
Friends Of *Istokpoga* Newswire

Friends Of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

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In This Issue: Slot Limit; The Grass Carp Story;
What happen to Florida Fish and game

Bass SLOT Limit proposed for Lake Istokpoga

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) is proposing a slot limit for Lake Istokpoga. They are proposing a 15-inch to 24-inch protective slot limit with a three-fish bag limit for largemouth bass to be implemented July 1, 2000.

This means you will be allowed to keep only three fish per day, and these fish must be under 15-inches or over 24-inches. All bass caught that are between 15-inches and 24-inches will have to be released immediately.

Why the slot limit you ask? Well, FFWCC says the current regulation is incompatible with quality management objectives. The changes will allow the females protection so they could provide more and bigger bass.

Primarily it will protect female bass from age three until age nine, their best breeding ages.

What does this all mean? It means you can still catch good eating fish under 15-inches, and you can still catch that trophy fish over 24-inches, and while you are doing that, our bass population will be expanding and growing bigger. In other words, we will be growing more trophy size fish in our lake. This means better fishing!

For more information contact Beacham Furst or Larry Davis, FFWCC, at (941) 462-5190.

A public hearing on this proposal will be held on November 4, 1999, 5

PM to 7 PM at the Sebring Ag-Civic Center. This will be an excellent opportunity for you to express your opinion, or get your questions answered.

Grass Carp and Lake Istokpoga

by *Beacham Furst*, FFWCC

History -Hydrilla first appeared in Lake Istokpoga in 1979 and spread to approximately one-third of the lake by 1988. Originally responsible for turning a quality sport fishery into an excellent one, it eventually became the scourge of the lake. Soon it was nearly impossible to operate a boat without overheating its engine

The traditional solution to the hydrilla problem on Lake Istokpoga was to conduct large-scale herbicide treatments, which cost between one and two million dollars. In an effort to reduce this cost, and also the amount of herbicide used in the lake, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) undertook a study during 1990 and 1991 to determine the feasibility of using triploid grass carp to slow hydrilla growth. Using radio-telemetry methods, the study indicated that stocked grass carp would not leave the system. However, the lake experienced a drought during the study period, reducing water flows over the spillway and largely preventing escape of radio-tagged carp.

The Department of Environmental Protection funded a

lake-wide herbicide treatment in early 1992, which was followed by the stocking of 125,000 triploid grass carp during the winter months of 1992-93 by the Commission. The Commission's goal was to reduce major hydrilla treatments to intervals of three or more years. Shortly after the stocking, the drought ended, and carp unexpectedly began migrating upstream into Lake Arbuckle and downstream through the water control structure toward Lake Okeechobee. Too many carp left the system, and the goal was not met.

Can't we contain these carp and try again? To successfully maintain adequate numbers of grass carp within Lake Istokpoga it would be necessary to install a barrier preventing their escape. Grass carp occur naturally in rivers in Asia, and require flowing water to reproduce. Even sterile triploid grass carp are drawn to flowing water when they reach maturity. This tendency is especially problematic under conditions of high rainfall, when large amounts of water pass through the water control structure.

Carp barrier types

The obvious way to prevent carp from leaving the lake is to install a screen or fence with sufficiently small openings to prevent the carp from passing through. This method is used in nearly every open system where carp are stocked within the state of Florida. Unfortunately, such barriers tend to restrict water flow and rapidly become choked with debris during high flows, requiring

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constant maintenance. For the structure on Lake Istokpoga, where the ability to quickly reduce lake levels to prevent flooding is mandatory, the use of screens is not practical. For similar reasons, several other types of innovative physical barriers including rolling screens were investigated and also found to be unacceptable or impractical without constant maintenance.

Another type of potential barrier is one that uses electrical pulses to repel carp. While these devices are often effective in preventing upstream migration of fish, electrical barriers on water outflows are much less suitable for containing fish and also pose health risks to humans and other animals. Additionally, electrically-dependant barriers have a high potential to cease functioning during a loss of power, especially during storm events when additional rainfall causes higher flow rates.

Other barriers that have been investigated include a flashing strobe light and underwater sound pulses used to frighten fish. Both barrier types are ineffective in controlling the movement of carp.

The downside of grass carp

While grass carp are a cost-effective method for controlling nuisance aquatic vegetation in many cases, they do have some disadvantages. Grass carp are relatively unselective in their feeding preferences, and will eat a large variety of plants. This may result in loss of desirable habitat when stocked carp deplete the target vegetation (usually hydrilla).

Grass carp are very long-lived and some are still found in Florida lakes that were stocked over 10 years ago. Grass carp have been reported to live over 20 years and grow to

over 90 pounds. It is very difficult to remove grass carp from larger lakes once they have been stocked. A variety of methods have been used to remove carp including: gill nets, cast nets, poisoned bait, electrofishing, bow-fishing and angling. Removal of carp from large lake systems is difficult, if not impossible to accomplish without either poisoning or draining the entire lake, neither of which are seriously considered options on a lake as large as Istokpoga.

Where are we today? At this time, the Commission does not feel it is in the public's best interest to stock additional grass carp into Lake Istokpoga. The lake has a diverse plant community that could be threatened by the number of carp required to control hydrilla.

Additionally, with the passage of the Florida Forever legislation during the 1999 session, the funding for aquatic plant control should be sufficient to control hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga for the foreseeable future.

(The opinion stated above is not the opinion of the Friends Of Istokpoga Board of Directors. We strongly support the search for alternative methods of control for hydrilla. Continued and constant poisoning of the lake cannot be in it's best interest.)

COOKBOOK Update!!

Welcome home winter residents.

Remember our association cook books? Well, they were so popular that we sold out of the first printing and many of you haven't even had an opportunity to get one.

You may have not been able to purchase your copy of the '**Special Recipes From The Friends Of Istokpoga**' cookbook, but don't despair, a new printing will arrive

in late October. All the fine recipes in our cookbook were received from your friends and neighbors.

The cookbook is over 100 pages of recipes, including appetizers, main dishes, vegetables, breads and pastries, desserts, beverages, calorie counter and dietary information. Also included are baking tips, a meat cooking chart, an article on canning vegetables and other useful information. These cookbooks make great gifts and an asset to any kitchen (***don't forget that Christmas is just around the corner***).

The price is only \$7.00 per copy (\$10.00 by mail). All money made goes back into the general account to help offset the expenses each year. So buy a copy for yourself or give a copy to a friend or family member today.

New Associate Memberships Available for businesses

We have had a request from one of the local business operators, Henderson's Fish Camp, to offer Associate Memberships for businesses in our area.

Well, I am happy to announce that your Friends Of Istokpoga Board of Directors agree.

We are now offering Associate Memberships to any business that would like to support the efforts of our organization. These memberships will be \$20.00 per year. Each Associate Member will be listed in all our newsletters published in that calendar year.

In addition, we will list all businesses that join this year in any newsletters we publish after they join in 1999.

I am happy to announce that Henderson's Fish Camp was also the

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first one to join as an Associate Member.

Melaleuca Report

We are sure most of you are aware of just how harmful the Melaleuca tree is to Florida. It grows very fast and uses a large amount of water and over time can completely take over, squeezing out all other vegetation.

Over a year ago the Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association decided to try eliminating the Melaleuca trees in and around Lake Istokpoga. We contacted Highlands County officials and asked for help. We worked with Vicki Pontius, Operations Manager, Highlands County, to identify and treat the trees around the lake. Vicki and her team have been very helpful in eliminating many of these trees in our lake.

We want to continue our efforts until this invasive tree is completely eliminated from Lake Istokpoga. If you know of any living Melaleuca trees in the lake or at the waters edge, please call one of our lake association's officers or directors and let them know where the trees are. With your help we can prevent Melaleuca from being a problem on our lake.

MEMBERSHIP

To all members, thank you for renewing your membership, it is you that makes us strong! We look forward to your continued support. As we approach the new millennium we are very proud to say that our membership fees will remain just \$5.00 per year. For just pennies a day you are protecting Lake Istokpoga. We look forward to the new year, with more members supporting the lake association we can remain

strong and confident about Lake Istokpoga's future. When we send the new membership renewal forms for 2000, please consider adding one more member to your application. We thank you very much, and hope you had a wonderful summer.

Contacting Friends Of Istokpoga

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Next General Meeting - December 11, 1999

A slight change from our last newsletter, our next general meeting will be at 1:30 PM on Saturday, December 11, 1999. This will be our last meeting of the millennium. We are having it on Saturday in hopes that each of you will be able to attend.

This will be an open meet with no formal speakers. We hope to have a number of officials there to answer all of you questions about Lake Istokpoga on subjects like:

*The Proposed Drawdown
Hydrilla control
The new proposed Slot Limit
Arbuckle Creek Status
Melaleuca treatment*

We will be accepting renewals for next year at the meeting if you want to renew early. Our dues will remain the same next year, only \$5.00 per person.

New Era for fish and wildlife conservation

By Beacham Furst

July 1, 1999, begins new era in fish and wildlife conservation in Florida!

This past November the voters passed Constitutional Revision 5 which combined the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (GFC) to form the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC). This spring the Florida legislature passed the "merger bill" (CS/CS SB 864) that established the structure of the new agency. Please appreciate that marine conservation elements did not become absorbed into the old Game and Fish Commission; in reality, **both** commissions were eliminated and a **new** agency was created. This agency has constitutional authority and will follow rule making procedures used by the old GFC as well as administrative processes provided under Chapter 120 of the Florida Statutes.

Many administrative and operational changes need to be made before the new agency becomes a harmonic mix of previous Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and GFC programs. The FFWCC will have approximately 1,750 full-time employees (FTE) and a budget of about \$150 million, making it one of the largest fish and wildlife agencies in the nation.

Former DEP, MFC, and GFC employees are excited about working for a new agency that is responsible for all wild animal life, freshwater aquatic life, and marine life.