Friends of Istokpoga Newswire

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Are the Lake Okeechobee Projects Going to Help Lake Istokpoga?

By Bill Dwinell

There are two Lake Okeechobee projects that could potentially help Lake Istokpoga, the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project (LOWP), a component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP), and the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan (LOPP), the proposed solution to the Okeechobee Protection Act. While each of these programs are designed to be of great help to Lake Okeechobee, they are not designed to protect Lake Istokpoga from harm and it doesn't appear that they will make significant difference to Lake Istokpoga's Phosphorus (P) problem.

The Problem - Our P levels continue to rise in Lake Istokpoga. The primary source of this increase is from water flowing into the lake from Arbuckle Creek. Most of the high P coming into the lake is from within Highlands County since low levels have been measured at the out flow of Lake Arbuckle.

The problem is that the level can only go so high before the lake assimilates as much P as it can. At that point, instead of P entering the lake and being bound up, harmlessly, in the bottom sediments, it will remain active in the water column. More of the P entering the lake also will leave the lake and ultimately end up in Lake Okeechobee. In a report written by researchers from the University of Florida-IFAS, December 2003, it is estimated that Lake Istokpoga would become saturated with P in 15 years.

So what does it mean if the lake becomes saturated? As the P increases the plants, including hydrilla, and algae grow more rapidly. This can also cause the blue-green algae to grow which ultimately can cause serious fish kills (these algae produce toxins to protect them from being eaten, which makes them a poor part of the food chain, and in rare cases can harm higher organisms with the toxin)! Water will be more green, less clear and have stronger odors. Muck will start building up on the bottom, smothering many of the sand-bottom "bugs" that form much of the base of the food chain.

LOPP - This project plans to address the P problem in the Istokpoga watershed by using BMP's (Best Management Practices). These are procedures implemented by various agriculture and urban land uses to reduce the P leaving their respective properties. The problem is that the reduction goal is only about 25%, which will delay the saturation date, but not prevent it.

Page 7 of the LOPP states,

"…at this time only typical cost-share BMPs will be considered for these [Istokpoga and Kissimmee Chain Of Lakes] basins. More information is needed to determine if larger regional public works are needed for restoration in these areas. It must be noted that Lake Istokpoga and Lake Kissimmee provide a buffering effect through their assimilation of phosphorus, thus masking the impacts of upstream phosphorus reduction measures. However, this buffering ability will not continue indefinitely. Studies of sediment cores in the lakes indicate that current assimilative capacity will continue for approximately 10 years under existing conditions (White, Belmont, Reddy, and Martin 2003). The effects of implementing P reduction programs upstream of these lakes will extend the ability of the lakes to assimilate P into the future and not create additional P loads to Lake Okeechobee. Based on this information, a recommendation has been included in the LOPP to start implementation of cost-share BMP programs in the Lake Istokpoga and Lake Kissimmee watersheds in 2009."

Notice that this plan is concerned about Lake Okeechobee's water quality and not specifically about Lake Istokpoga's. Indeed, they recognize that saturation is occurring and do not recommend stopping it. If you consider that BMPs will not start until 2009, and take 10 years to reach effectiveness, then about the same year Istokpoga is expected to

become saturated (in 2019—15 years from now), BMPs will be reaching their 10th year. The BMPs probably will delay the saturation date by some time, but they will not stop it. Istokpoga is headed for worse times if more is not done.

LOWP - This plan has evaluation criteria that look at improved water level management and nutrient conditions in Lake Istokpoga, but currently appears focused only on Lake Istokpoga's regulation schedule. While it will be good to have a revised schedule that gets Lake Istokpoga back to a more natural cycle of high and low water levels, the LOWP isn't likely to resolve the situation with our high P levels. As for why this project is not focusing on P, the LOWP project managers tell us that the LOPP will focus on Lake Istokpoga, but as discussed above, the LOPP won't fix the problem.

When we pointed out that after Istokpoga becomes saturated it will shed more P toward Okeechobee - well, a project manager from SFWMD, says that it isn't cost effective for Okeechobee's needs to work upstream of Istokpoga (reread the 2nd to last sentence of the quote). My concern is that they have done no feasibility studies or cost estimates on putting either reservoirs or STA's in the Istokpoga Watershed. How can they know it won't be cost effective if they haven't done any cost estimates?

Now I believe this is a shortsighted approach, especially in light of the fact that the project is suppose to be a fifty-year plan to protect Lake Okeechobee's water quality.

They are currently looking at putting reservoirs and storm water treatment areas ("filter marshes," called STA's) downstream of Lake Istokpoga to filter out a significant amount of P before it enters Lake Okeechobee. Where they are shortsighted is in the fact that when Lake Istokpoga becomes saturated the level of P exiting Lake Istokpoga will climb dramatically. The reservoirs and STA's will have to handle more P than expected. This, combined with the fact that Lake Istokpoga will be in such bad shape at that time that they will likely have to figure out how to fix it then.

If they were to put a reservoir and STA in the Istokpoga watershed (north of Istokpoga) they could kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. This would clean up the P entering Lake Istokpoga, extend or do away with the saturation of Lake Istokpoga, and reduce the P leaving Lake Istokpoga and entering Lake Okeechobee.

As it stands now, all the plans were written to save Lake Okeechobee. That is a notable goal, but if we rely on their indirect efforts to save Istokpoga, we will be disappointed. If we are to save Istokpoga from a bad future, we need nothing less than plans specifically written to save Istokpoga.

Where do we go from here? - It appears that we will have to talk with our legislative representatives to see if we can get our lake added to the CERP. We are laying out that strategy as we speak..

Thanks for editorial help from Dr. Paul Gray, Audubon of Florida.

The NEW Hydrilla Situation

The situation with the hydrilla in the lake has changed! A lot of factors have prompted the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to look for alternatives to the current methods of treating hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga. In a note to various agencies about this problem, DEP outline the problems. This is the summary to that note:

In the past, it has been possible to manage around water schedules for Lake Istokpoga and still achieve hydrilla control with minimal non-target impacts or unintended consequences. Due to the issues noted above, future hydrilla management requires the following considerations:

- Continued large-scale fluridone use would require that water schedules be changed in the winter and early spring on Lake Istokpoga. This would result in reduced herbicide load and cost, more flexibility in the choice of formulations, prevention of downstream fluridone loss, minimal non-target impacts, and improved hydrilla control.
- If water schedules are not changed, then fluridone use will have to be scaled back considerably or discontinued in lieu of contact-type herbicides to maintain control over hydrilla in a few priority areas. This strategy may have negative impacts on flood control capacity, recreation, and habitat since it will result in a long-term and large-scale presence of hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga.
- If neither of the above considerations is feasible, then large-scale grass carp stocking may be the only alternative to keep hydrilla under control. While this strategy alleviates

flood control concerns, the likely non-target and economic impacts are considerable. Low rates provide little discernible control while only slightly higher rates can control all of the hydrilla along with the rest of the plants for more than a decade. Controlling all of the vegetation in Lake Istokpoga may alleviate flood control and water supply concerns, but may reduce recreation and habitat for a long period.

Our February Meeting

Our meeting in February was well attended. We held our annual election of directors and the six directors that were willing to serve again were all reelected. These were Bill Dwinell, Jim Wilkins, Jack Richie, Jeanne Porter, Bert Galloway, and Don Linton. We also received one nomination from the floor, Ray Schirtz, who was also elected.

Following the general meeting the new board of directors met briefly to elect officers for this year. Bill Dwinell was reelected as President, Bert Galloway was elected as Vice-president, Jack Richie was reelected as Treasurer, and Jeanne Porter was reelected as Secretary.

If you did not attend this meeting, you missed a great program. President Bill Dwinell first updated us on the early February Hydrilla treatment. He also let us know that the lake is not as healthy as it might appear. The phosphorus (P) situation continues to worsen. A report from the University of Florida estimates that Lake Istokpoga could be saturated with P in fifteen years.

Commissioner David Flowers updated everyone on the situation with the Avon Park Correctional Facility (APCF) and their dumping of treated effluent into Arbuckle Creek (a contributor to the P problem). His good news was that APCF has been working with the Avon Park Bombing Range and it looks like they will be able to work out a deal where they can treat the effluent on the bombing range property and stop dumping it into Arbuckle Creek.

The highlight of the meeting was the presentation by Karen Whall, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on the results of her study of some of the bass in Lake Istokpoga using radio telemetry. For anyone there that paid close attention I am sure they have changed some of their favorite fishing holes and strategies. The insights into the habits of some of the bass should be very helpful in understanding where the bass are.

Friends of Istokpoga Sponsors Fishing Line Recycling on Lake Istokpoga

All of the sponsor signs are now in place (four of the five on Lake Istokpoga were sponsored by Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.). We hope each of you will use the fishing line recycling centers at the boat ramps to dispose of your old fishing line. Please do not discard used line into the lake. It can cause serious harm to the wildlife that inhabits our lake.

Glades Electric Coop Annual Meeting

If you attend the Glades Electric Coop annual Meeting on Saturday, March 27th, we hope you stopped by our table to at least say hello. We had a number of members that did stop by. We had a pretty successful outing with 11 new members and 13 renewals.

In case you are not aware of it, we do a drawing at these meetings for a $100 bill. This years winner was Suzanne Harper, owner manager of Harper's Fly-In Ranch Resort in Clewiston, Florida, with ticket number 174403.

If you didn't find us this year, look for us next year.

News from our FWC Enforcement Officers

Violations on Lake Istokpoga are up this year over past two years. Lieutenant Dale Knapp of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) believes the increases are due to more users and more enforcement efforts being directed to Lake Istokpoga.

According to the statistics Lt. Knapp provided, there were 144 violations cited in 2001-2002 (March 1

to March 1), 160 violations in 2002-2003, and 228 violations in 2003-2004.

2001-2002 Total Violations	**144**
Fishing without a license	28
Boating violations	7
Bag Limit, Slot Limit, hunting, lingering, etc	12
Arrests	**47**
Boating violations	60
License warnings	26
Bag Limit, Slot Limit, hunting, lingering, etc	11
Warnings	**97**
2002-2003 Total Violations	**160**
Fishing without a license	23
Boating violations	12
Bag Limit, Slot Limit, hunting, lingering, etc	21
Arrests	**56**
Boating violations	80
License warnings	16
Bag Limit, Slot Limit, hunting, lingering, etc	8
Warnings	**104**
2003-2004 Total Violations	**229**
Fishing without a license	54
Boating violations	9
Bag Limit, Slot Limit, hunting, lingering, etc	19
Arrests	**82**
Boating violations	111
License warnings	28
Bag Limit, Slot Limit, hunting, lingering, etc	8
Warnings	**147**

I am sure we are all glad that the FWC has stepped up their enforcement efforts.

News from the FWC

Ever wonder how your fishing skills compare to the tournament fishermen that frequent Lake Istokpoga? Well, thanks to Beacham Furse and Karen Whall of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), we have some numbers that sum up the tournaments held on our lake for the first quarter of 2004. Check them out and see how you do.

Tournaments	17
No. Anglers	802
Total Weight	1537 lb
Avg # of Bass/ angler	2.02
Biggest bass	11.08 lb
Avg. big bass	8.51
Biggest win	30.46 lb
Avg Mean Length	16.65"

SFWMD Funds Intensive Water Quality Investigation of Lake Istokpoga

By Clell Ford,
Highlands County lakes Manager

Last summer, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) agreed to fund a request from the Highlands County Natural Resources Department for an intensive investigation of water quality in Istokpoga. Highlands County has received $109,000 to undertake this study.

Istokpoga, as part of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed, has been implicated as a source of excess nutrients to Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. SFWMD has done a phosphorus budget and assessment of the phosphorus storage capacity of the sediments in the lake. However, those studies did not look at the impact of those nutrients to the lake itself. A study of existing information by County Natural Resources Department staff indicates that nutrients and algae in the lake have increased far out of proportion to in-flowing water concentrations. Current water level regulation practices, which function for flood control and water supply, may play a role in this, though currently uninvestigated nutrient sources within the lake, such as canals and near-shore areas, as well as the lake watershed, may contribute significantly to the observed increases.

The study will investigate nutrients and potential sources of nutrients and other biological indicators to the lake from residential canals, near-shore areas and other in- flow points to Istokpoga. This project will

refine the estimates for phosphorus and other nutrients entering Lake Istokpoga. It will identify sources, such as residential canals and streams, which contribute excess nutrients to Lake Istokpoga. It will determine the relative contribution from specific tributaries compared with internal "cycling" of nutrients in the lake itself. Finally, the project will provide information to support future management strategies for Lake Istokpoga, including development of a lake watershed management master plan, minimum flows and levels, and total maximum daily loads of nutrients for the lake and its watershed.

Field sampling will occur during each season to account for the water level regulation schedule, stream flows, and variations in rainfall and variations in the number of waterfront residents. Sample sites will include in flowing streams, residential canals, restored near-shore habitat areas, near-shore wildlife islands and un-restored portions of the near-shore environment. Open water sites will also be sampled. A total of between thirty and fifty sites will be sampled. An agreement and scope of work are being developed between SFWMD and Highlands County for this project. Sample collection will begin once these documents are in place which is expected to be in April or May.

Did you know that all of the problems in Lake Istokpoga can directly effect the value of your property!

We need your help!!

As you can see from some of the articles in this newsletter, Lake Istokpoga is not as well off as it appears to be. Yes, the fishing is good! Yes, the lake "looks" pretty good! The problem is that looks can be deceiving.

We have a serious hydrilla problem and DEP doesn't currently know how to solve it. We have a phosphorus problem that isn't getting the attention it needs, and predictions are that Lake Istokpoga will be saturated within fifteen years. We potentially have some serious water quality problems, but probably won't know until the water quality study is completed in a year or two.

Did you know that all of these problems can effect your property values!

So you ask, "How can I help?". "I don't know much about any of these issues."

I am glad you asked. You can help by helping us get all of your neighbors to join our association. Our voice with the government agencies is directly proportional to our membership. You need to share what you know about the problems in our lake with your neighbors. Share with them that the Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. is working hard to get these problems resolved, but that we need each of them to become members to help us with this task.

Membership forms are available at the Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce, many of our Associate Members businesses, and from our website.

