

Friends Of Istokpoga

NewsWire

Friends Of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.
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Draw Down Update

By Bill Dwinell

You may have already heard about the proposal by SFWMD to accelerate the plans for the draw down and do it while the lake is low because of the drought. In fact the SFWMD held a meeting in Lorida on December 11, 2000 to promote this idea. They said all the right words to gain the public support of the idea. What they didn't say is that they have contributed nothing towards the required \$3 - 4 million to actually do the tussock removal. They also didn't tell everyone their true motive for promoting this idea.

While I agree the taking advantage of the naturally low lake levels would be the ideal situation, I do not agree the SFWMD should promote a project they don't intend to help finance. For over two years the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) has tried to get help from SFWMD with the plan for the draw down. For two years SFWMD has said they wouldn't help. You may ask why they are promoting it now, and it would

be a good question. The answer is they want the water. They are promoting this so you will not be angry when they take our water for downstream users. The drought has caught SFWMD unprepared. They need the water in our lake to satisfy the commercial interests downstream. According to Tom Champeau of FFWCC, the drop

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dead date for obtaining the money is January 15, but this might be stretched to February 1 since FFWCC has already expedited the bid process without the funds being committed. The only hope for funding is from some extraordinary action taken by our government officials. Friends Of Istokpoga, Highlands County Board of Commissioners, Lake Istokpoga Management Committee, Highlands County Lakes Association, as well as members of the public have written to our Legislators requesting help in obtaining the money to take

advantage of this drought situation. Guy Maxcy plans to meet with Governor Jeb Bush on January 18 to see if there is help available there. Without the help of the Governor, and or Legislators the tussock removal will not occur this year. Our hopes are that our legislators will see the value in doing the draw down during the drought and come up with some creative means to fund it.

Where Is Our Water Going?

By Bill Dwinell

On December 20 and 30, and January 1, SFWMD released water, somewhere between 600 and 1000 acre feet., (1000 acre feet would drop the lake level about 2.4 inches) from Lake Istokpoga for the use of the citrus industry, in the Istokpoga Basin, so they could protect their crops from the freezing weather. SFWMD characterized this as in insignificant amount of water. Personally, I think this pretty much sums up the attitude of SFWMD. Our little lake and its water are insignificant. But, at the same time they have implemented steps that will allow them to

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release water from Lake Istokpoga and send it downstream when ever they want even though the lake is below the level that the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) defines as the minimum level in its regulation schedule. They cite in Order No. 2000-184-DAO-WS item 15 that *"It is possible that withdrawal of water from Project Canals and Lake Istokpoga, below the minimum levels stated in Rule 40E-22, F.A.C., would not result in serious harm to the water resources, canal cross sections or the integrity of Project Control Structures"*. Guess who gets to decide if serious harm will be done! The answer is SFWMD! Isn't this a case of the fox guarding the hen house?

I believe we will see frequent releases over the next few months with little or no concern for the damage to Lake Istokpoga or the effects on home owners and businesses dependent upon the lake, and I am not sure what we can do about it other than hope the funding comes through for the tussock removal project.

Friends Of Istokpoga Persistence Pays Off?

Friends Of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. began trying to get repairs done to the structure on Istokpoga Canal (G-85) after photographing the leaks back in February. Our concern was that

the structure could fail. Failure of this structure would cause significant damage throughout the southeastern portions of Highlands County, as well as completely draining Lake Istokpoga.

We have good news to report! Our persistence has paid off. SFWMD recently completed repairs on the structure and assures us that it will last until the new structure (S-67) is completed in the next few years.

Hydrilla Treatment Planned?

The planned hydrilla treatment may be in jeopardy if SFWMD has its way. SFWMD has suggested that the \$1.8 million currently allocated for hydrilla

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treatment in Lake Istokpoga be spent on the draw down and tussock removal instead. There are many issues to be considered here. With the low water, if the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) does not do a full lake hydrilla treatment this spring, the hydrilla will be so bad that boating, except by airboat, will be nearly impossible before they can do it next spring. According to Jeff Schardt, DEP, without treatment, the hydrilla

will be topped out throughout the lake by summer; there will be virtually no access by conventional boat, possible large scale fish kills, and there is a potential that floating rafts of hydrilla could pose serious risk to our flood control structures during flooding associated with wet tropical storm systems.

November 2000 Meeting Review

We had a great meeting on November 9, 2000. If you were unable to attend I will try to share some of what you missed.

First some statistics: we had 75 to 100 attendees; we had forty people join as new members, and thirty of our members renewed there membership for 2001. We also want to Welcome Audubon of Florida as our newest Associate member. On top of that we had a number of these folks give donations to Friends Of Istokpoga.

The proposed changes to our by-laws were unanimously approved by the members in attendance. Members who want a copy of the revised by-laws can call 941-490-014 (not a long distance call within Highlands County), leave your name and complete address, and we will mail you a copy.

Bill Dwinell gave updates on the status of the drought warnings from SFWMD, the G-85 request, the draw down plans, and the meeting with SFWMD to discuss the possibility of removing tussock while the lake

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is low due to the drought conditions expected.

Carl Cool, Highlands County Administrator, gave us an update on the plans the county has for the Windy Point and Istokpoga Park boat ramps.

Vicki Pontius, Highlands County Operations Manager, updated us on the county weed control plans and the plans for a lake wide hydrilla treatment planned for February or March 2001. It was also announced by Carl Cool, that Vicki had been promoted to Parks and Recreation Director.

Congratulations Vicki!!

Andrew Kelly, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), talked about what you can do and what not to do in the lake or on a canal without a permit. Bottom line, When in doubt call DEP. He also emphasized that if a contractor tells you he can dredge out your canal without getting a permit, **STAY AWAY FROM HIM!**

Remember, DEP will go after the property owner first and the contractor second when they discover violations. The requirements for permits generated many questions from the attendees.

Jeff Schardt, DEP, was also in attendance and helped answer several questions dealing with aquatic plants.

Annual Dues

It is time to renew your annual membership dues. Check the mailing label on this newsletter, and if it doesn't say 2001 or higher in the upper-right corner, then your dues need to be paid as soon as possible. If it does read 2001 or higher we thank you for your prompt or early payment.

To renew, send in the enclosed RENEWAL Form in our brochure, being sure to update your address or other information that might have changed.

If you have already paid your 2001 dues, give the brochure to a friend or neighbor and help us increase our membership.

Have you logged onto Your Web Site Lately?

We have been posting the latest news on the "Accelerated draw down" there to provide updates in a more timely manner than the newsletter. Be sure to check it regularly for the latest news about the draw down, or other important news affecting Lake Istokpoga. The web address is at the bottom of this page.

New Brochure

We completed our new brochure in the middle of November. We are really proud of it. It is a single document that combines the general membership application, Associate Member Application, renewal form, and our handout describing Friends Of Istokpoga Lake Association. **Kudos to Chris Monroe, our**

Vice-president, for the great job in pulling this all together.

You can find our new brochure in this newsletter and at the Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce.

Annual Meeting

Our next general meeting will be on Thursday, February 22, 2001. We hope you will mark your calendar and come out and join us for our Annual Election Meeting.

We will be holding our annual election of directors at this meeting. It is very important you come out and vote. All of our current Directors and Officers will be running for reelection. Refreshments will be served beginning at 6:45 PM.

Our guest speakers will be Dr. Paul Gray, Audubon of Florida, who will discuss "Lessons from Lake Okeechobee: things to do now to protect Istokpoga". And Carl Smith who will update us on the plans for treating Lake Istokpoga for hydrilla.

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Water Restrictions

If you are not already aware of it, we are in a serious drought. Both the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) have declared water shortage situations invoking rules that restrict the use of water. You will need to contact the water management district you live in to find out the specific rules that apply to you. If you do not know which district you fall in, check your tax bill where it is listed under "Taxing Authority"

To find out what the rules are you will need to contact the district you are in.

For SFWMD you can call 1-800-662-8876 or check their web site at www.sfwmd.gov
For SWFWMD the number is 1-800-848-0499 and their web site is

While the officer is authorized to give a "Warning" on the first offense, the First Violation fine is \$50; Second is \$100; Third \$250; and Fourth and all subsequent is \$500.

Regardless of the penalties, we want to encourage everyone to conserve our precious water.

If you live in Highlands County, you are under watering restrictions. Be sure to check with your specific Water Management District for the rules that apply to you.

www.sfwmd.state.fl.us

On January 9, 2001, the Highlands County Commissioners adopted an ordinance that prescribes penalties for any violations of these rules (approved 3-2). Our thanks to the commissioners that see the need to enforce these water conserving rules and thus protecting our valuable water resources.