

Friends Of Istokpoga

NewsWire

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Can Lake Istokpoga end up like Lake Okeechobee?

by Bill Dwinell and Paul Gray

At our February meeting, Dr. Paul Gray made a wonderful presentation that spelled out some things we need to be concerned about with Lake Istokpoga. I transformed his presentation into this article, with some editing help from Paul.

Lake Okeechobee has suffered from many stresses that culminated in the 1990s as many problems, including algae blooms, loss of "clean-water" bugs and replacement with "pollution tolerant" bugs, 90% submerged plant loss, exotic plant growth, spreading cattails, loss of larval fish, loss of wading birds, loss of waterfowl, loss of snail kites and alligators with unusual hormones. The reasons for these problems were numerous, but the most important causes of the problems are just two things: water level mismanagement and nutrient pollution. These two factors lead to almost all the other problems.

Nutrient pollution seems to be the worse. The level of phosphorus in Lake Okeechobee has approximately tripled since the early 1960s, and this was in spite of four, government-implemented, nutrient

Let's not let them do this to our Lake Istokpoga.

control programs. Lots of hoopla but little positive results were achieved. There are many sources of phosphorus entering Lake Okeechobee, the worse being fertilizer which accounts for 73% with an estimated 5,400 metric tons spread in the watershed per year.

One of the key things to note here is that a lake will appear to absorb the phosphorus until it becomes saturated. It is like a dry sponge. For a while you can drip water onto a dry sponge and it will absorb every single drop. Once the sponge becomes saturated, every extra drop will run out. Once the plants and soils in a lake absorb all the phosphorus they can (like a sponge absorbing water), the rest tends to remain in the water column and cause problems, including algae blooms that can kill fish and threaten animal health, turbidity that can shade out aquatic plant life, and runoff that pollutes downstream water bodies. The nutrient programs, like SWIM (Surface Water Improvement Management), that have been in place for Lake Okeechobee had incorrectly assumed the lake could continue to absorb the large amount of phosphorus being loaded into it annually but they were wrong—the "sponge" was saturated. Now, Lake

Okeechobee is in its worst condition ever.

The phosphorus laden mud in the center of Lake Okeechobee is estimated to contain more than 30,000 tons of phosphorus, which is

so much, that even if we stopped all phosphorus inflows today, the lake would remain polluted for decades or more. The muck covers a huge area and is as much as three feet thick. It is also estimated that it may take \$1 Billion to remove it, if they can figure out how.

What does all this mean as far as Lake Istokpoga is concerned? Well, the outflow of phosphorus, measured at the S-68 structure was 30 ppb (parts per billion) 1990 to 1994, or about 7.1 tons per year that were going down stream. In 1995 to 1999 it was 60 ppb or 27.3 tons of phosphorus. The outflows have roughly doubled in phosphorus concentrations in the last ten years. Is Istokpoga already saturated? One must wonder where the phosphorus is coming from? Is Istokpoga's mud core growing? What caused this increase?

The Lake Okeechobee legislation that Senator Pruitt sponsored last year calls for an assessment of the phosphorus sources from the Lake Istokpoga Basin, to be completed by July 1, 2003, but the legislation had no money attached for this and the current status is "no work underway due to lack of funding and resources". Friends of Istokpoga plans to contact the South

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Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), and Senators Pruitt and Laurent regarding this and request their support for funding it this year.

Lake Okeechobee also is considered a water supply resource by SFWMD, as is Lake Istokpoga. Clearly Lake Okeechobee is such a resource, but it isn't so clear that Lake Istokpoga should be. The record low levels in Lake Okeechobee this year are only partly due to the drought, and partly due to the irrigators and cities pumping water out of the Lake, in spite of its harmfully-low levels. Should Istokpoga be allowed to be pumped ever-lower during droughts like this? Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. fought this for two years, but because there are high costs associated with alternative solutions, SFWMD has elected to ignore our recommendations and consider Lake Istokpoga as a water supply source for the Istokpoga Basin, since it is "free water" as far as they are concerned, in spite of any environmental impacts that might result. By "high costs" they mean that pumping well water costs more, and that building water storage reservoirs on agricultural properties costs more, and installing back-pumps costs more. The growers, and SFWMD would rather not spend their money for their water, they prefer Istokpoga water because it is "free."

During a year with normal rainfall, this is not currently a problem, with outflows of approximately 200,000 acre feet, and demand at only 172,091. The problem arises when we enter drought conditions, or add more users. During a 10-year drought, demand increases to about 204,865 acre feet with significantly less out flows. The deficit is estimated to be at least 64,937

acre feet. While this deficit will be satisfied partially by back-pumping into the lower basin from Lake Okeechobee, the remainder must come from Lake Istokpoga. This will result in withdrawals below the minimum levels set by the current regulation schedule. On top of this, there is an estimated 41,000 acres increase of irrigated crops in Highlands County expected by 2020. This is made up of big citrus groves, vegetable farms, and sugar plantations moving to Highlands County for our water. They will apply for an allocation and once it is granted it will give them a "right" to Istokpoga's water. Do you think someone should have the right to build a NEW development (agricultural or urban) in a spot that does not have enough water supply for their development, and then be allowed to suck water out of our lake?

Some action items we must keep our eyes on are the Lake Istokpoga Regulation Schedule (how they plan to control lake water levels), the Istokpoga Basin Phosphorus evaluation (where, and how much, pollution), the evaluation of Minimum Levels (MFL) criteria (what is the lowest they will let the lake get), any relaxation of the current moratorium on new Consumptive Use Permits, and the revised operational plan for Lake Istokpoga. Lake Okeechobee's problems came about because our government agencies have not managed the Lake for its own health. Let's not let them do this to our Lake Istokpoga.

Lake Restoration Update

By Bill Dwinell

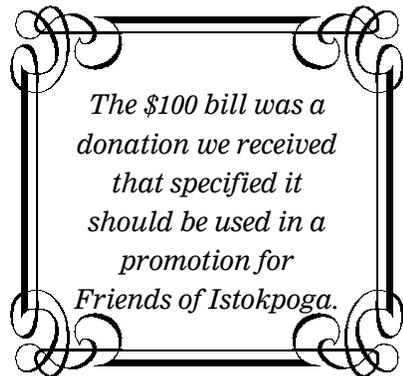
The restoration of Lake Istokpoga has begun. On March 23 a celebration event, held at Istokpoga Park, was the official start of the restoration work that will remove approximately 2,443,523 cubic yards (1342 acres) of tussock from the shoreline of Lake Istokpoga at a cost of \$2,534,169.50, according to Beacham Furse, FWC. We asked the FWC to use the remaining portion of the \$3 million to expand the work to include the area south of area nine. They will have to wait and insure there are no overruns before they will know if there is any money left, but they have agreed to consider this suggestion and have applied to DEP to extend the permit to cover this area.

They even had a bulldozer (see picture below), complements of Mack Construction (one of the contractors doing the work) on-hand at the celebration to show us how the work will be done. The speakers were Guy Maxcy, Highlands County Commissioner, Tom Champeau and Ed Moyer, FWC, Paul Whalen, Dept. Director, Kissimmee Department, SFWMD, Jeff Schardt, DEP, and Bill Dwinell, representing the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee.

The actual work for several of the nine areas was started a few days before the celebration (pictures are available on our web site). It is expected that the remaining areas will be started

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very soon. Please refer to the



insert for a map of Lake Istokpoga showing the location of the nine areas, and a chart showing a description of the areas, the volume of tussock, the cost, and the contractor.

More than half of the tussock removed from the lake will be stored in upland storage areas for the next couple of years. After that Highlands County is scheduled to spread it out in the areas in which it is stored, according to FWC.

The remaining tussocks will be stored within the lake on "Wildlife Islands", at least that is what the FWC calls them. You may have seen some of these in the past out in the area of Big Island. For the latest information on the tussock removal project be sure to check our web site. We try to keep it updated with the very latest information.

If you do not have a computer that can get on the Internet, ask your friends who do have one to show you our site. The address (URL) is located at the bottom margin of this page.

Hydrilla Treatment?

The hydrilla treatment began on March 3, 2001 and will continue with the final treatment being done on April 3, 2001. At the writing of this article, the first three treatments have been completed. DEP and Highlands County will take water samples to determine the concentration of the Sonar (Floridone) this week to determine how much more of the herbicide to apply in the final treatment on April 3rd. The target concentration is between 4 and 7 ppb (parts per billion). We plan to post the sample readings on the web site when DEP makes them available to us.

Correction

OOPS! We made a mistake in the header of our past two newsletters. We had the incorrect phone number listed.

Our correct voice mail phone number is (941)490-0140. And, we made a mistake with the phone number on our Dues Notice post card we sent out!

We are very sorry if you tried to contact us using the bad numbers.

I guess the editor needs his pay cut.

Glades Annual Meeting

Friends of Istokpoga participated in the Glades Electric Cooperative Annual meeting by having a table to promote membership and sell our cookbooks. We had a great meeting with forty memberships, some of which were renewals, but the majority

were new members. We also sold twenty cookbooks and had a few donations.

Jack Harris, one of our members that renewed his membership for 2002, while he was there, was the lucky winner of the crisp new \$100 bill we gave away in our drawing. He had the winning ticket, number 623481.

Annual Meeting

Our general meeting was held on Thursday, February 22, 2001. All of our directors for 2000 were unanimously reelected for 2001.

Our guest speakers was Dr. Paul Gray, Audubon of Florida, who discussed "Lessons from Lake Okeechobee: Things to do now to

protect Istokpoga". (See separate column on his presentation.)

Carl Smith, Supervisor of Aquatic Weed Management for Highlands County updated us on the plans for treating Lake Istokpoga for hydrilla.

Water Restrictions Enforced

According to SFWMD, they have taken action to stop individuals and groups in the Istokpoga Basin, from continuing to take water from Lake Istokpoga during the drawdown. They have received a number of complaints regarding these activities since March 2, 2001 when we reached the 36.5 foot level for the lake. Furthermore, while these

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groups do have valid rights to the water, under normal conditions, through a 1966 agreement, SFWMD is working with them to update it into a Consumptive Use Permit.

About Our Phone

In order to better serve our members we now have a beeper so we can receive your calls as soon as possible. To call us you have to dial the 941 area code before the number. Our number is (941)490-0140. This is NOT a toll (long distance) call from anywhere in Highlands County.

When you call you can leave messages two ways. The easiest and fastest way is for you to simply dial in your phone number (if you have a touch-tone phone), including the area code if you are not in Highlands County, followed by the pound key (#). This will send us your phone number immediately.

The second way is to leave a voice message. To retrieve your voice message we have to call the beeper company, then call you after we listen to your message.

In either case, we will try to get back to you as soon as possible. One of our officers or directors will always have the beeper.

Got Questions?

Do you have any questions about Lake Istokpoga? Do you have any questions about the Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.? How about any of the agencies doing the work on Lake Istokpoga?

We would love to answer your questions for you. All you have to do is send them to us. We will try to answer all questions we receive.

Thanks for the Pictures

We want to thank everyone that sent us pictures of Lake Istokpoga for our web site. If you haven't visited the picture pages of our web site, then you are missing out on some really beautiful views of our lake. You can visit these pages by going to

www.friendsofistokpoga.homestead.com/picture.html

If you have pictures you would like to see on our web site, send them to us and we will try to use them. If you want them returned to you, please include a stamped self-addressed envelope. Send your pictures to the address on the front page of this newsletter.

Thanks to the Land Owners

Friends of Istokpoga would like to thank all of the land owners that are allowing the FWC to store the tussock material being removed from

the shoreline on their properties. This is really important to the lake because it is allowing the complete removal of more than half of the material from the lake. The portions of the material that cannot be removed to upland storage sites such of these, will be piled within the lake on what FWC calls "Wildlife Islands".

Our Thanks to all the landowners that are allowing the use of their land for