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*The Newsletter for all the Friends of Lake Apopka*

# Making it **CLEAR**

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

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**April 2004**

## **The Trails are Coming Together**

FOLA sponsored a ceremony on Saturday January 24 to celebrate installation of the first trail marker for the Lake Apopka Loop Trail. More than 50 people turned out to hear speakers from Lake and Orange counties, SJRWMD and the Office of Greenways and Trails in Tallahassee. The event ended with the unveiling of the trail marker on the West Orange Trail near Amon Pavilion at the Oakland Nature Preserve.

Lake County is making progress on several trails around the west side of Lake Apopka with sections of the South Lake Trail under various phases of planning and construction. Phase II, known as the missing link that will connect the West Orange Trail and the Lake Minneola Scenic Trail, is in the design phase. Plans should be finalized by May and construction will begin sometime this summer.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has awarded the first design phase of the South Lake Trail Phase III and IV to Keith & Schnarrs Engineering firm. This phase determines the final alignment of the corridor and the environmental impacts. These phases of the trail will connect the Lake Minneola Scenic Trail to the Van Fleet Trail (about 14.5 miles). This will complete the South Lake trail, which will be 24.5 miles in length.

Additionally, Lake County plans to use a corridor along Black Still Lake Road as the connection north for another portion of the Lake Apopka Loop Trail. Verbal agreements with developers along the corridor for right-of-way donations are already in place.

Lake County also has plans to construct a bicycle/pedestrian overpass over SR 50 near the National Train-

ing Center and to construct a trail to Lake Louisa State Park.



In Orange County, plans are coming together to assemble a corridor for the Pine Hills Trail which will connect it from Clarcona-Ocoee Road to the West Orange Trail. Also in the works is research into a connection from the West Orange Trail to Magnolia Park. There is budget money for West Orange Trail Phase IV, but not for a few years. Phase IV should add 8 miles of trail and connect Kelly Park and Wekiva Springs State Park.

## **Phosphorus Levels Encouraging**

Phosphorus (P) is the nutrient that causes algae blooms in most Central Florida lakes, so P data becomes very important to the scientists working on restoration. The P levels in Lake Apopka were always high because of leaching, and pumping of fertilizers used on the farms. Until 1995, these P levels averaged 220 parts per million (ppm). After the farms ceased operation, the P levels dropped, averaging 100 to 150 ppm. During the drought they peaked to around 300 ppm because of the concentration in lower water levels and the oxidation of exposed organic deposits. Sampling in September and October this year shows a dramatic drop with current levels about 62 ppm. This fluctuation is seasonal and the dramatic fluctuation seems to be typical of aquatic systems in recovery. Most of the restoration projects planned for Lake Apopka are focused on reducing phosphorus in the lake (shad removal, marsh flow-way, and the phosphorus limitation rule applied to new development).

## Message from the President

On Saturday February 21 the FOLA Board had the opportunity to take a field trip to the restoration area on the north shore of Lake Apopka. It was very impressive to say the least. So impressive that we are organizing a field trip for our membership so you can see what is happening for yourself! (see article in this newsletter).

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the current water quality data from Lake Apopka and the positive indications resulting from examining the probable causes and effects. It is exciting to note that the total phosphorus concentrations, which spiked while lake levels were rising, have since dropped to seasonal low values. The concentrations are currently approaching the restoration target of 55.0 parts per billion. Chlorophyll, an index used to measure algal abundance in the lake, has also dropped, improving the light availability and promoting the growth of submerged plants around the lake. The staff at St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) has found many patches of chara, eelgrass and hydrilla in the lake (hydrilla is being treated as quickly as it is detected).

Improvements in water quality during the fall/winter season are common, however the rapid return of good conditions following the drought suggests that there will be no long-term adverse effects from it. The return of normal water levels has allowed the shad harvest project to continue this year, and since early December through February 697,000 pounds of shad have been removed from the lake. St. Johns staff member Walt Godwin is working with another wholesaler who should be able to remove an estimated 200,000 more pounds from Lake Apopka this year.

In addition to the shad harvest, the Marsh Flow-Way began operation in mid-November and is slowly increasing the volume of water it treats each day. Since operation began all the flows out of Lake Apopka down the Apopka Beauclair Canal have been treated by the system, with a portion of the treated water returning to Lake Apopka. The Marsh Flow-Way has removed 344 tons of solids, 20.9 tons of nitrogen, and exported .55 tons of phosphorus. Because all four cells are now removing phosphorus, the exported phosphorus numbers keep decreasing. Flow rate is approximately 157 cubic feet per second. Dissolved oxygen levels are being monitored and staff is evaluating options for increasing the D.O. levels if necessary.

A third project coming online is the expansion of the flooding on the former Duda farm. Agreements with the USDA and USFWS are in place to allow flooding of approximately 2,000 acres. Phosphorus loading from these areas to the lake should decline as the wetlands develop.

It is also worth noting that numerous rookeries are being established in this area increasing the diversity and numbers of birds on the north shore. This is really exciting to see.

A recent proposal has been presented by Lake County Water Authority to design an expensive alum treatment system to treat water flowing from Lake Apopka through the Apopka-Beauclair Canal. We have great concerns about long-term effects of alum on natural systems and recommend a more thorough evaluation of the restoration progress before such a major step is taken.

As we seek to find the solutions for the decline in water quality of so many of the lakes in Florida we believe it is important to note that the scale and the complexity of the restoration process on Lake Apopka are monumental. The staff of SJRWMD has worked hard to improve environmental conditions in and around the lake, including performing cutting edge research that has demonstrated far-reaching impacts of agriculture on environmentally sensitive lands. These results will be used on a global scale as agricultural areas are restored. The staff at SJRWMD is to be commended for their determination and dedication to this goal. The methods used to restore the lake and wetlands on the north shore have to be science-based.

The fact that the buyout of the farms stopped the dumping of tons of phosphorus into Lake Apopka and the Harris Chain from Apopka-Beauclair Canal should be given great credit. However, a single event or management strategy is not likely by itself to improve the health of this large and complex ecosystem. Improvement will continue as a result of the implementation of multiple projects. We believe that it is critical to understand the complexity of this restoration effort and to keep focus on the whole project.

Mona Phipps, President, Friends of Lake Apopka

### Thank You to SJRWMD

We would like to thank the board members and staff at St. Johns River Water Management District for acknowledging FOLA for our partnership with them in opening the Lake Apopka Marsh Flow-Way. On March 5, Executive Director, Kirby Green presented FOLA with a beautiful plaque that we are very proud to display. Our organization will continue to support SJRWMD in any way possible. We are very aware of their continued efforts and hard work to restore this great natural resource.

## News from Oakland Nature Preserve

### WIN an 18' REGAL Bowrider with I/O Engine

Want to go boating in high style and help a great cause? Then don't miss the chance to buy raffle tickets to win a Regal 18-foot bowrider, complete with 4.3 L I/O motor and trailer.

A cooperative effort of local Rotary clubs who have joined forces as part of the Rotary International Centennial Celebration, the proceeds of this fundraiser raffle will be used to build the Environmental Education Center at the Oakland Nature Preserve.

Tickets for the boat raffle are \$10 and can be purchased from a Rotarian from any of the following clubs: Apopka, Lake Buena Vista, Maitland, Ocoee, South

Lake County, Southwest Orlando, South Orlando, West Orlando, Winter Garden and Windermere, or from FOLA and ONP board members or at the ONP office on Machete Trail in Oakland.

Look for the boat to be displayed in various locations throughout the area until the drawing, which will be held on June 26, 2004 at the Rotary District 6980 Awards and Guards Ceremony. The boat was generously donated by The Boat Tree.

Reported by George Poelker

### Docent Recruiting Program

The **Oakland Nature Preserve** is seeking volunteer docents to answer questions and give tours to raise public awareness about its mission to promote understanding of the fragile balances among land, water, mankind, and the environment by EDUCATING present and future generations about the natural ecosystems of the Lake Apopka Basin and by RESTORING and CONSERVING the lands within the Preserve. Interested persons should be

able to commit to 3 to 4 hours a month (not necessarily all on the same day), be physically capable of walking all the trails in the preserve, and enjoy talking with people and spending time outdoors. Knowledge of the flora and fauna of upland sandhill and wetland ecosystems, and the history and restoration plans of Lake Apopka are helpful, but not necessary, as training will be provided.

**Please contact Jackie Osbun at 352-242-1321 if interested. Thank you for supporting the Oakland Nature Preserve!**

### Magnolia Park Bluegrass Festival - May 1, 2004 - 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Visit us at the FOLA/ONP booth at the Annual Bluegrass Festival at Magnolia Park, 2929 Binion Rd, on the East shore of Lake Apopka. Bring your lawn chairs and listen to the wonderful sounds of bluegrass music from local bands.

### Membership Application for Friends of Lake Apopka

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Business/Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone / Fax / Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Volunteer / Interests \_\_\_\_\_

Send EMAIL Newsletter

- \_\_\_\_\_ 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

## **Fieldtrip To The Farms**

**May 1, 2004**

No matter what you hear about the restoration, seeing the process for yourself is a very rewarding experience. FOLA encourages you to sign up to take a fieldtrip to the farms on the north shore of Lake Apopka to learn about the restoration first hand. SJRWMD staff members Dr. Gian Basili and Jim Peterson will be on hand as guides.

We will meet at the University of Florida – IFAS Mid-Florida Research and Education

Center, 2725 Binion Road (next door to Magnolia Park), where we will board mini buses for the tour. Wear comfortable shoes and bring your camera and binoculars. Space is limited and there is a small charge of \$5.00 per person. Please be on time for us to leave the parking area at 9:00 A.M. FOLA will furnish drinks.

**Call Mona Phipps at (407) 656-8277 to reserve your seat.**

### **Lake Apopka March Bird Survey**

**Pamela Bowen, SJRWMD**

The weather was sunny and warm with breezy to windy conditions. The group surveyed seven transects including areas 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 13. The total number of birds recorded was 5,640 (compared to 8,289 recorded in February 2004). A total of 87 species was identified; 85 species were recorded in February 2004. The largest numbers of birds were recorded on Duda (1,575) and Lust Rd (1,372). The highest species diversity was recorded on Duda (56 species), Lake Level Rd North (49 species), and Lust Rd (49 species).

Red-winged Blackbird (1682), Tree Swallow (748), Cattle Egret (409), Glossy Ibis (382), and Common Moorhen (289) were the most frequently observed species. The Northern Harrier was the most frequently observed raptor (83). The first State survey. Glossy Ibis was the most frequently recorded wading bird

(382). Tree Swallows (748), Barn Swallows (41), and Purple Martins (7) also occurred. The Red-tailed Kite of the year was also observed during the survey in larger numbers than in previous months. Only five warbler species were observed and included Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat. Rare or unique sightings for the area included Sora, Limpkin, and Herring Gull.