

Friends of Istokpoga

NewsWire

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Have you paid your dues for 2004?

2004 annual membership dues were due before January 1, 2004. If you haven't paid your dues for 2004, this could be the last copy of the *Istokpoga NewsWire* you will receive, because technically your membership has already expired. We do not want to lose you as a member because **We Need You.**

You might ask, "**How do I tell if my dues have been paid?**". Well, that is pretty easy. All you have to do is look at the address label on this newsletter. Somewhere on the label there will be a four-digit number with the last year your dues were paid through. If it is 2004 or greater, then you have paid your dues for this year and do not have to worry about them any longer.

If your label reads **2003**, then you need to pay your dues soon to insure you do not miss any future issues of this newsletter. **If you believe your label is wrong, please contact us immediately by calling 863-219-0082** and simply key in your phone number or leave a message.

Istokpoga Canal Update??

By Bill Dwinell

Well, the saga continues.... We still do not have a plan from the U.S. Corps of Engineers (USACE) and/or South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) regarding Lake Istokpoga Canal and the proposed new structure (S-67).

While I have heard a number of items that may be changing, the only documented change, and I am stretching it a bit calling it documented, is that the idea of dredging the canal west of the current G-85 structure has been scrapped. This information was received in an e-mail and stated "*We are in the process of modifying the plan, and will provide a detailed outline of the changes once we have*

completed this. Definitely we have minimized the dredging of the canal so it is now only going to happen in the east half of the canal, no dredging west of the structure. Other details are still being discussed."

This is the same plan that Wiener Cadet, USACE Project Director, promised us by our next Lake Istokpoga Management Committee meeting (LIMC) in July 2003.

Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area - Royce Unit Update

History-- The Lake Wales Ridge ecosystem is an ancient dune system that once included 600,000 acres of dry uplands. These ancient sand dunes were periodically isolated from North America by rising sea levels during recent ice ages. The plants and animals living in the harsh environment of these dunes were also isolated from their continental relatives and some developed differences that persisted when the sea receded and the Ridge was reunited with North America. Many of these dune plants and animals remained restricted to the Ridge. Thus, the Lake Wales Ridge has one of the highest concentrations in North America of endemic (locally- restricted) species. The Ridge supports 35 plant taxa (with 21 endemic to the Ridge) and 14 vertebrate taxa (with 2 endemic to the Ridge) listed (as of June 2000) as endangered, threatened, or of special concern by federal or state government, or tracked as rare by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI).

Today, more than 85% of this landscape has been converted to agriculture and residential development.

In the early 1980's a protection strategy was developed which included preserving sites of varying sizes along the ridge. In 1985, it was determined that many of the plant species along the ridge qualified under the endangered species act. In 1993, Congress designated a portion of the Lake Wales Ridge a National Wildlife Refuge, the first designed to protect

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rare plants. To date the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Areas consists of 15 separate tracts totally 15,000 acres scattered over 75 miles.

In the late 1980's the Nature Conservancy purchased approximately 300 acres of scrub on the Royce/Silver Harbor Ranch. In December 2001, the state purchased the remaining 2347 acres of the ranch and this piece of property was added to the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area. (Note that this took approx. 2700 acres including 4 miles of lakefront out of future development).

Two-hundred and thirty five acres are in citrus and with the exception of 50 acres, this has been leased to the University of Florida as an experimental grove.

In late 2003 Mike McMillian became the lead biologist for the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife Environmental Area's, which include the Royce Unit. Kevin Main the former lead biologist is now the district biologist for FWC.

Plans for Royce Unit-- One of the state mandates is to provide public access to these properties. In keeping with this mandate the Royce unit has initiated several public use activities:

Hunting-- Wildlife technicians have planted four dove fields supporting eight hunting opportunities (last dove hunt is Jan 10). Four small game hunts run from early December through late January (next two are Jan 16-18 and Jan 23-25). Small game hunts include game animals up to feral hog size. In 2003 the Royce Unit sponsored its first white-tailed deer hunt and in 2004 will provide two spring turkey hunts.

According to Mike, "We have had 7 dove hunts with over 30 hunters each. We had 10 hunters for our deer hunt (all that were allowed). We have had just over 80 hunters on our small game hunts. We will have 10 hunters for our turkey hunts (all that is allowed). Some results: deer hunters took 5 bucks (50% success rate); dove hunters were taking around 90-150 birds per hunt until the cows destroyed all four dove fields (now they get about 10-15 doves); the small game hunters have taken 75-100 gray squirrels and approx. 10 hogs (two weighed over 300 pounds); other animals have included cottontail rabbit (very few), common snipe (very few) and one armadillo; turkey hunting hasn't happened yet. As for trail users there is no way to know. We don't keep any records but use is fairly low I would say. I don't think enough people know about the place. I don't think there have been any horseback riders yet again because they probably don't know it's available."

Hiking— The Royce unit has a small parking area at the trail head, which leads either north to Lake Istokpoga or south to our southern boundary. The current trail takes hikers through pine flatwoods, various grassland types, bayhead, oak hammock, and lake shoreline. In 2004 we hope to expand the trail to include cutthroat grass seeps and scrub. "We are going to extend the trail this year and install a bluebird trail in late February."

Horseback Riding— The same trails used by hikers can be used as horseback riding trails.

Other plans for the Royce Unit include habitat restoration and exotic plant removal: The Royce Unit had been ranched for approximately 70 years. During this period the property was drained and many areas were converted to bahai grass pasture for grazing. We will be attempting to restore the hydrology of the Royce Unit, pre-1940, to restore bahai grass pastures, cutthroat seeps, and scrub. These restoration projects are long-term projects designed to return the landscape to an early 1900's look based on historic photographs. Several restoration projects will use controlled burning. Once we have conducted detailed impact studies, hydrology will be restored by filling in ditches. Bahai grass removal will involve burning, plowing, and the use of herbicides followed by native vegetation plantings. Cutthroat seeps (cutthroat is listed grass species) will be restored using controlled burning and timber harvesting. Scrub restoration will be accomplished using controlled burning and plantings.

Although Mike McMillian has left his position with Archbold Biological Station, he will continue his long-term research project on Lake Istokpoga Osprey (15 years and counting). This work will not be part of his FWC duties but will continue to be on his time. The Osprey has long been used as a biological indicator species for the health of an ecosystem, in this case, Lake Istokpoga. Mike also works on Lake Arbuckle in Polk County and will expand his research to include Blue Cypress Lake (Brevard County) in 2004.

Our November Meeting

If you didn't make it to our November meeting you missed a good one. Jennifer Brunty shared a number of tips about how each of us should be taking care of

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our septic systems so that they will not harm our lakes and streams.

Susan Gray, Ph.D., SFWMD, Director of the Lake Okeechobee Division, talked to us about the Okeechobee Protection Plan. We had hoped for her to include Lake Istokpoga in her talk and in the Okeechobee Protection Plan, but it doesn't appear that SFWMD is going to address the phosphorus problems we have in Lake Istokpoga anytime soon.

The Door Prize winners were:

Dog Country (3 day boarding) – Mike Elter, Outback USA Gift Certificate – Al Schultz, Dog Country Grooming – Hal Jablonski, Outback USA Gift Certificate – Harold Haskel, Boat Corral Gift Certificate – Jack Wagner, \$25 Outback Steak House Gift Certificate – Roy Lucker, Boat Corral Gift Certificate – Paul Gray, \$25 Ruby Tuesday Gift Certificate – David Robinson, Boat Corral Gift Certificate – Keith Finlayson, \$50 Lakeshore Mall Gift Certificate – Gin Chandler

Friends of Istokpoga Sponsors Fishing Line Recycling on Lake Istokpoga

The Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. are sponsoring most of the fishing line recycling locations on Lake Istokpoga. You may have spotted one or more of these recycling centers at the boat ramps on Lake Istokpoga. We decided that this was such a good idea that we would sponsor them on Lake Istokpoga.

We encourage each of you that fish on our lake to use these recycling centers for your used fishing line and help us protect the fish, birds and other wildlife in and around our lake from the problems fishing line can cause if it is disposed of in the lake or allowed to blow out of your boat.

This project is the idea of Eric Harper, Technician for Highlands County Soil and Water Conservation District. He has been busy installing them on lakes all around the county.

The fishing line recycling locations that Friends of Istokpoga has sponsored are the ones at Henderson's Fish Camp, Rutledge Road boat ramp, Windy Point boat ramp, and Lake Drive boat ramp (located off Cowhouse Road).

Signs are to be placed at each recycling location with the sponsors listed. We are hopeful that these signs are installed pretty soon.

Don't Miss the February Annual Meeting

Our Annual meeting will be held on Thursday, February 19, 2004 at 7:00 PM, at the Lorida Community Center. We hope you will all come out and join us for this important meeting.

Our first speaker will be County Commissioner David Flowers. He will give us an update on the situation with the Avon Park

Correctional Center. They were ordered by DEP to stop discharging their treated effluent into Arbuckle Creek.

Our second guest speaker will be Beacham Furse, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) who will tell us about the bass tracking they have been doing on Lake Istokpoga. I am sure all you bass fishermen will want to know about the bass movements on the lake. This might help you find them those times when no one else can catch any.

We will also holding our annual election of directors for the Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. at this meeting. After this meeting the directors that are elected will meet and elect the officers that will serve for the next year.

In addition to the current directors who are willing to serve an additional year, nominations will be accepted from the floor at this meeting to fill open positions.

Only members whose dues are current are permitted to vote.

We will also be serving refreshments before our meeting, beginning at 6:45 PM. Join us, and bring your friends!!

DOOR PRIZES WILL BE DRAWN AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING.

Don't miss our
February 19th
meeting!