The Istokpoga Newswire

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.



Hydrilla Treatment Update

In the continuing commitment to manage invasive plants in Florida public waters, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) contracted with Remetrix LLC to conduct acoustic mapping of the hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga during the fall of 2007. Bathymetric maps as well as maps illustrating submersed plant coverage and volume in the water column can be viewed on the Friends of Istokpoga website at www.istokpoga.org. The maps indicate that hydrilla has increased in biovolume since the last large-scale control effort conducted in April and May of 2007. DEP and Highlands County Parks and Recreation personnel have been closely monitoring hydrilla levels in Lake Istokpoga throughout the past year to adapt the hydrilla management plan in cooperation with members the Lake Istokpoga Interagency Group. The current management goals are to keep hydrilla out of the northern portion of the lake as long as possible, keep hydrilla in the southern portion of the lake at manageable levels, and keep the area near the S68 flood gate structure open. As always, hydrilla management plans are developed to conserve or enhance native aquatic plants within the lake, and provide access and navigation, particularly to boat ramps and fish camps.

To meet these objectives, management staff from DEP and Highlands County Parks and Recreation proposed treating hydrilla in the south end of Lake Istokpoga with Aquathol K herbicide (manufactured by UPI, Inc.)

that would lower the biovolume of the existing hydrilla, especially hydrilla at or just below the water surface, to keep it under maintenance control. The proposal was discussed at the Lake Istokpoga Hydrilla Management Subcommittee Meeting to inform interested groups and stakeholders within Highlands County and the surrounding area of the proposed treatment. Erica Van Horn, and Matt Phillips of DEP, Dr. Mike Netherland with the US Army Corps of Engineers stationed at the University of Florida, and representatives of UPI were present to answer questions regarding the treatment proposal.

On March 4th and 5th 2008 hydrilla was treated in four plots strategically located to target areas with the greatest biovolume on the southern end of the lake. (A map of the treatment areas is available on the Friends of Istokpoga website, www.istokpoga.org. The herbicide administered was Aquathol K liquid formulation at a rate of 2 ppm and was applied by helicopter. This herbicide has been used throughout Florida for more than 40 years for small and intermediate size hydrilla control. It is also used for larger treatments to control hydrilla when there are strains of hydrilla that are resistant to fluridone, an herbicide used in whole lake or large-scale treatments of hydrilla. Aquathol K is a contact-type herbicide meaning that it acts fairly quickly to control hydrilla with which it comes in contact. It does not bioaccumulate and has no fishing restrictions associated with its use. The timing of the hydrilla treatment was chosen to enhance the efficacy of hydrilla control with as little impact as possible on the multitude of additional uses

Inside this issue:

Hydrilla Treatment Update	1—2
Lake Wales Ridge Environmental Area Update	2
Lake Istokpoga Management Committee 2008 FOI Officers Glades Electric Coop Mtg. Next FOI Meeting	3
Free FOI T-Shirts	3–4
What's Happening?	4–5
Update on Istokpoga Water levels	5
Snail Kites on Istokpoga	6
Membership Application	7
Associate Members	8

Special points of interest:

The Friends of Istokpoga Annual Meeting will be held on Thursday May 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.

and functions of the lake.

After the treatment, further monitoring of the site will be conducted by DEP and Highlands County. Specific points using GPS will be located within and surrounding each treatment plot and hydrilla will be examined to evaluate the efficacy of the treatment. Monitoring was conducted the day of and one day after the treatment and will continue on a weekly basis until the full impact on the hydrilla is achieved. Water samples will be analyzed by Dr. Netherland to monitor any herbicide movement within the water column. DEP and Highlands County personnel will continue to survey the area and map the extent of hydrilla control. A summary of the treatment results will be shared at the next scheduled Istokpoga Hydrilla Management Subcommittee meeting.

Erica Van Horn Regional Biologist Department of Environmental Protection

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Lake Wales Ridge Environmental Area —Royce Unit Update

By Mike McMillian, FWC

One of the crowned jewels of the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA) is the Royce Unit (RU) located on the northwestern shores of Lake Istokpoga. This purchase added approximately 2,700 acres to the WEA and preserved 3.2 miles of Lake Istokpoga shoreline and 1.0 mile of Josephine Creek shoreline from development. In January 2002, the RU was purchased from the Royce family who primarily used the land for agricultural purposes; grazing and citrus

production. Currently, activities permitted on RU are hiking, biking, hunting in season, and horseback riding.

To accommodate ranching practices, the former owners changed the landscape by altering the hydrology and converting native habitat into Bahia grass pastures. Bahia grass is an exotic grass from Argentina. This was a typical practice of ranch owners in southern Florida. A ditch system was designed to remove water from the property quickly. Several seasonal wetlands (typically wet during the rainy season) were converted into barrow pits for permanent water. The Royce family should be commended for keeping a portion of the property in a seminative state.

The habitats on the RU are; Bahia grass pasture, Hermathria grass pasture (another exotic grass), cutthroat grass seep (rare habitat), scrub (rare habitat), flatwoods, bayhead, cypress strand, seasonal wetland, wet prairie, citrus grove, and oak hammock. Under the states ownership, land use goals have shifted from agriculture to habitat restoration. In this regard, FWC has secured funding to restore a 200-acre freshwater marsh known as the Peace Pond (resembles a Peace symbol from the air). The former marsh was drained and converted to pasture. This large scale hydrologic project began last week after years of preparation. The project will also restore the overland flow of water (sheet flow) to 700 acres of cutthroat seep, restore seven seasonal wetlands, and will restore the natural waterway leading from the Peace Pond to Lake Istokpoga. In preparation for the hydrologic restoration project, pine trees were harvested from the site (over 450 loads). The pines would have been killed by excessive water and therefore were sold as pulp and saw timber. Old aerial photographs of the RU depict a virtually treeless cutthroat grass swale where water sheet flowed across the landscape into Lake Istokpoga. Pine trees numbers no doubt skyrocketed at RU due to

alterations in fire, fire frequency, and hydrology.

Three additional projects on Royce involve upland habitat restoration. As you enter the property, the Bahia grass pasture on your right is being restored to flatwoods. Flatwoods habitat is comprised of various grass species, palmetto, herbaceous plants (flowering plants), and a sparse pine overstory. The first step in this process is the elimination of the Bahia grass and other exotics. After several herbicide treatments, the pasture will have very little vegetation. The next step will be the re-seeding process. A similar flatwoods area will be located, burned, and when plants seed out, they will be collected and spread over the Royce pasture. Once the ground story vegetation has been restored, pine trees will be planted. FWC rerouted the fencing on this pasture to eliminate cross fencing and make moving around the pasture easier. Once planting begins this area may require an electric fence to keep feral hogs out.

The two remaining projects involve the restoration of scrub habitat. Scrub restoration is in its infancy and some of what we are doing on Royce is trial and error. Our goal is to restore a 22-acre portion of the citrus grove and a 55-acre area cleared in preparation for citrus. Again, exotic plants will be removed prior to any planting. Once exotics have been removed, scrub plants (oaks, lyonias, palmettos, rare and/or endangered species) will be planted. The scrub plants will have been started in a greenhouse before planting in the field. The oaks for example require one year in the greenhouse before they are planted in the field.

If you have any questions or concerns about the RU or any other property managed by FWC along the ridge, please feel free to call Mike McMillian at 863-699-3740. The FWC staff on the Lake Wales Ridge hopes you come out and enjoy the property.

Lake Istokpoga Management Committee

About 10 years ago the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners created the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee (LIMC) for the purpose of keeping the Commissioners informed and advised on Lake Istokpoga. This Committee, cochaired by Clell Ford, Highlands County Lakes Manager; and Tom Champeau, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) meets 4 times a year (this year: April 17, June 12, September 11, and December 11) at the Highlands County Ag Center at 9:00 am, meeting room 3. All meetings are open to the public and public comments are always accepted.

Regular voting membership on the LIMC is representative of Lake Istokpoga stakeholders. Voting committee members represented are Angler-Hunter Community by Steven Klutey, Environmental Community by Paul Gray, Lake Placid Community by David Boyer, Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. by Bill Dwinell, Lorida Community by Gary Albin, Highlands County Lakes Association by Dick Reaney, Highlands County Homeowners Association by Jack Richie, Fish Camp Owners by Ray Schirtz, Range Agriculture by Joe Collins and the Istokpoga Marsh Watershed Project by Paul Phypers, Jr.

In addition to the 4 regularly scheduled meetings, additional meetings are called as need arises and sub-committees meet on a near monthly basis. One of the strengths of the LIMC is the availability of interagency representatives from Highlands Natural Resources, Highlands County Aquatic Weed Control, FFWCC, and Department of

Environmental Protection (DEP), South Florida Water Management District, US Army Corp of Engineers, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

LIMC is an advisory group and makes recommendations to the County Commissioners. It does not make or enforce policies regarding the Lake Istokpoga Water shed or the lake itself. If you have an interest in attending a LIMC meeting, note the dates on your calendar or contact Clell Ford, (863) 402-6545 or cford@hcbcc.org.

2008 Officers for Friends of Istokpoga

At the February 14th General Membership Meeting held at the Lorida Community Center the slate of members to serve as the Board of Directors for 2008 was presented and voted into office by acclamation. Members elected to the board were: Gary Albin, Carol Derr, Bert Galloway, Virginia Greene, Jeanne Porter and Ken Stebbins with one board position remaining unfilled. Officers were selected by the Directors at the next regularly scheduled Board of Directors Meeting on March 14th with President Bert Galloway, Vice President Gary Albin, Secretary Virginia Greene, Treasurer Jeanne Porter, and Carol Derr to head up a committee to follow the Highlands County Land Use Plan and zoning changes being recommended to the **Highland County Board of County** Commissioners.

Friends of Istokpoga at The Glades Electric Coop

And the Winner Is ---

For the past 8 years, Friends of Istokpoga has enjoyed the opportunity to participate at the Glades Electric Cooperative Annual Membership Meeting. Those of you who have attended know about the "little blue ticket" given away at our booth which is good for one chance to win a

\$100.00 bill. The drawing for the lucky winner is always done toward the end of all the prize drawings just before the truck give-away. One way to increase your chance of winning is to sign-up for membership or renew your membership while visiting the booth. We award 5 additional tickets to folks who sign up for an individual membership and 10 additional chances if you enroll as a family.

This year the lucky winner was from Sebring; Francis Mueller. Congratulations! And, a special thank-you to Glades Electric Cooperative for making it all possible.

Friends of Istokpoga General Membership Meeting May 15

Mark your calendar now. The next regular scheduled General Membership Meeting for the Friends of Istokpoga will be held on May 15th at the Lorida Community Center. Refreshments available by 6:45 pm with the meeting beginning at 7:00 pm. The program will include a current progress report on; weed (hydrilla) treatment program, funding for the canal cleaning project, the S-68 Spillway structure, the progress on the Istokpoga Canal water retention structure, and the boat ramp on US 98 with access to the Kissimmee River.

Special guest, Steven Gornak, FWC, will update us on all the things they are doing on Lake Istokpoga. Representatives from Lake Istokpoga Management Committee and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) will also be in attendance to answer questions.

FREE FOIT-SHIRT

An attractive new navy blue Friends of Istokpoga t-shirt with pocket, screen printed with our colorful logo is available to new or renewing members (while the supply lasts). The shirt can be viewed on the web site www.istokpoga.org. A

three year Individual Membership is \$21.00, while a 3 year Family Membership is \$36.00. A 3 year Associate Membership is \$75.00. With both the Family and Associate 3 year memberships you will receive 2 shirts.

If you are already current for the 2008 year and would like the shirt just send the balance for the additional 2 years. Shirts are also available with any \$10.00 donation. When up-grading to a 3 year membership please send you requested t-shirt size. Sizes are currently available for M, L, XL, 2XL and 3XL.

Shirts will also be available at the May $15^{\rm th}$ General Membership Meeting.

What's Happening on Istokpoga?

Lake Istokpoga is a busy place with many events and happenings on our wonderful lake. At this time we will try to bring you up-to-date on things that your board of directors is working on and other projects that are being preformed by some of the state and local agencies. Also, we will try to give you some insight into events that have happened in the last few months. If you have any questions about or ideas for this column please Email them to friends@istokpoga.org.

A: Hydrilla Spraying on Istokpoga

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had a private contractor do a Hydrilla treatment to 2074 acres at the south end of the lake on March 4-5, 2008. This treatment was done in four locations by helicopter using the herbicide Aquathol K. It appears from all indications that the treatment was successful.

Also, Highlands County will

be doing some small spot control as well as cutting trails through the topped out Hydrilla.

Note: It is the intent of DEP to keep the Hydrilla confined to the south end of the lake. If you notice any excessive growth of Hydrilla in the north end of the lake please notify the county at 863-402-6813 so they can investigate.

A email received from Erica Van Horn just before going to press:

"We have seen much of the hydrilla within our treatment sites effected and most of it has fallen out. The herbicide used Aquathol K works throughout the entire water column. So, the topped out hydrilla is affected as well as the hydrilla below the surface. The damage to the topped out hydrilla may be more apparent because it is visible."

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. SFWMD has not released any new data on this project. We are looking for them to give us an up to date report before our next newsletter.

C: Hydrilla Resistance to Herbicides.

Fluridone, also known as Sonar, which has been very effective in controlling hydrilla on Lake Istokpoga can no longer be used. For now and in the foreseeable future the state (DEP) will control the Hydrilla with Aquathol K. There is hope that in the future that DEP will have some new herbicides to treat the whole lake once again. At present there are five herbicides that are in some stage of testing and one could be the answer to our hydrilla treatment problem. In the interim let us hope that the DEP is able to keep the Hydrilla under

control in the south end of the lake. Any out breaks of hydrilla in the north end of the lake should be reported to 863-402-6813.

D: Canal Maintenance & Dredging

All the preliminary work has been completed on this project. Now the iffy part of getting this project done starts. Clell Ford the project manager for this project has been successful in getting Senator J. D. Alexander to request funding from the state for the project. Let us hope that our State Legislators look kindly on this and fund the real work part of this project for the fiscal year 2008/2009. We will give you an update on our web page when we hear anything from the state.

E: Istokpoga Canal Project US Army Corps of Engineers

This project is now fully funded and the contractor has been back at work since the beginning of the year Following is the scope of work for this project:

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 on Istokpoga Canal. It is old and it is leaking badly. Also this project will build a new park and a boat ramp at the Istokpoga Canal and US. 98. And the Istokpoga canal will be dredged from U.S. 98 to the Kissimmee River. This work is scheduled to be completed in early 2009.

F: Spring Lake Pumping Problem

Spring Lake Improvement District has done a complete rework of there pumping station at the Arbuckle Creek location. It appears that these improvements to the pumping station will alleviate any flooding problems that the pumps may have caused in the past. We also understand that the parties, with issues about the pumps are pleased with these new improvements at the pumping station and its operation. They look for the injunction to be lifted by the court before the start of the rainy season. We hope that these improvements will resolve this problem for the good of the Spring Lake residents and also the health of Lake Istokpoga.

G: S-68 Modification Project US Army Corps of Engineers.

This project is well under way and on schedule. The contractor is now ready to pour the concrete for the new gate just to the east of the existing gates on county road 621. The contractor is also digging a new diversion canal to supply water for this gate. This project is being done to better handle discharges of water from Istokpoga. Look for this project to be completed by December 2008.

H: Pond Apple Tree Enhancement.

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Along with the SFWMD will be planting 2000 Pond Apple trees on the west side of Big Island. Historically there has always been a stand of these trees, in this area of Big Island but in recent years for one reason or another trees has been depleted. The Pond Apple also known as the Alligatorapple is native to South Florida and is common in the Everglades. It provides a good habitat for birds and other wild life. Its fruit is also a good food source for the wildlife. It is hoped that this new area of Pond Apple will be used as a bird rookery.

I: Apple Snail Study.

Dr. Darby from the University of West Florida will be on Lake Istokpoga to do a study on the Apple Snail (main food source of the Snail Kite). The study will focus on the Apple Snail habitat in Lake Istokpoga. To quote Dr. Darby, it is very difficult to affect the survival of a species such as Snail Kites directly. Rather, if we wanted to increase survival, it would most likely be through providing high quality habitat. We at Friends of Istokpoga are glad to see Dr. Darby here because it speaks well of the health of Lake Istokpoga.

J: Osprey Update

Mike McMillian is hard at work on his 20th season of researching Lake Istokpoga Ospreys. According to Mike the Osprey population looks about the same as last year but he will not have his final numbers until sometime in June or July. We will put these numbers in our next newsletter and also on our web site istokpoga.org.

It is said that Osprey population are a good indication of the health of a lake and considering that Lake Istokpoga has the largest known concentration of nesting Ospreys in the world it reflects well on the health of our Lake.

Update of Lake Istokpoga Water Level

We are sure you have at least two questions regarding the water level in Lake Istokpoga. What is the lake level today and where is it going to be two months from now? The answer to the first question is that today April 1 the level is 38 feet 3 1/2 inches. This level is very good if you look at other lakes in the area or you realize that at this time last year the lake was 2 inches lower and on the way down. Also you have to understand that South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) had the okay to take the lake to 37 feet by now because of the deviation request to the Regulation

Schedule that was approved by the Army Corps Engineers (ACE). So at this time we give our thanks to God for supplying us with some much needed.

Now the big question comes. Where will the lake level be the first of June? The worst scenario could see the lake at 36 feet, if SFWMD chooses to take all the water that is allowed by the deviation schedule. Realistically and from the word on the lake we should be at about the same level as we were last year 37.5 ft. Now this is not written in stone but from all indications this is where the lake will be. This is good news and it should allow access to the lake from most of the boat ramps and shoreline canals.

Also another plus is that the higher than expected water level will help to keep the hydrilla from getting out of control. Something to remember, SFWMD will be letting some water out of the lake to take it to summer pool even if we have good rainfall. You can keep abreast of this situation by going to the Friends of Istokpoga web site (istokpoga.org) and checking the lake levels. Also come to the general membership meeting on May 15, for an update from the folks at SFWMD.

Important Dates

Upcoming meeting dates:

LIMC - Regular Quarterly Meeting

- Spring Meeting Thursday, June 12, 2008 09:00 am Noon
- Summer Meeting Thursday, September 11, 2008 - 09:00 am -Noon
- Fall Meeting, Thursday,
 December 11, 2008 09:00 am Noon

LIMC – Lake Management Plan Sub-Committee

• Thursday, April 17, 2008 10:00 am - Noon

LIMC - Hydrilla Sub-committee

Next meeting TBA – Per Vicki Pontius, Director of Highlands County Department of Parks and Recreation "We will schedule another meeting of the sub-committee when we anticipate doing another hydrilla treatment, perhaps in May or June.

As far as cutting boat trails, Carl Smith will review areas of concerns and perform these tasks using our airboats. We have been receiving several phone calls from residents who are socked in".

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc. Meetings

- Thursday, May 15, 2008 7:00 pm 8:30 pm
- Thursday, November 13, 2008
 7:00 pm 8:30 pm

Snail Kites on Lake Istokpoga

There are eleven active nest on Lake Istokpoga this year. *This is the most we have had since FOI was formed.*

The nests for the most

part are along the western shoreline in the bulrush (a pdf file showing the areas where the nests are located is available from the *News* page on our website— Provided by FFWCC). Only Lake Istokpoga and Lake Toho have active Snail Kite nests this year because of the drought conditions in Florida. Please use caution when fishing or air boating along the western shoreline. Remember that the Snail Kite is on the Endangered Species list, so please do not disturb them so they can have a successful nesting season. Let us hope that our diligence will help to enhance the survival potential of the Snail Kite.

The guidelines below, and also found on our website, are mainly aimed at management activities, but they translate well for recreational usage. In general, we discourage any activity (e.g. airboats) within the no activity buffer zone that may disturb the active nesting site habitat. **Do not approach or molest any of the birds or nests.** Contact Steve Gornak of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (863)462 -5190 or Heather Tipton of the US Fish and Wildlife Service at (772) 562-3909 ext. 296 if you have any question/concerns.

Buffer Zone Guidelines:

During each nesting season (generally December 1 to July 31, but including all periods when active nest are known), the following rules apply to active nesting sites:

- **1. No-entry Buffer Zones -** A 500-foot (ft) (~150 meter) radius no-entry buffer zone will be established around all active nests that are discovered. The purpose of this buffer zone is to protect kites from direct disturbance that may affect the fate of nesting.
- Airboats, personnel, helicopters, and
 - other equipment and activity must stay outside of these areas at all times when kite breeding activity is occurring.
 - These buffers

are slightly larger than the estimate of 430 ft (131 m) recommended in a study of disturbance to birds from airboats (Rodgers and Schwikert 2003). This larger buffer was selected because the disturbance tested in their study does not necessarily represent the types of activity that may occur during land management activities because they monitored the responses of perched birds and not nesting birds.

2. Limited Activity Buffer Zones -

A 1,640 ft (500 meter) radius limitedactivity buffer zone will be established around all active kite nests. This buffer zone is intended to maintain and protect foraging opportunities and

- habitat conditions around each nest to allow the nest to succeed. The goal is to maintain habitat conditions for the entire nesting period similar to those that were present when the birds selected the site.
- Airboats, personnel, helicopters, and other equipment and activity should stay outside of this buffer when possible, and activity within the buffer should be limited to the minimum time necessary to complete appropriate management activities.
- Only management activities that are expected to maintain or improve the existing kite foraging and nesting habitat within these areas should occur while there is evidence of kite breeding activity.

o Exotic and invasive plant control

- efforts, including water hyacinth, water lettuce, and hydrilla, and similar invasive species that may rapidly encroach on native vegetation communities may be treated within limited-activity buffer zones during kite breeding, so long as treatments are not expected to result in impacts to vegetation species that contribute to snail kite and apple snail habitat. Treatments expected to result in changes > 10 percent in the cover or occurrence of native vegetation species including spike
- o Treatments of invasive and undesirable woody plants, cattails, tussocks, and other similar vegetation should not occur within these buffer zones during kite nesting. These treatments should be postponed until after kite breeding activity has ceased.

rushes, bulrushes, maidencane, and

other emergent vegetation should be

o These buffer distances are intended to encompass the primary foraging area around a nest. The buffer distance is larger than the 820 ft (250 meter) radius recommended by Sykes (1987), and is a better representation of the area that kites use for foraging during nesting.

avoided.

Membership Application

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

Annual membership fee \$7.00 per person Annual Family Membership fee \$12.00 per family* Annual Associate membership fee \$25.00

Annual dues are valid Jan. 1 to Dec. 31

*Family Membership is for a couple and their children under 18 years old living at home

Name(s) or Business name				
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Mail to: P.O. Box 205, Lorida, FL 33857

For additional information call: 863-219-0082 - Voice Mail

Or email us at: friends@istokpoga.org

Please visit our web site: www.istokpoga.org

Friends of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 205 Lorida, Florida 33857

Pager: 863-219-0082

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