

Making it **CLEAR**

The mission of FOLA is the restoration of Lake Apopka and surrounding wetlands



May 2002

Message from the President

FOLA has been extremely busy with all the projects you see listed in this newsletter. We must continue as watchdogs and advocates for continued restoration projects in the basin but we have also begun our proposals for future protection and enjoyment of a restored lake system.

Our Development Design Guidelines have been well received and the two most significant developable lakefront parcels have now been submitted following our requests, with natural upland buffers along the shoreline and no deeded lakefront lots and the Lake County Commission has passed an ordinance based on the Guidelines. We have now completed the first phase of our Greenways, Trails, Recreational and Ecotourism Opportunities project and it is very exciting. The conceptual master plan showing a loop trail around the lake and a number of proposed trailhead sites will be presented at our meeting on June 5 at 7:00 P.M. We are now in the process of raising funds for Phase II, which will include design and implementation. The results will be a regional project that offers the public access with many opportunities to enjoy the lake and for environmental education programs.

Our FOLA Board of Directors continues to meet the first Thursday of each month at 4:00 P.M. in Little Hall. We have difficult decisions to make as we work toward

our goals of restoring and protecting the lake. We are frequently forced to try to understand difficult technical or controversial issues. Environmental advocacy becomes more difficult all the time. Many self-proclaimed environmentalists approach the issues in adversarial, negative, uncompromising and unrealistic ways and they become ineffective and written off as protest groups who have little effect on the real problems. Others are willing to cave in on the major issues to accomplish their own agendas or ego-demands. In my years of working with many activists, I have also seen small numbers of people who did their homework, presented realistic solutions and continued to focus their efforts on the issues, have a positive effect on the problem. I have also seen the opposite, as well-meaning people took the wrong approach and ended up hurting the cause.

I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of our organization over the years. We have had a positive effect and we have gained the respect of regulatory agencies. We need to continue our efforts and we need the continued help and support of our members. If you are willing to serve on our Board, please let me know. The rewards are worth the efforts!

Respectfully Submitted by Jim Thomas, President

FOLA's Greenways and Trails Project

As you know, FOLA has long been concerned about the restoration of the lake and protection of the basin. With the considerable investment already made, we feel the public should have adequate access to these resources and that every opportunity should be taken to provide as many economic and recreational amenities as possible.

With the help and support of all eight jurisdictions in the Lake Apopka basin and SJRWMD, FOLA hired a professional planning firm, Land Design Innovations, Inc., and they have completed a conceptual master plan which includes a loop trail around the lake and a series of trailheads designed for ecotourism, environmental education and recreational activities.

With the completion of Phase I we have been busy visiting all the commissions and councils to seek continuing support as we move into Phase II of the project, which includes design and initial implementation processes. During this presentation we ask for the following from each jurisdiction:

A critical review of the conceptual master plan and

the comments from elected officials and staff members.

Adoption of a resolution supporting this process.

Assignment of appropriate staff members to work with design and implementation teams in the next phase.

Assistance in funding Phase II. (We will request \$5,000 from each of the eight jurisdictions).

Long-term support in the implementation of this project.

The map of the Greenways and Trails Master Plan shows the major features of the system and their locations.

FOLA will present the conceptual master plan to their membership at the public meeting scheduled for June 5 at 7:00 P.M. in Tanner Hall in Winter Garden. Anyone interested in reviewing this project is welcome to attend.

State of the Lake

While we have been disappointed that the full scale restoration plan for the lake has not been implemented, we have agreed that we need all the answers regarding toxicity before we create marshes and habitats. Things are happening, however, and limited programs are being conducted:

Duda Sub-East Pilot Restoration Project: The District and NRCS have received permission from the USFWS to begin flooding a 700-acre portion of the former Duda property in the NSRA. This will be the first reflooding of the former farmlands since the bird die-off in 1998-99, and this area was selected because of the low levels of pesticide residues in the soil. Careful monitoring of the hydrology, bird use, and pesticide residues in fish, sediments, and water will provide valuable information for the entire restoration program. Project initiation (soil saturation) is targeted for June 3, 2002.

Bioaccumulation Study: This study is being conducted by Dr. Tim Gross of the USGS at UF, and it will measure the bioaccumulation of pesticides in invertebrates, fish and wading birds. The pesticide investigations are designed to reassess bioaccumulation rates from soils to prey organisms, and from prey to birds. It is a necessary step for development of a management plan for the North Shore Restoration Area (NSRA), and results will be also be applicable to other programs designed to restore damaged agricultural lands to a more natural condition. One phase of this 3-part study is complete, and the remaining phases are underway.

Marsh Flowway: Consultation with USFWS on operation of the flowway will be initiated in June 2002, and if permission is granted and the lake level comes up, Phase I of the flowway should be operational in the fall of 2002.

Gizzard Shad Harvest: The low lake level has limited catch efforts, nevertheless, nearly 150,000 lbs. of gizzard

shad has been harvested since October 2001. A new dock facility on District lands in the North Shore Restoration Area is nearing completion and will facilitate commercial shad harvests in the future.

Hydrilla Control: District staff have located and treated hydrilla in the Gourd Neck Spring.

The lake levels are extremely low. While this is allowing considerable weed growth, it should also have some positive benefits if the sediments continue to oxidize and consolidate.

Wasteload Allocation Rule

To clear the water in Lake Apopka the Florida Legislature directed the St. John's River Water Management District to adopt a rule to limit the phosphorous(P) discharges going into the Lake. In mid 2000 the District scientists determined that the P loading from new development should not exceed existing pre-development levels. The District found the current storm water regulations inadequate. FOLA has worked with the District staff to develop a rule which

- (1) increases the volume of storm water to be treated;
- (2) allows for additional options and methods of treatment;
- (3) adds specific monitoring requirements for each stormwater treatment system; and addresses projects that divert water from locations which currently do not contribute run off to Lake Apopka.

FOLA is delighted that the rule has now been published and hope that it will be adopted by the District Governing Board in June 2002.

Audubon Center for Lake Apopka?

Orange Audubon Society (OAS), one of the largest Audubon chapters in Florida, is considering establishing an Audubon Center in the Lake Apopka Restoration Area. The center would be located on the north or northeast side of the lake on land managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

One reason OAS is interested in establishing a center there is that the area ranks as one of the top birding sites in Florida. The north shore has been rated as having the third highest number of shorebird species (38) in Florida. Only Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park have recorded more species. Quite a feat for an inland site!

In addition, the area has been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International and the National Audubon Society. Over 220 bird species have been seen here - including at least 14 listed as Endangered, Threatened or Species of Special Concern. IBAs are considered critical to the survival of birds and other wildlife.

It is obvious why people come from all over the world to observe the birds around Lake Apopka.

An additional reason to locate the center on Lake Apopka is that nature education facilities are lacking in the area. Audubon Centers are intended to serve the whole community with educational programming aimed at people of all ages and backgrounds. It is hoped that school children from the surrounding counties would be able to visit on field trips and get hands-on experience there.

Information about the Lake Apopka restoration process would also be provided.

If the center is built, it would likely include classrooms, educational displays, nature trails, a butterfly garden, and native plant specimens. Courses on nature photography and wildlife and plant identification would be offered. An Audubon Center in the north shore area would complement the Oakland Nature Preserve on the south shore.

An Audubon Center would be a wonderful addition to the area and to the proposed greenway and trail system around the Lake. It would be a beneficial educational and ecotourism resource.

New Head of Restoration to Speak at FOLA Public Meeting

Dr. Gian Basili, who has been named to head the restoration project for Lake Apopka, will speak at the FOLA public meeting on June 5th about the status of the restoration process.

Dr. Basili holds a B.S. in Biology from Colorado College and a M.S. and Ph. D. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Before joining the SJRWMD in 1999, he held several academic positions and administered a number of research grants. He is the former director of ornithology for the Florida Audubon Society. It was in his capacity as Audubon's chief ornithologist the he became directly involved in the bird issues at Lake Apopka. Over the past three years, he has

worked as a land acquisition planner and a technical program manager in the District's Division of Land Management. In those roles, he assisted with acquisition of farms and fringe parcels on Lake Apopka's north shore, and was project manager for the Central Florida Beltway Mitigation Program that funded numerous projects in the Apopka watershed. He also managed the final phases of the restoration project at the 3000-acre Orange Creek Muck Farm in the Ocklawaha River Basin.

FOLA congratulates Dr. Basili and welcomes him to the project.

ONP UPDATES

Boardwalk Construction Begins

The Oakland Nature Preserve celebrated a red ribbon cutting to mark the beginning of construction of our 3,000 linear feet of boardwalk from the heart of the Preserve on the West Orange Trail through the pristine wetlands to the shores of Lake Apopka. The \$600,000 project will be completed in about six months by Coquina Engineering, Inc. Included with this construction will be a 900 square foot pavilion and lakeside dock to be used as classrooms in our environmental education programs.

The boardwalk project represents the partnering of several private and public entities with about half of the money coming from each sector. The ceremony was attended by many of the ONP workday volunteers as well as several dignitaries from supporting organizations and their families. In attendance were Commissioner Teresa Jacobs, her aide Graciela Noriega, and Rick Baird of Orange County EPD; also in attendance were Trustees Jim Dexter and Kirk Ardaman of the Ella B. Sadler Foundation as well as Representative Fred Brummer of the Florida State Legislature, and Mayor Jon VanderLey, Councilmen Kathy Starks, Bill Dudzinski, Mike Satterfield, and Town Manager Jay Evans from the Town of Oakland.

ONP will now begin a major effort to sell boards on the Boardwalk for \$25 each. Each \$25 donation will be tax

deductible and help ONP pay for the over 6,000 boards on this marvelous nature trail. This donation will also entitle you to an annual Sponsor membership for the current year in ONP, and your name on a brass plaque for contributors. Contributions can be sent to ONP, Box 98, Oakland, FL 34760.

Adopt-A-Plot Program Initiated

The Oakland Nature Preserve membership has begun restoration of the upland portions of the site with real progress already evident. There is now a need to focus a lot of attention on routine maintenance, focusing on continued removal of exotic species and planting and encouraging the growth of desirable species. To accomplish this we have established an "Adopt-A-Plot" program whereby individuals, families or organized groups can adopt plots of varying sizes and become responsible for continuing the restoration. Training programs will be held, plots are established and clearly marked and no heavy work is necessary. Please consider adding your help to the many volunteers who have initiated this exciting project. Call Jim Thomas at (407) 656-8277 or Jack Amon at (407) 656-9692 or attend our publicized training sessions to adopt your plot. The next session will meet at the Trail Shelter on June 8th at 9:00 AM.

Membership Application for Friends of Lake Apopka

Name _____
Business/Organization _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Phone / Fax / email _____
Volunteer / Interests _____

- _____ Student or Youth—\$3.00
_____ Individual—\$10.00
_____ Family—\$15.00
_____ Sponsor, Corporation or Organization—\$25.00
_____ Patron—\$100.00

Please mail this form with your check. Your interest in **Friends of Lake Apopka** is vital to the ongoing restoration effort.

Make check payable to: FOLA

Mail to: Friends of Lake Apopka
PO Box 770355
Winter Garden, FL 34777



Public Meeting

**June 5th, 2002 at 7:00 PM
Tanner Hall - Winter Garden**

Plan to Attend

FOLA will host a public meeting on June 5, at 7:00 P.M. Tanner Hall in Winter Garden. The agenda for the meeting includes SJRWMD staff member Dr. Basili, who has recently been appointed to head the restoration project. Dr. Basili will update the membership on the restoration process. Land Design Innovation, Inc., the design firm hired by FOLA to oversee our latest project, which identified opportunities for Greenways, Trails, Recreation and Ecotourism in the Apopka basin, will give a presentation on the completion of Phase I and an overview of the goals for Phase II (see the complete article on this project in the newsletter). FOLA President, Jim Thomas, will update everyone on all other current issues. Anyone interested is encouraged to attend this very important meeting.

Friends of Lake Apopka
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