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The Istokpoga Newswire

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.



2007 Hydrilla Management Plan for Lake Istokpoga

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Background

Lake Istokpoga is a shallow 27,772-acre water body with tributary inputs from Ar-buckle and Josephine Creeks, in the north and northwest sector of the lake respectively. Water flows out through the flood control structure S68 at the southeast side of the lake. The water level in this system is closely regulated between 39.5 feet NGVD at high pool and 37.5 feet at the low pool stage to provide irrigation water during dry winters and springs, and flood protection during the summer tropical storm season. At full pool, Lake Istokpoga has an average depth of 5.5 feet.

Invasive Aquatic Plant Management

Invasive aquatic plant management is a complex discipline that blends predictable sciences of chemistry and hydrology with the highly variable parameters of biology and meteorology for application in venues with boundaries defined by human values and perceptions and economics. Managers must consider the invasiveness of non-native aquatic plants within the water body as well as invasibility of the water body. For example: shallow or nutrient-rich (eutrophic) waters may be much more susceptible to invasion by hydrilla than deep oligotrophic, tannin-stained waters. Managers must also consider the expectations of various management strategies as well as consequences of taking no action or inadequate actions to suppress invasive aquatic plant growth. Rarely can invasive plants be managed for just one function within an ecosystem without generating concerns elsewhere in the ecosystem. Invasive plant management therefore requires: an understanding of all of the uses within the ecosystem, an under-

standing of the management tools and strategies available to control invasive plants, and cooperation among researchers, resource managers and other stakeholders to reach consensus on a management plan that is best suited for the ecosystem.

The Florida Legislature has designated the Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as the lead agency to coordinate aquatic plant management activities in the state's public waterways. Further, state law mandates that invasive aquatic plants be managed at the lowest feasible level within infested waters. The FDEP is responsible for developing and approving invasive aquatic plant management programs that integrate cost-effective management tools and strategies that are as compatible as possible with the uses and functions of each water body. This includes uses within the water body as well as downstream influences of the water body. Management strategies are selected that control invasive plants while conserving or enhancing native vegetation habitat in the system. All management plans are reviewed and commented on by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as well as other regulatory agencies and stakeholder groups prior to implementation. The FDEP contracts with the Highlands County Parks and Recreation Department and private companies where applicable to carry out aquatic plant management services in Lake Istokpoga.

Hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga

Hydrilla, introduced into Florida from Southeast Asia or Africa during the early 1950s, is one of the most invasive and adaptable submersed aquatic plants known. Growth rates of 1-4 inches per day have been reported in Florida enabling this plant to expand from sparse, seemingly innocuous populations in winter and early spring to fill the water column and cover the surface in as little as one growing season. Unlike native submersed plants whose biomass is mostly contained lower in the water column or in

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Special points of interest:

Are You Concerned about the Drought & Istokpoga Water Levels of Lake Istokpoga?

Then you need to attend the May 17th Friends of Istokpoga general meeting in Florida. See page 5 for details.

sparse patches where they seldom cause problems, hydrilla can fill entire water columns and continues to grow when it reaches the surface, forming dense tangled mats that block water movement, boat traffic, light, and oxygen penetration. About 80% of the biomass in a mature stand of hydrilla is in the upper 2 feet of the water column. Thick growths of filamentous algae usually grow on top of hydrilla surface mats increasing light and oxygen problems and making control even more difficult.

There is no better example of hydrilla's ability to overwhelm a large, multiple-use water body in Florida than Lake Istokpoga. A 2005 economic sectors at risk assessment conducted by Florida State University estimated an value of approximately \$40 million to Highlands County with irrigation, flood protection, and recreation listed as the primary uses and functions of this nearly 28,000-acre water body.

Hydrilla was first recorded in Lake Istokpoga during routine DEP plant inventories in the late 1970s. It was contained for several years behind and among cattails along the east side of the lake before expanding into open water. At that time there was much debate that hydrilla could never cover the open water portions of a lake the size of Istokpoga. Hydrilla spread in Lake Istokpoga much as it has in other Florida waterbodies; from runners, fragments, and via small buds that form in leaf axils, break loose, and disperse throughout the lake assisted by wind and water currents. Individual plants form small domes from which additional runners, fragments, and buds are produced and quickly fill in the gaps. Hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga expanded from about 100 acres in 1986 to an estimated 13,000 acres two years later in 1988.

Even with repeated management efforts, hydrilla eventually filled the water column of Lake Istokpoga, reaching a maximum surface-matted coverage of more than 25,000 acres by 1996. This rapid colonization was possible in part due to hydrilla's rapid growth rate and Lake Istokpoga's shallow nutrient-rich water, but also because hydrilla essentially filled an empty niche. Lake Istokpoga historically supported only a few hundred acres of native submersed vegetation, comprised mostly of eelgrass

(*Vallisneria americana*) and pondweed (*Potamogeton illinoensis*). Once established over a broad area, hydrilla eradication is not feasible with current technologies. As soon as the standing crop is controlled, a new one germinates from the hundreds of millions of tubers that it produces in the lake bottom for which there is currently no feasible control method.

Hydrilla Management Options

There are about 20 different control methods that have been researched through the years that have some utility in controlling hydrilla. Several insect species that feed only on hydrilla in their home country were studied and released in Florida, but none have been successful in reducing or stressing the plant. Sterile carp were released in Lake Istokpoga in the early 1990s but could not be contained in this flow-through system. Mechanical harvesters were thoroughly examined in the 1970s and 1980s. Although they provide a role in Florida's hydrilla management program, especially around bridges and other structures, they have proven too slow and too costly for large-scale hydrilla management. From an ecological perspective, harvesters spread hydrilla through fragmentation and remove non-target plants and animals.

Herbicides provide the most cost-effective and selective method for controlling invasive plants in Florida waters. The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) evaluates and authorizes the use of herbicides in water after many years of testing. Herbicides must be further registered by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) before they can be used in the state. During this process, environmental and health agencies review and comment as well. Once approved, the FDEP contracts with universities and other research institutions to determine the most appropriate times, rates, and formulations of herbicides to use that are compatible with expected environmental conditions.

Since its registration by USEPA and FDACS in 1986 for use in Florida waters, fluridone, a systemic herbicide, has been the only viable large-scale hydrilla management tool capable of selectively and economically controlling thousands of contiguous acres of hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga for periods of 18-24 months. This biennial herbicidal fluctuation of the hydrilla population is also the likely driving force behind the outstanding bass fishery in Lake Istokpoga. Hydrilla at low levels can en-

hance fisheries by providing cover and increasing forage sites, but at high levels can stunt sportfish populations and lead to catastrophic fish kills from oxygen reductions. However, repeated fluridone use in Lake Istokpoga and other lakes in Florida has lead to an increasing resistance to this compound in hydrilla to the extent that it may be too expensive to use at higher rates. Additionally, rates high enough to control resistant hydrilla may have considerable nontarget impacts to native aquatic plants.

This potential loss of the most important large-scale management tool prompted researchers and managers to convene a series of three workshops in 2004-2005 to develop research initiatives for new hydrilla control tools and to plan interim strategies to contain hydrilla during this process. Also during this period, a series of hurricanes and strong storms combined with management activities to uproot hydrilla and suppressed its re-growth through dark water generated by increased turbidity, tannin content, and algae blooms associated with wind and increased nutrient input. Summit recommendations include; funding additional research projects to explore new biological controls, screen for additional herbicides, and re-evaluate existing tools and strategies in addition to taking a more assertive approach to keep small hydrilla populations from becoming large-scale infestations. The concern for Lake Istokpoga is that if hydrilla grows beyond 15,000-25,000 acres as it has in the past, that there currently is no way to regain control. This information has been conveyed to Highlands County residents through several stakeholder and County Commission meetings during the past several years.

2007 Hydrilla Management Planning

FDEP has been closely monitoring hydrilla levels in Lake Istokpoga through acoustic sounding conducted by Remetrix, LLC. Remetrix conducted operations during the second week of February 2007 to create maps showing bathymetry, biocoverage and biovolume of the hydrilla. (These Maps can be viewed on the Friends of Istokpoga website. The maps are in color and unable to be printed to the newsletter). Currently, there are about 5,000 acres of hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga located on the southeastern corner of the lake near the S68 structure. The biocoverage map presents coverage on the bottom of the lake with the more intense colors representing more dense

growth, while the biovolume map presents submersed plant matter occupying the water column. The red area on the biovolume map indicates where surface matted hydrilla can be found.

On March 12, 2007 an inter-agency meeting was held to develop a hydrilla management plan. Attendees included representatives from FDEP, FWC, SFWMD, Highlands County Parks and Recreation, and The Soil and Water Conservation District. Attendees agreed upon a plan to treat approximately 1,000 acres of hydrilla that is at or near the surface with Aquathol K herbicide. Aquathol K has been used throughout Florida for more than 40 years for small and intermediate size hydrilla control. Aquathol K was recently re-registered through USEPA's more stringent evaluation process. The Aquathol K liquid formulation will be used at a rate of 2ppm and will be applied by helicopter during early to mid April. Aquathol K is a contact-type herbicide meaning that it acts fairly quickly to control hydrilla with which it comes in contact. It is used routinely in Florida public waters to control hydrilla without impacting important submersed native plants like eelgrass. The early season treatment is scheduled to take advantage of higher oxygen content to buffer plant decomposition, and to have hydrilla under control in the vicinity of the S68 outfall structure at the onset of tropical storm season.

A triangular block treatment has been proposed and is shown on a map included on the Friends of Istokpoga website. The base of the triangle will span from near Trails End fish camp to the S68 structure and the point of the triangle will head towards Big Island. Hydrilla in this area is at or near the surface and presents the greatest likelihood to cause problems later in the spring and summer if not addressed soon. Hydrilla in areas between Big Island and Bumble Bee Island and the southern end of the lake are not scheduled for control at this time. These areas will be closely monitored to develop any future treatment plans that may be required.

After the treatment, further monitoring of the site will be conducted by FDEP and Highlands County. Specific way points using GPS will be located on the treatment site and hydrilla will be examined to verify if treatment goals have been

met. Monitoring will be conducted the day of, one day after, and weekly following the treatment. FDEP will also pull water samples which will be sent to Dr. Mike Netherland, who works with the US Army Corps of Engineers and is stationed at the University of Florida, to conduct further testing. FDEP and Highlands County personnel will also survey the area and map the extent of control that was achieved.

For more information on the management of invasive aquatic plants in Florida please refer to the University of Florida web site at <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu>. Here you will find a library of more than 70,000 articles and information on aquatic plants as well as information on all facets of aquatic plant management in Florida public waters. In addition, University staff and Florida science teachers are collaborating to develop classroom curricula that addresses invasive plants and their management in state waters.

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You may ask, "What does the Ever-

Full Federal Funding Needed to Keep Everglades Restoration on Track

glades restoration project have to do with Lake Istokpoga?" Well, we are the second largest water supply source to Lake Okeechobee and Okeechobee is the source of most of the water to the Everglades. So to fix the problems with the Everglades you must fix the problems in the Okeechobee watershed. The two biggest parts of the Okeechobee watershed being the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and Lake Istokpoga.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) is the part of project that will bring some benefits to Istokpoga if it is fully funded by the Federal government and the State of Florida. There are many projects in the CERP but the one

that calls for the building of a large reservoir to the southeast of Lake Istokpoga and hopefully a smaller one to our north would be a big benefit to Lake Istokpoga. These reservoirs will take some of the burden off of Lake Istokpoga of being the primary water supplier to the Indian Prairie Basin and the Okeechobee Service Area. These Reservoirs will also help with the clean up of the phosphorus that cause the rapid growth of some of our invasive plants.

At the time of the writing of this article April 5, 2007 South Florida Water Management District is asking the Army Corps of Engineers for a deviation from the Lake Istokpoga Regulation Schedule. They would like to drop the Lake about 1.5 ft which would put the lake at 36.5 ft. If this happens, many canals on the lake would not be navigable. This is happening because we are in a drought condition. But, if we get the funding for the CERP we could probably avoid this kind of event in the future. We would have had full reservoirs that could have helped us through this crisis. By the time that you read this article the above scenario may have played out and we hope that it does not. If it does you can understand why we need your help in persuading our representatives to back up there promises with action and fund these projects. This is your lake and watershed we are talking about! Please Help! Call or write your Senators and Congressmen today!

Glades Electric Cooperative Give-Away

For several years, Friends of Istokpoga has had a membership and informational booth at Glades Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting and given away free chances to win a \$100.00 bill. This year slightly over 760 tickets were given out at the Lake Placid Middle School. Individuals who joined or renewed their membership at the booth were able to increase their chances to win. Each individual that renewed got an additional 5 tickets and each family that renewed received an additional 10 tickets. Glades Electric is an Associate Member of Friends of Istokpoga Lakes Association, Inc. and makes a donation of \$100.00 to be used in the give-away. The drawing is held in conjunction with the door prizes given away at the yearly event. This year's lucky winner was Claude Jones of Sebring, FL. Congratulations, Claude!

FOI 2007 Annual Meeting

Friends of Istokpoga held a General Membership Meeting on February 15, 2007 for the purpose of electing a Board of Directors for 2007. In addition the program included Senator Alexander; Missie Barletto from the Okeechobee Service Center, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD); and Clell Ford, Highlands County Lakes Manager. Due to a scheduling conflict Senator Alexander was not in attendance and Patty Harrison and Becky Simson from his office conveyed his apologies.

The slate for the 2007 Board of Directors was presented and President Bert Galloway asked for any additions from the floor. Pat Gaiefsky was nominated from the floor and added to the slate. Not having more additions to the slate it was accepted by proclamation and unanimously accepted by those in attendance. Directors for 2007 are: Bert Galloway, Gary Albin, Ken Stebbins, Ray Gaiefsky, Pat Gaiefsky, Don Linton, and Jeanne Porter. 2007 Officers were determined at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Directors.

Missie Barletto presented a handout that reviewed South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) Service Area and the assistance and programs provided. Highlands County project's SFWMD is involved with include Lake Istokpoga Water Quality Investigations, Water Regulation Schedule Issues, Arbutle Creek Watershed Assessment and Lake Istokpoga Canal Sediment Project. Missie answered questions from the audience regarding water usage, water shortages, and permitted water users.

Clell Ford, Highlands County Lakes Manager gave a power point presentation reviewing the multitude of agencies and organizations with a vested interest or responsibility for the health and condition of Lake Istokpoga. He also discussed the efforts being made to improve the inter-agency communication regarding activities scheduled for Lake Istokpoga whether from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Dept. of Environmental Protection and Invasive Plant Management, or South Florida Water Management District. Clell also referred to some historical data on the fluctuation

of the lake since the structure to regulate the water level was installed. Those in attendance asked question regarding hy-drilla treatment, mapping of the lake, fish counts and canal maintenance. Beacham Furse from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission was also available to answer questions and concerns.

2007 Officers Elected

Directors of the Friends of Istokpoga, elected officers for the 2007 term at their regularly scheduled March Board of Directors meeting at the home of Jeanne Porter. Elected were Bert Galloway as President; Gary Albin as Vice President, and Jeanne Porter as Secretary/Treasurer.

Pat Gaiefsky, will begin working with the data base and become familiar with data entries in preparation for assuming the duties of Secretary/Treasurer 2008.

We Will Miss Don Linton

Don Linton one of Friends of Istokpoga original board members passed away on February 20, 2007. Don was one of the founders of Friends of Istokpoga and had always been one of its board members.

Don was a fifth generation Floridian born and raised in Wewatchka, Florida. He was a true outdoors man all his life and he truly loved living on Lake Istokpoga. Don served in the U.S. Army from 1946 to 1950. In 1953 Don graduated from the Florida State University. It was while attending Florida State that he met his wife Kitty; and was also on its first undefeated football team. After graduation he began a 30 year career in education, teaching science and coaching football. He eventually advanced into school administration. Don retired in 1985 as principal of Cooper City High in Ft. Lauderdale. He then made his home at Eagles Nest, on the south shore of Lake Istokpoga.

Even though Don came to Istokpoga to fish and relax, he truly was not a sit still type of person. He got involved in our local community in a big way. Besides being on The Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. board of directors, he was member of the Water Advisory

Board, Lake Placid Chamber of commerce, Highland County Lakes Association, Rotary Club, Highlands County Retired Educators Association and the Highlands County Education Foundation. Don truly was a busy person and a great asset to our community. Don was also a man of great integrity and compassion he will be soulful missed by all who knew him.

Don is survived by his wife of 53 years, Kitty, daughter Catherine and three sons Don, John, Paul and many grandchildren.

Don we will miss you out there on Istokpoga and the Friends of Istokpoga thanks you for all your help through the years.

Dr. Paul Gray Honored

One of Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. (FOI) members, Dr. Paul Gray, PhD., has been honored with the Defender of the Everglades Award from the Friends of the Everglades. Paul has worked very hard on many of the problems that threaten Lake Istokpoga.

Over the years, he has been a great asset to FOI with his biological knowledge and expertise on environmental problems. He has always been there to assist us with his extensive understanding of the Istokpoga ecological system.

Paul has worked for Audubon Society since 1995, beginning as warden of Audubon's Ordway-Whittell Kissimmee Sanctuary before it was incorporated into the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve Park. He is the sixth Lake Okeechobee Audubon Warden since 1936 and considers it and honor to hold the position. He is also a member of the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee, an advisory committee to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners.

We at Friends of Istokpoga are very proud to have Paul as a member and champion for beautiful Lake Istokpoga. Thanks Paul for all your help and congratulations on your award.

What's Happening on Istokpoga

By Bert Galloway, President

There are many projects and events happening on Istokpoga. At this time I will try to bring you up to date on things that your board of directors is working on and other projects that are being preformed by some of the state and local agencies. Also I will try to give you some insight into events that have happened in the last few months

A: Hydrilla Spraying on South Side of Istokpoga

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Contractor will be spraying approximately 1000 acres of Hydrilla south of Big Island in the middle of April. By the time you receive this newsletter this area should be showing the effects of the spraying. For more info read the article by Erica Van Horn in this newsletter.

B: Arbuckle Creek monitoring of water quality

This is an ongoing project by South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to assess the water quality of the Arbuckle Creek watershed. SFWMD is trying to track down the areas in the watershed that contribute the most phosphorus loading of Arbuckle Creek and subsequently Lake Istokpoga. We will give you more info on this project when we get a copy of the SFWMD next report on this project.

C: Aquatic Plant Management

The Friends of Istokpoga weed management committee led by Ray Gaiefsky has set out to take pictures of weed control by the different agencies on the lake. This will be a regular project by our weed committee and we should have pictures on our web site and at our membership meeting to share with you, in the near future.

D: Aquatic Plant Resistance to Herbicides.

Fluridone also known as Sonar that has been very effective in controlling hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga can no longer be used. This is because the hydrilla on Istokpoga has become resistant to the Sonar treatments. At this time we only have the contact type of herbicides that are sprayed directly on the hydrilla for control. This is the method that is being use by the DEP on the south end of the Lake. None of the new herbicide products that are now being tested seem to fit the bill for hydrilla control on Istokpoga. They either

can't do the job or they are too toxic to other plants or crops in or around Lake Istokpoga. The DEP is still looking for other means to control the hydrilla on Istokpoga but for the present they will use only the contact herbicides. This type of treatment will not knock the hydrilla back all over the lake like the Sonar did. The hope is that they will be able to manage the hydrilla and keep it an acceptable amount on the lake.

E: Canal Maintenance Dredging Evaluation

Phase one of this project by SFWM has been completed (surveying the canals). Phase two has been started by Clell Ford and he is in the process of estimating the cost of dredging all the residential canals. This figure will be submitted to SFWM for funding the actual work of cleaning the canals. We are told that this will take about two years to finish. Phase three of this project will be work on the lake itself. This work will make the residential canals accessible during low water levels. We need this work done properly before the new Lake Regulation Schedule begins.

F: Istokpoga Canal Project US Army Corps of Engineers

This is about an 18 month project to enhance the Istokpoga canal. There are three main features to this project. The one that is most important to Lake Istokpoga is the building of a new control structure (S-67) and demolition of the old one (G-85). This control structure is about a ½ mile east of county road 621. It is old and it is leaking badly. Also this project will build a new marina and boat ramp at US 98 and the Istokpoga canal will be dredged from U.S. 98 to the Kissimmee River. This work is underway and should be completed by May of 2008.

G: Spring Lake Pumping Problem

At present the flooding problems that Spring Lake experienced last summer seem like a distant memory. This is because of the drought situation that we are presently in, but give us one tropical storm this summer and this flooding problem will likely reoccur. The good news at this time is that the Spring Lake Improvement District has been working with Craig A Smith Engineering Firm and they have come up with five proposals to fix the pumping and flooding problem. These five proposals will be submitted to the courts in the next month. Let us hope that the judge agrees that the

proposal will fix the problem for everyone involved and that he lifts the pumping injunction that he has imposed against Spring Lake. This will be good for the residents of Spring Lake and also the health of Lake Istokpoga.

H: S-68 Modification Project US Army Corps of Engineers

Look for work to begin within the next month on the S-68 structure on county road 621 at the south side of Lake Istokpoga. This is an 18 month project and it will add another gate and a diversion canal just east of the present structure. The first part of this project will involve building a temporary road for CR-621 to allow the building of the new structure and digging of the diversion canal. This project is being done to better handle discharges of water from Istokpoga.

I: Wildlife Island Re-vegetation

Five of the wildlife islands on Lake Istokpoga north side have been planted with native shrubs and trees by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC). It is their hope the islands will serve as a good habitat for wildlife and also make them environmentally friendly to the lake. The new plantings have been watered on a regular basis and at this time we are told that they are doing ok. If this test project works out the FFWCC hope to do the rest of the wildlife islands on the Lake.

May 17 FOI Meeting

Concerned about the Drought & Istokpoga Water Levels?

Representatives from the South Florida Water Management District will make a presentation about the drought situation and provide information on the proposed diversion plan of Istokpoga lake water. Come with your questions and concerns about this issue and any others that you have about Lake Istokpoga. Bring your friends and neighbors to this informative meeting.

The Meeting will be held at the Lorida Community Center on Thursday May 17, 2007 at 7:00 PM. There will be refreshments served beginning at 6:45 PM. So come and participate in this very important issue about Lake Istokpoga. Be part of the team looking out for Istokpoga's best interest.

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