

November 2007

The Istokpoga Newswire

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.



Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area; Royce Unit

By Mike McMillian, FWC,

Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental
Area

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA) is composed of 19 sites beginning in the south with Gould Road site located near Venus and ending in the north with the Lake Blue site located near Auburndale; a distance of 75 miles. One of the jewels in the WEA crown is the Royce Unit located along the northwest shore of Lake Istokpoga. Prior to The Florida Fish and Wildlife's (FWC) ownership, the Royce family's 70 year use of the property included cattle grazing and citrus production. Later the family expanded its activities to include eco-tours (buggy rides), hunting opportunities, skeet/trap shooting, and cabin rental.

In 1995, The Nature Conservancy purchased 294 acres of the Royce Ranch. Their goal was to protect a remnant patch of ancient scrub habitat located in the southwest corner of the ranch. Only 10-15% of this rare habitat remains in Florida due to citrus production and development.

Over one million years ago peninsular Florida consisted of a thin sandy ridge (The Lake Wales Ridge) running down the center of modern day peninsular Florida. That's right; the lands under all of the current large coastal cities in peninsular Florida were under water. The sand ridge was over

100 miles long but often no wider than one mile. Plants, animals, and insects made their way along the lower 48 states (at that time the lower 48 states were semi-arid) and onto the sandy ridge. As sea levels rose, only the highest sand dunes along the ridge remained above water. The plants, animals, and insects were trapped on individual islands and evolved their own way of doing things. Many new species evolved to deal with the harsh conditions of island life resulting in one of the highest concentrations of listed species (endangered, threatened, and species of special concern) in North America.

In January of 2002, the state purchased the remaining 2,345 acres of the Royce Ranch for a total of 2,639 acres. The Royce Unit has 3.2 miles of shoreline frontage on Lake Istokpoga and this will be protected from development forever. Additionally, the Royce Unit has one mile of creek frontage on Josephine Creek. Habitats located on the unit include cypress, bayhead (wooded swamp), seasonal wetlands, cutthroat grass seeps (listed species of grass and another vanishing habitat type), ancient scrub and scrubby flatwoods, pine flatwoods, oak hammock, wet prairie, citrus, and bahia grass pastures.

The Royce family did an excellent job of managing this property prior to state ownership and much of it remains in a semi-natural state.

Upcoming plans for the Royce Unit involve several habitat restoration projects. The largest of these projects is slated to begin in late October or early November.

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Special points of interest:

The Friends of Istokpoga Fall Meeting will be held on Thursday Nov. 15, at 7:00 PM. This will be a great meeting. Come and join us and bring your neighbors. See page 3 for more information.

FWC will begin a relatively large-scale hydrologic restoration project. The end result will be a restored 200-acre fresh water marsh, eight seasonal wetlands, and overland flow (rather than ditch flow) to 700 acres of cutthroat seep. Water will enter Lake Istokpoga as sheet flow rather than by ditch. This will result in a reduction of nutrients entering the lake from the Royce Unit.

Additional plans include the restoration of Bahia grass pastures (Bahia grass is an exotic grass in Florida) to original habitat types based on old aerial photographs, and the restoration of former scrub habitat.

If you see smoke, don't panic. One of FWC's main habitat management techniques is prescribed burning. Habitats in Florida have evolved with fire. Some habitats actually depend on fire for their continued existence. The Royce Unit is divided into 26 burn units. Some of these units require fire once per year while others may only require fire once every 60+ years. The local FWC staff are trained in conducting prescribed burns and have all necessary equipment for this endeavor. FWC staff make every attempt to keep smoke off of private citizens.

The public is welcome to hike, bike, bird watch, and horseback ride on the Royce Unit. Trails are open year round and do not require a day-use fee or permit. Trail users are asked to remain on existing trails and roads. Access to and around the citrus grove is prohibited. There are limited hunting opportunities on the Royce Unit as well. FWC host eight one-day dove hunts, four weekend small game hunts, one weekend deer hunt, and two weekend turkey hunts. Additional hunts have been proposed for this unit and if approved, these will

take affect during the 2008 hunting season. Motorized vehicles are not permitted except during hunting season where limited travel by hunters is permitted. FWC staff are present from 8-5 Monday through Friday however wildlife officers may patrol the property any time. If you have questions or comments for FWC staff please phone 699-3740.

Deviation Request to the Water Regulation Schedule

As you have all probably heard or read South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is considering asking the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) for a deviation to Lake Istokpoga's water regulation schedule. The Friends of Istokpoga Board of Directors has been keeping a watchful eye on this ongoing situation. It is your board's intent to follow a similar approach to this request, if it is asked for, as we did for the request earlier this year. At that time SFWMD was only granted a 6 inch deviation instead of the 2 foot deviation they requested. You can keep up-to-date on this situation, on our website (www.istokpoga.org), subscribe to our message group, or come to the next general membership meeting on November the 15th at 7:00 PM. We will keep you informed about the current happenings of their request and actions taken by USACE

What's Happening on Istokpoga

By Bert Galloway, President

There are many projects and events happening on Istokpoga. At this time I bring you up- to-date on things that the Friends of Istokpoga board of directors are working on and other projects that are being preformed by some of the state and local agencies. I will also give you some insight into events that have happened in the last few months.

A: Hydrilla Spraying on Istokpoga

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will

have a private contractor on Lake Istokpoga in November to map out the location of all the hydrilla on the lake. Then they along with Highlands County and the FWC will have a meeting to determine how much and where they will be spraying to control the hydrilla. After a decision is made, the treatment for hydrilla should happen some time after the first of the year. It is the intent of DEP to keep the hydrilla confined to the south end of the lake. In the interim, Highlands County will be doing some small spot control as well as cutting trails through the topped out hydrilla.

B: Arbuckle Creek monitoring of water quality

This is an ongoing project by South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to assess the water quality of the Arbuckle Creek watershed. SFWMD is trying to track down the areas in the watershed that contribute the most phosphorus loading of Arbuckle Creek and subsequently Lake Istokpoga. For more information on this subject see the article in this newsletter by Paul Ritter, SFWMD Analyst.

C: Aquatic Plant Management

The Friends of Istokpoga weed management committee led by Ray Gaiefsky has set out to take pictures of weed control by the different agencies on the lake. This will be a regular project by our weed committee and we should have pictures on our web site and at our membership meeting to share with you, in the near future. This project is still under way but we did encounter problems this summer because of the low water levels. We hope to have a good showing of our progress at the next general membership meeting on the Thursday 15 November at 7 PM.

D: Aquatic Plant Resistance to Herbicides.

Fluridone, also known as Sonar, that has been very effective in the past in controlling hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga can no longer be used. This

is because the hydrilla on Istokpoga has become resistant to the fluridone. At this time, we are told that the DEP will be trying a new herbicide on Lake Cypress in the Kissimmee chain of Lakes. If this treatment works out as well as DEP expects then we may see this herbicide used on Istokpoga in a few years. In the interim the state will control the hydrilla with Aquathol K.

E: Canal Maintenance Dredging Evaluation

Clell Ford is in hopes that this project will go out for bids in the early part of 2008. He is now in the process of getting a cost analysis for the scope of work involved. The hard part of this project is getting a funding source from South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). They (SFWMD) are currently looking for a funding source and are optimistic that they will find one. If all goes as planned we are told that this project should take about two years to finish and that some of the actual dredging could start in the latter part of 2008.

Phase three of this project will be work on the lake itself. This work will make the residential canals accessible during low water levels. We need this work done properly before any new Lake Regulation Schedule could be implemented.

F: Istokpoga Canal Project US Army Corps of Engineers

This 18 month project to enhance the Istokpoga canal is still having some funding problems. This is because congress has yet to pass the federal budget for this fiscal year. The US Army Corps of Engineers however have gotten partial funding for this project and they hope to have the contractor back on the job in the near future. Let us hope that congress puts their noses to the grind stone and they pass this years budget so this project can be completed.

There are three main features

to this project. The one that is most important to Lake Istokpoga is the building of a new control structure (S-67) and demolition of the old one (G-85). This control structure is about a ½ mile east of county road 621. It is old and it is leaking badly. The other two features of this project will build a new marina and boat ramp at US 98 and the Istokpoga canal will be dredged from U.S. 98 to the Kissimmee River. This work, if gets underway soon, should be completed by Dec. of 2008.

G: Spring Lake Pumping Problem

So far this year Spring Lake has not experienced any of last years flooding problems. This is because of the drought situation that we are presently in; but give us one tropical storm or some good rain (which the lake could use) and the flooding problem could reoccur. The good news at this time is that the Spring Lake Improvement District has rented two large pumps so if they do encounter a flooding situation they will react to the problem before it gets out of hand. Spring Lake Improvement District is also working on getting the pumping injunction lifted that was imposed against them by the courts. We would like to see this injunction resolved so they can get back to a normal pumping situation. This would be good for the residents of Spring Lake and also the health of Lake Istokpoga.

H: S-68 Modification Project US Army Corps of Engineers

This project is well under way. This fall the dust is still flying in and around the S-68 structure on county road 621 at the south side of Lake Istokpoga. This is an 18 month project and it will add another gate and a diversion canal just east of the present structure. The first part of this project will involve building a temporary road (which has been completed) for CR-621 to allow the building of the new structure and digging of the diversion canal. At this time the contractor is building a coffer dam at the spot where the new gate will be built. This project is being done to better handle discharges of water from Istokpoga. Look for this project

to be completed by November 2008.

I: Wildlife Island Re-vegetation

Eight of the wildlife islands on Lake Istokpoga have been planted with 2000 native shrubs and trees by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). This past September a team From the FWC weeded one of the islands by Henderson's cove and what they found was very promising for this project. The team found that almost 100% of the new plantings were alive and doing well. They are looking at weeding the rest of the islands in November and December. It is their hope that these islands will serve as a good habitat for wildlife and also make them environmentally friendly to the lake. If this test project works out the FWC will look for funding to do the rest of the wildlife islands on the Lake. Following is a partial list of some of the new plants that you will find on the islands: Live Oak, Bald Cypress, Cabbage Palm, Crape Myrtle, Acacia, Chinaberry and Willow.

Friends of Istokpoga Fall Meeting

The friends of Istokpoga will hold our fall general membership meeting at the Lorida community center on Thursday November the 15th at 7:00 PM. Steve Gornak and Beacham Furse will speak about the FWC Lake Istokpoga Management Plan being developed by the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee.

Also, Dale Knapp, Law Enforcement Officer for the FWC, will give a short presentation on rules and regulations that you need to know when you are out on the lake.

We will also have representatives of various local and state agencies who will be able to answer some of your questions and concerns about the lake.

Please bring your friends and neighbors to this informative meeting. If they are not members of Friends of Istokpoga, have them join our cause.

We need their help in our efforts to keep Istokpoga the Jewel of Highlands County. Remember we as a large group create a voice for Istokpoga that can be heard in the county and the state governments.

There will be refreshments served beginning at 6:45 PM. You will also be able to pay your 2007 membership dues. So come out with your neighbors and participate in our effort to make Istokpoga the true Jewel that it deserves to be. See you November 15th.

South Florida Water Management District Water Monitoring

By Paul Ritter, SFWMD, Staff Environmental Analyst, Okeechobee Service Center

A presentation of the water quality information for the Arbuckle Creek and Lake Arbuckle Basins was made to the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee in September. This is a brief summary of that report.

The South Florida Water Management District monitors the water quality within the Arbuckle Creek and Lake Arbuckle Basins. Information is reported according to "Water Year" which begins on May 1 and goes through April 30. The following information is for Water Year 2007 (WY2007) from May 1, 2006 through April 30, 2007.

The Arbuckle Creek Basin covers approximately 140,172 acres (219 square miles) from Lake Arbuckle to Lake Istokpoga. It is located in northern Highlands County and southern Polk County. This basin includes the south-central area of the Avon Park Air Force Base. The boundary between South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) divides the basin in half just to the west of Arbuckle Creek. During the Water Year 2007, 12 monitoring sites within

the basin were routinely analyzed for total phosphorus (TP) concentration. Eleven sites were monitored by SFWMD and one site was monitored by the US Geological Service.

The Lake Arbuckle Basin covers 105,490 acres (165 square miles) from Lake Arbuckle north to Crooked Lake. The basin is located in northern Highlands County and Southern Polk County. The northwest portion of the Avon Park Air Force base is located within the basin. The boundary between SFWMD and SWFWMD divides the basin in thirds, just to the east of Lake Reedy with the eastern one third in the South Florida Water Management District. The city of Avon Park and the northeast area of the city of Sebring are located within the basin. The area along the Hwy 27 corridor is rapidly being developed for business and residential uses. During the Water Year 2007, nine monitoring sites were routinely analyzed for Total Phosphorus (TP) concentration in the Lake Arbuckle basin. Four sites were monitored by SFWMD and five were monitored by Polk County.

WY2007 was an exceptionally dry year with low amounts of rainfall and record low levels in Lake Okeechobee. In Arbuckle Creek, the Total Phosphorus changed from 90 ppb TP downstream of Lake Arbuckle to 85 ppb TP at Arbuckle Creek at Hwy 98. The small difference is likely due to the reduced amount of runoff from the tributaries within the basin. The discharge structure for the large sod farm near the Sebring Airport was modified to increase the holding time of water before being discharged from the property. This resulted in an approximate 25 percent reduction in the concentration of phosphorus being discharged from that site. Further monitoring is needed to verify these results. In Lake Arbuckle Basin, Livingston Creek had higher TP concentrations than other creeks in the basin. Monitoring by Polk County indicated that water within Lake Livingston also had high TP concentrations. Further investigation is needed to determine the possible source of the phosphorus.

Monitoring sites will be relocated from areas of good water quality to those areas of concern to better determine the possible sources of higher phosphorus. Water quality surveys will be done to locate phosphorus sources. The Lake Arbuckle and Arbuckle Creek basins are included within the Northern Everglades region and phosphorus source controls will be implemented in this region.

Friends of Istokpoga

Message Group and Website

Would you like up-to-date news and information about issues and events that concern or affect Lake Istokpoga? Do you want information when it happens?

There are two tools the Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. (FOI) have provided to help keep you informed. Most of you have probably visited one of them, and that is the Friends of Istokpoga website at www.istokpoga.org. Here we provide a multitude of information about Lake Istokpoga and about FOI. We also provide current event, meeting information, and other items that may concern you. The down side is that you actually have to visit our site to get this information.

Since some of us are very busy and don't always have time to visit a website just to check to see if there is anything new, we have provided a method to keep you informed that doesn't require you to take an active role in getting the information (except for signing up). This is our Message Group on Yahoo. It is open to anyone who signs up. Any hot news we receive is sent to our message group subscribers while the information is still current.

Just visit our website and go to the Information Menu and select "Message Group" to sign up and learn more about this tool.

Lake Istokpoga Management Committee

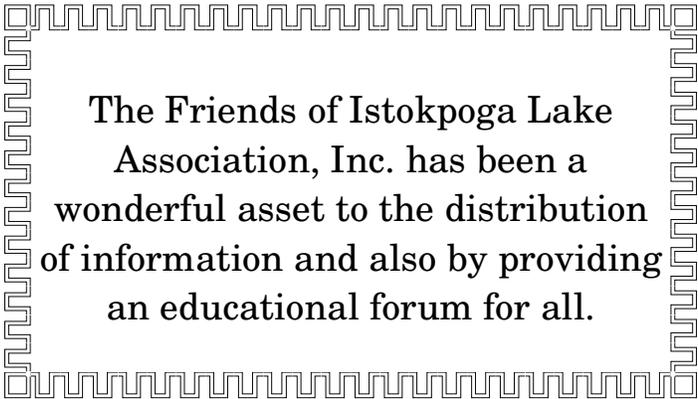
By: Erin McCarta, Lake Management Assistant, Highlands County Natural Resources

As I approach the end of 2007, I have found myself thinking about the events of the past year. In our office, at the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District, there were many activities that have kept us busy. We have several lake projects occurring county-wide, including the management activities on Lake Istokpoga. With such an enormous lake, we are grateful to have several interest groups, citizens, and other regulatory agencies involved in the management of this wonderful asset. It is a rare occasion for our programs to have so many people involved.

Although all of these 'groups' may not always agree, the mixture does provide for effective management options that can address the needs of everyone. This is extremely important for Lake Istokpoga, as it is a lake that provides recreation, healthy fisheries, diverse habitat for wildlife, and water supply. Even though the use of this great lake as a regional water supply is not the most desirable situation, it simply is the situation, and our management goals must incorporate this use. Hopefully, state-sponsored programs will initiate the construction of reservoirs to alleviate the stress of water demand on Lake Istokpoga. But this is a long-term goal.

Some short-term management goals are being drafted by the Lake Istokpoga Management

Committee (LIMC). Currently, there are regular workshops scheduled that are devoted to drafting measurable goals for the lake. We have collected some background data from various sources to provide a starting point. To this date, the workshops have been successful in bringing all interests to common ground. The attendees at the workshops have been instrumental in bringing every concern they have to the table, to be addressed. The concerns have ranged from general communication issues among citizens and agencies to the specifics on how herbicide should be applied to Hydrilla for optimum control. No



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matter how small the concerns seem, they are all important to consider. Even the smallest change in an ecosystem can have enormous consequences.

Having so many people concerned about one lake is invaluable. It requires a lot of coordination, but the end result is well worth the effort. The Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. (FOI) has been a wonderful asset to the distribution of information and also by providing an educational forum for all. This group is also an active sponsor of our Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program, helping to provide more than 6 collection bins on Istokpoga. This program has collected more than 2 miles of used fishing line in the first 6 months of this year. If my calculations are right, approximately 1 mile of that collected line was from Istokpoga alone. For a shallow lake, that's a lot of fishing line!

Remember that all of the LIMC meetings are open to the public, as well as the workshops. To obtain more information on how to get involved, you can ask about it at FOI meetings, ask anyone with SOS Florida Lakes, or you can call our office at 402-6545. We sincerely encourage more participation in the drafting of management strategies as they will most definitely affect all users and residents of Lake Istokpoga.

Time to Renew Your Membership

Your current (2007) membership does not expire until December 31, 2007, we want to encourage to think of renewing your membership. The dues are still \$7.00 for an individual \$12.00 for a family, and \$25.00 to become an Associate Member. Also, new members that join now get the rest of 2007 for free. In other words you can join now and for the same fee get the rest of 2007 and all of 2008.

If you plan to attend our November 15th meeting, please consider renewing your membership then. And, bring a neighbor with you and encourage them to join too.

"Why", you ask? Let me explain. Almost everything we do involves dealing with government agencies and officials. Both of these groups are influenced by numbers. If we go to them and tell them we have a group of ten people that want something to happen, do you think we will have much influence? No? You are right! If we go with a few hundred, we start to get their attention. As our numbers increase, so does our influence. This should tell you that the more members we get the more effective we can become.

So, again, we ask you to contact your neighbors and tell them how important it is that they join us in our fight to keep our lake healthy and beautiful.

Friends of Istokpoga Lake
Association, Inc.

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