istokpoga will be a better lake now and for future generations. We must act now or we will have problems like Lake Okeechobee.

*By Bert Galloway, President, Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.*

## Friends Of Istokpoga Winter Meeting and Elections

The Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association Inc. will hold our winter general membership meeting (Our Annual Corporate Meeting) at the Lorida community center on Thursday, February 16, at 7:00 PM. This meeting will be the election of directors for the next year. So please come out and vote.

If you or anyone you know would like to serve on the Friends of Istokpoga board of directors let us know. We can always use new ideas and help running our organization.

We will have two speakers for the evening, Mr. Mike McMillian, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Mr. Carl

Smith, supervisor of the Highlands County Weed control unit. Mr. McMillian will give a presentation on the large Osprey population that we have on our lake. He has been banding and tracking the Ospreys for the past fifteen years.

Mr. Smith will be speaking about the aquatic weed spraying that Highlands County is doing on our lake. He will also be able to answer your questions in regard to the spraying activity and plans for this year.

This meeting will be very informative for you. So we urge you to come out vote, listen to our speakers, and get answers to some of the

questions that you have about Lake Istokpoga. Bring your friends, neighbors and fishing buddies. We need everyone's support in our effort to keep Istokpoga a vibrant and healthy lake.

There will be refreshments served beginning at 6:45 PM. There will also be membership tables where you can pay your 2006 dues so come out and meet with your board of directors, neighbors and others who are interested in our beautiful Lake Istokpoga.

Friends of Istokpoga Lake  
Association, Inc.

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Email: [friends@istokpoga.org](mailto:friends@istokpoga.org)

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Were on the Web —  
[www.istokpoga.org](http://www.istokpoga.org)



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