# The Istokpoga Newswire

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

## History & Current Status of the Deviation Requests to the Lake Istokpoga Water Regulation Schedule

In the spring of 2007 a request was made from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for a deviation to the Lake Istokpoga Water Regulation Schedule from 37 ft. to 36 ft. The Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. (FOI) informed all parties involved that we were opposed to any change to the water regulation schedule, because of both environmental and economic concerns. FOI also followed up with letters stating our opposition and concerns to USACE and other agencies. In June of 2007 the ACE approved a temporary deviation to Lake Istokpoga's water regulation schedule from 37 ft. to 36.5 ft to provide water to users in the Indian Prairie Region. Because of actual rainfall received in the basin, SFWMD did not have to resort to taking Lake Istokpoga down to 36.5 ft. The actual low level that the lake reached in the summer of 2007 was 37.3 ft. on or about July 4.

Now fast forward to October 17, 2007. The SFWMD on this date again made a request to USACE for a deviation to the Lake Istokpoga Water Regulation Schedule from 37 ft to 35.5 ft. Again the FOI wrote a strong letter of opposition to the USACE with our same concerns and opposition that we had stated in our earlier letters. The FOI also spoke at a special workshop held by the Highlands County Commissioners about this request for a deviation to the Lake Istokpoga water regulation schedule. We again made everyone present at this workshop know that FOI are opposed to deviation because of our environmental and economic concerns. At the writing of this article we have not seen an official response of approval from the USACE on this matter but all indications are that the new deviation request will be approved to allow SFWMD to take Lake Istokpoga down to 36 ft.

Following is but one statement that was taken from USACE's own environmental assessment of Lake Istokpoga, for the deviation request. "Keeping hydrilla under low levels of control is extremely important in Lake Istokpoga. If hydrilla again covers the surface across thousands of contiguous acres, regaining control may be extremely difficult. Hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga is becoming increasingly resistant to Fluridone herbicide: the systemic herbicide that was used for large scale control on this lake. The past two large-scale Fluridone applications in Lake Istokpoga have been terminated because of a half life of only seven days due to enhanced microbial degeneration activity. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was unable to sustain an appropriate level of Fluridone in the water column to control hydrilla." This is but one of the problems that may be encountered if the lake gets too low

You're Board of Directors for the Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association have many concerns about what a deviation of



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# Special points of interest:

The Friends of Istokpoga Annual Meeting will be held on Thursday Feb. 14, at 7:00 PM. This will be a great meeting. Come and join us and bring your neighbors. See page 3 for more information.

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this extent will do to Lake Istokpoga if it is fully carried out. We understand that the drought that we are experiencing is hard on everyone, but we do not believe that a deviation is the approach that should be taken. It is our feeling that we should let nature take its own course in this matter because this short term fix of a deviation will probably cause long term environmental and economical problems to Lake Istokpoga and its people.

Note: We received an email from Catherine Byrd, USACE," The deviation request for Lake Istokpoga was approved on Friday, January 11,2008 for 36.0 ft., NGVD."

## What's Happening on Istokpoga?

By Bert Galloway, President

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

#### A: Hydrilla Spraying on Istokpoga

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had a private contractor out on Lake Istokpoga during December to map out the location of all the hydrilla on the lake. On January 30 the Istokpoga Management Subcommittee on hydrilla will have a meeting to help in the determination of how much and where they will be spraying to control the Hydrilla. After a decision is made the treatment for hydrilla should happen at the end of February or the beginning of March. This will not be a whole lake treatment but it should be in batches of 1000 to 2000 acre that will be separated by several weeks. In the interim, Highlands County will be doing some small spot control as well as cutting trails through the topped out hydrilla. Note it is the intent of DEP to keep the hydrilla confined to the south end of the lake.

## 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. Will get more info on this project when SFWMD releases there yearly assessment on water quality.

#### **C: Aquatic Plant Management**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife **Conservation Commission (FWC)** have been doing some control of both the spatterdock and the cattails on the lake. Both of these plants are native to Lake Istokpoga and are very desirable to the health and well being of the lake. What FWC is doing is more of a maintenance type of operation for both of these plants. In the case of the cattails, they are just trying to open up some areas in and around Big Island for better water flow. They are also trying to get the cut to the west of Big Island back to where you can navigate through it. So don't be alarmed if you see some of this work going on out there.

## D: Hydrilla Resistance to Herbicides.

Fluridone, also known as Sonar, which 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 fluridone treatments. The Department of

Environmental Protection (DEP) has been working with researchers across the nation to develop new hydrilla management tools. A new compound, Penoxsulam, has been registered by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Florida Dept. of Agriculture for largescale control of hydrilla in Florida waters, but it does not have crop tolerance approval from USEPA. Because Lake Istokpoga water is used for crop irrigation the use of Penoxsulam is prohibited until it gets the crop tolerance approval and there is a question that it will. In the interim the state will control the hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga with Aquathol K which can only be applied to smaller sections of the Lake at any given time.

#### E: Canal Maintenance Dredging Evaluation

It seems that we were being a bit to optimistic in our last newsletter about the canal dredging schedule. The process of getting a cost analysis for the scope of work involved is done but the hard part of this project, getting a funding source, is just starting. Clell Ford, the project manager, has placed a request to Senator J. D. Alexander for funding in the new State Budget. Let us hope that this request is approved so that we can have access to Lake Istokpoga during low water. We will keep an eye on the State Budget and advise you when new information is forth coming.

#### F: Istokpoga Canal Project US Army Corps of Engineers

This 18 month project to enhance the Istokpoga canal has had some funding problems but come February 2008 the contractor should be back up to speed on this project, with the funding problems behind the USACE. Following is the scope of work for this project: 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 on Istokpoga Canal. It is old and it is leaking badly. Also, this project will build a new marina and boat ramp at the Istokpoga Canal and US 98; and the Istokpoga canal will be dredged from U.S. 98 to the Kissimmee River. This work is behind schedule and it will probably be the beginning of 2009 before all work is completed.

#### G: Spring Lake Pumping Problem

Spring Lake Improvement District has done a complete rework of there pumping station at the Arbuckle Creek location. It appears that this improvement to the pumping station will alleviate any flooding problems that the pumps may have caused. We also understand that the parties, with issues about the pumps are pleased with these new improvements at the pumping station and its operation. The last hurdle in getting this problem completely resolved will be going back to the courts and getting them to lift the injunction that prevents Spring Lake from running the pumps on a timely fashion. We hope that these improvements will resolve this problem for the good of the Spring Lake residents and also the health of Lake Istokpoga.

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

This project is well under way and on schedule. The dust is still flying in and around 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 temporary road and the coffer dam have been completed and the contractor is presently working on digging the diversion canal and the driving of pilings for the new gate structure to attach to. This project is being done to better handle discharges of water from Istokpoga. Look for this project to be completed by November 2008.

#### I: Wildlife Island Re-vegetation

At this time Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has put this project on the back burner. The project did show some promise in getting the wildlife islands to re-vegetate but there are no plans at present to continue with this project. We will let you know if this changes.

#### J: Royce Unit Improvement

For our members that are not familiar with the Royce Unit it is 2,639 acre piece of property located on the west side of Lake Istokpoga and to the south of Josephine creek. It is part of the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area and it is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). At the present time the FWC is working on restoring a 200 acre fresh water marsh that is adjacent to Lake Istokpoga and a 700 acre cutthroat grass seep. These projects will help water enter Lake Istokpoga as a sheet flow rather than by ditch and they will also reduce the nutriments entering the lake.

### Friends of Istokpoga Annual Meeting

The Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association Inc. will hold our Annual Corporate general membership meeting at the Lorida community center on Thursday, February 14, 2008 at 7:00 PM. This meeting will be the annual election of directors. So please come out and vote.

We will have speakers for the evening from both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District to speak to us about the deviation to the Lake Istokpoga Water Regulation Schedule. They will be giving us their reasons and some insight into the granting of a temporary deviation to water regulation schedule both of these speakers will also take questions from the audience so attend this meeting and get a few questions that have been bothering you answered.

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 questions that you have about Istokpoga.

Bring your friends, neighbors and fishing buddies. We need everyone's support in our effort to keep Lake 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 2008 dues so come out and meet with your board of directors, neighbors and others who are interested in our beautiful Lake Istokpoga.

## Lake Istokpoga - Hydrilla Largemouth Bass Capitol of the World

By Dave Douglas, bass fishing guide, tournament fisherman and officer of SOS - Florida Lakes Inc.

When it comes to the subject of the Lake Istokpoga Fishery, first, one thinks of Florida's best biglargemouth-Bass lake and second, the lakes peculiarities, such as, shallow sheer wind characteristics and Hydrilla areas in varying degrees of growth totaling approximately 20-30% of the lake area.

Lake Istokpoga's characteristics and lake management policies have affected the original Hydrilla strain -- which arrived in the lake over 50 years ago – and caused it to genetically change itself into a "New Strain" of Hydrilla. One could say our lake has "Istokpoga Hydrilla", which is a new and improved strain which resists all chemicals but contact herbicides, or in other words, a "Super Strain."

Now let's look at what the fish (more specifically – Bass) think on this matter. This is guite simple to achieve, all one needs to do is attempt to catch Bass in each area of the lake known to produce -"Fishing Holes." It won't take too long before you'll clearly see that an overwhelming majority of Bass are in those "Fishing Holes" which have Hydrilla along the transitional sections of those holes. One also clearly sees that the very presence of the thick weed enhances the quality of the hole as far as the fish is concerned. Instead of having a limited section of the area in which it feels protected, the weed expands the area of protection. Instead of having a 100' by 30' area, the hole is improved to 100' by 200'. It should be stated that fish don't leave the original structural route even though the existence of Hydrilla enabled the expansion of the area the fish feels safety in.

It is a fact that fish don't inhabit all Hydrilla areas, but instead inhabits the same areas they would normally if there wasn't any Hydrilla present. The only difference with Hydrilla being present is, fish don't have to travel as far to a vegetative area -without Hydrilla, fish use grass varieties, such as, Cattails, Bulrush, Spatterdock, etc.

Because of this "Istokpoga Characteristic" it is imperative that a Hydrilla treatment plan be formed using an ordered process which is derived from the environment itself, starting with the consideration of the renewable natural resources – the lake's food chain.

In the past, the determining factor in establishing a treatment plan was, Hydrilla growth --"Topped-Out Areas" This approach makes sense IF eradication is the goal, BUT, since this is impossible at this point in time, this approach should not be used. Instead we should employ a method to achieve the goal of "Hydrilla Management."

Since "management" is all we are able to achieve, it stands to reason that the natural renewable resources should be the main consideration in the formation of an adaptive management strategy.

An "Adaptive Management Strategy" is designed using a specific order derived from the fishery priorities. Lake bathymetry is the food chain's home parameters, Bass don't inhabit the center areas of sandbars, but instead travel along the deep water transitions to the sandbars. In areas where the lake bottom is flat for thousands of acres the Bass move along the transitional areas of the large flat section in accordance with weather conditions such as, wind and its by-product, turbidity.

The reasoning -- "Adaptive Management Strategy" -- addresses the challenges lake managers face when factoring the weather's affect on Aquathol treatments which is not consistent from area to area within the lake. In open unprotected wind areas where wind has the greatest affect, treatments produce "Shading" at a much greater rate and amount than protected wind areas. ("Shading" is a lake-water-column condition which happens in large shallow lakes with high sheer winds which produces too many suspended solids, blocking sunrays from reaching the plant. The plant itself is covered by suspended muck or decaying plant matter and the water clarity is very low.)

Protected wind areas require the entire target area to be treated, whereas the high wind areas require strategic applications along the upwind leading edges of the target area instead of treating the entire area. Once this weather influence has been determined for each Hydrilla area, the next step is to consider the home of the food chain. It is a fact that there are some areas of the target zone which the food chain thrives in as opposed to the rest of the target zone. This is determined using the lake bathymetry and accumulated information from the primary lake users.

An Aquathol treatment management plan needs to be developed for each season of the year; one which adapts according to weather, bathymetry, fish habitat, and chemical effectiveness determined by those three factors. A monthly or bi-weekly plan of a helicopter / airboat, treatment application schedule, followed up by "Treatment Effectiveness Assessments" in between treatments, to determine how to "Adapt" the management plan in accordance with the weather.

Perhaps smaller "One-Day-Treatments" of 3-8 areas totaling 500 - 800 acres of actual application acreage -- not actual total target sizes. Adaptability is determined by the wind produced "Shading" the leading Aquathol treated edge produces.

We need to achieve the highest level of success in providing a 'Hydrilla Managed Lake" which produces the highest percentage of renewable natural resources (such as Florida's Largemouth Bass), and then educate the public lake users of this plan, publishing the plan at each of the lake's access ramps and through informative media.

Hydrilla is a beneficial positive opportunity, not a negative detriment. We can and should manage this challenge, producing a beneficial positive for our lake's habitat; a level of renewable natural resources which is off the charts.

When the most optimum Hydrilla management plan is finally developed and implemented the proof will demonstrate itself clearly by praise of the lake managers by the lake users. Responsible management includes education and timely information enabling lake users the ability to experience the best possible enjoyment of the lake.

Lake Istokpoga has provided a

rare opportunity to create the finest "Big Bass" lake in the nation, for no lake has the level of food chain, nor the level of ideal vegetative cover, nor the youngest eight pound Bass spawning all year long. This lake can flat out set a new record for the most. large Bass, and a state record if not "The Big Bass Record."

If we get this right, all the rest of the issues will take care of themselves.

## Election of 2008 Board of Directors

The 2008 election of the Board of Directors for Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. will be held on Thursday, Feb. 14, 2008 at the General Membership Meeting. The Directors are elected to a one year term, February through January. There are no limits to the number of terms a director may serve. The Board of Directors meets regularly on first Friday of the month at 1:00 P.M. except in July and August when no meetings are held. A quorum must be present at each meeting to conduct business. Meetings are usually held in a Board members home. Officers of the association are elected by board members from the board of directors. If you are interested in a board position or know someone you would like to recommend for a board position please e-mail friends@istokpoga.org or call 863-219-0082. Names for new directors will also be solicited from the floor and added to the slate before the election.

Current board members indicating their interest to be on the 2008 slate are; Gary Albin, Carol Derr, Bert Galloway, Virginia Greene, Jeanne Porter and Ken Stebbins.

Rav Gaiefsky has chosen not to be on the Board for another term however, he will continue as an alternate representative on the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee (LIMC) and Chairperson of the Hydrilla Management Study Committee of the LIMC.

### Friends of Istokpoga Message Group and Website

There is a lot happening that involves the welfare of Lake Istokpoga. So, if you are interested in these things, how do you find out what is happening? How do you find out before it is too late?

You cannot depend on the television stations, newspapers, or even the local radio stations because they just don't really focus on these kinds of things, especially in Highlands County.

You might say that our newsletter is your answer, but since it is only published a few times a year, it doesn't give you the information as

timely as it needs to be to keep you abreast of all the issues facing our lake.

There are however a few things vou can do to be knowledgeable of the current events that affect our lake. First vou can check our website on a regular basis. We try to keep important events. issues, and other key items current on our site. You will find it at www.istokpoga.org.

But there is another, more timely way. Sign up to the Friends of Istokpoga Yahoo message group. This is an email tool that will send you an email message anytime one is sent in, thus you will get information as soon as it happens. Not only will you receive important information about our lake, but you can also report items of concerns to the group, or ask questions about things that are happening around the lake. You can join this group by going to the

Message Group page on our website, or by sending an email to: foi-messages-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Other sources of information/ news on Lake Istokpoga:

www.sos-floridalakes.org

#### WE'RE CELEBRATING!

By Jeanne Porter, Secretary, Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

Ten years ago this February, a concerned and dedicated group of citizens got together at the home of Bill and Sandy Dwinell to share concerns about what was happening to Lake Istokpoga; who was making decisions about different aspects of the lake, and on what basis the decisions being made. Realizing that there were many areas of concern from a diverse group of lake users and home owners, those present decided the best way to be heard was to join together and take a united position. A decision was made to

Ten years ago this February, a concerned and dedicated group of citizens got together...

February is the 10 year **Anniversary of Friends of** Istokpoga 

form an association with the goal of protecting Lake Istokpoga from any and all <sup>1</sup> action that might cause harm. Others were contacted and by the next meeting over 100 paid membership's dues of \$5.00 to the newly

created "Friends

of Istokpoga".

Now, 10 years later some of the same critical issues are still being pursued, while others issues have seen great improvement. Opening better communication between the lakes stakeholders and county and state agencies is one of the significant gains. The formation of the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee by the Highlands County Commissioners, as an advisory group, presents a form for constituents to study and discuss

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issues such as weed control, water levels, water quality, fishing, water usage, and canal maintenance. Members of Friends of Istokpoga have had representation on this committee since its inception.

Other significant events during the 10 years include: membership surveys in 1998-99 to determine our position on the drawdown, membership on the Kissimmee Basin Water Supply Planning Committee, being instrumental in modifying FWC Slot Limit before implementation to protect big bass in our lake, taking part in the Gulfstream **Pipeline Environmental Advisory** Committee, getting USACE to commit \$50,000 for review of Lake Istokpoga regulation schedule as part of CERP, developing a web site, aiding in stopping water released from S68 that could harm bass spawn, instrumental in getting repairs made to G85 structure on Istokpoga Canal, sponsorship of the Fishing Line Recycling on Lake Istokpoga and signage at boat ramps to remove all plant life from boats at the ramp. In addition the organization has brought to the membership, informative speakers and has published the "Istokpoga **Newswire**", its membership communication newsletter. Along the way Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association. Inc. received the award for "Conservation Organization of the Year" in 2001 by Florida Wildlife Federation!

We're proud of our record. We believe it was true 10 years ago and is still true today; our most effective voice to being heard and affecting change to protect Lake Istokpoga is in a united voice, represented by a large and active membership. Thank you for your continued support and membership.

#### IS THERE A GOPHER TORTOISE IN YOUR YARD?

Gopher tortoises are one of at least 2 dozen species of tortoises known to have lived in North America million of years ago. Today only four are in existence and the Gopher tortoise is the only one living east of the Mississippi. "Gophers" as they are often called make their homes by burrowing into the earth. These burrows become havens for over 360 other animals such as the indigo snakes, lizards, frogs, toads, burrowing owls, opossums, armadillos, and rabbits; providing shelter, survival from fire and predators. Researchers' today estimate that in Florida the gopher tortoise population is less that onethird it original number.

Around Lake Istokpoga, gopher tortoises can be found in dryer habitats such as live oak and red oak hammocks, and sand pine scrub where there is well-drained sandy soil for digging burrows, adequate low plant growth for food, (gopher apples, paw paws, blackberries, saw palmetto berries and legumes) and sunny open nesting areas found in fields, pastures and grassy roadsides.

Tortoise burrows have been found 10 deep, 40 long and wide enough for the tortoise to turn around anyplace within the burrow. Inside the burrow the temperature and humidity remain fairly constant year round and are a refuge to other animals escaping fire, cold, or predators.

In Florida, female tortoises don't reach adulthood until they are 10 to 15 years old and have a shell length of close to nine inches. Typically, mating takes place in April and May with the female laying 3 to 15 eggs. Many people in our area have noticed the high rate of loss at the nesting sites as predators (armadillos, raccoons, skunks, alligators, and fire ants) often destroy 90% of the eggs.

Other threats to the survival of the tortoise are varied and many illegal. Urban expansion, forest management practices, tortoise harvesting, tortoise races, road mortality, disease, herbicides, inadequate law enforcement, acres of habitat lost in central Florida alone from mining phosphate, limestone and sand, even the damage done to the burrows by zealous rattlesnake hunters that use gasoline to roust snakes from the burrows.

Many questions about the gopher tortoise remain unanswered and in 1978 a group of biologists and other citizens concerned with the dwindling population of the tortoise, organized the Gopher Tortoise Council. The objectives of the council are:

• to offer professional advice for management, conservation and protection of gopher tortoises;

• to encourage the study of the life history, ecology, behavior, physiology and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species;

• to conduct active public information and conservation education programs;

• to seek effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout their ranges; and to promote the conservation of upland habitats through land acquisition.

More information on the Gopher Tortoise Council can be found at http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org. Additional Information on the Gopher Tortoise can be found at: http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW048

The information in this article was published by the Gopher Tortoise Council, concerned with the decline of the gopher tortoise. Publication date: 1991. First published: 1980. Minor Revision: July, 2001. Catherine Puckett, Richard Franz, former Florida Museum of Natural History writers; Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611 Mail completed Application to address at bottom of form with your membership fee or bring it to our meeting. Remember that numbers count, so please consider all members of your household when joining.

## Membership Application Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

Annual membership fee \$7.00 per person Annual Family Membership fee \$12.00 per family\* Annual Associate membership fee \$25.00

#### Annual dues are valid Jan. 1 to Dec. 31

*Family Memb	pership is for a couple and the	ir children under 18 years o	old living at home
Name(s) or Business name			
1 <sup>st</sup> Street Address			
City			
Phone ()			
2 <sup>nd</sup> Street Address			
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