
Friends Of *Istokpoga* Newswire

Friends Of Istokpoga Lake Association, Inc.
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To Drawdown or not to drawdown, That is the question.

By Bill Dwinell

For the better part of a year now we have been hearing from the GFC (Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission) that Lake Istokpoga needs to be drawn down so the tussock can be removed. They estimate the cost to be somewhere between 3 million and 10 million dollars. The GFC has changed the cost estimate several times and it seems to be based on how much money they think they might be able to get. My opinion is that it should be based on what is best for Lake Istokpoga.

If they are able to get \$6.3 million, they can drawdown the lake and remove most, if not all, of the tussock around the shoreline. If they only get \$3 to 4 million, then they expect to be able to remove about 40% of the shoreline tussock.

A little background information: There are about 2000 acres of tussock on Lake Istokpoga today, according to a GFC estimate, and it is expanding at about 100 acres per year. While tussocks do provide habitat for some wildlife, they are generally considered to have a negative effect on the lake as a whole.

The drawdown as it is currently planned, would take place in either 2001 or 2002. It would begin around June or July, when the lake is normally drawn down to its summer level. Only for the draw down it

would be lowered an additional foot to the 36.5 ft. level. This would make access to the lake difficult, or impossible, for most of us living on the lake. The GFC plan requires the county to provide access to the lake during the draw down at Istokpoga Park and at the Windy Point (Boat Ramp Road) boat ramps. This means there will be access at the northeast and southwest part of the lake.

The actual tussock removal would start around August or September, after the lake reached the 36.5 ft. level and would be completed by the end of March the following year. The removal would be done using bulldozers, back-hoes, dump trucks, etc. The harvested tussock material would be deposited on adjacent upland storage areas, or onto in-lake "wildlife" islands, when upland storage is not available.

The biggest risk to the lake is that rain is the only thing that can refill the lake. So, if we have a "dry" rainy season the lake could stay low longer than planned. While I don't think this is a big risk, it is important that we all understand it is a risk.

Several alternative solutions for removing the tussock have been considered and so far have none have been found that is truly viable. The GFC has looked at mechanically removing the tussock using a machine similar to the Aquarius Systems Swamp Devil. The problem here is the negative effect on the lake bottom (a violation of DEP regulations), and the large amount of debris left in the water that would

not be possible to remove, even if it were followed up by a harvester.

So, where are we now?

On January 28, 1999, the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee met in the Board Of County Commissioners Conference room and passed a motion, by a vote of 7-2, to recommend to the Board of County Commissioners that they accept the GFC plan with the following stipulations:

1) *The draw down should not begin until the GFC has obtained funding for the removal of a minimum of 60% of the tussock .*

2) *A study be conducted to insure the water needs are met for "down stream" permitted water users during the draw down (this is normally done as a part of the permit process)*

3) *A full lake hydrilla treatment be conducted before the draw down, to insure hydrilla doesn't get out of control during the draw down.*

GFC needs public support to proceed with the project. I encourage you to respond to this request expressing your support or opposition, by writing to FGFWFC, 3991 SE 27th Court, Okeechobee, FL 34974. Be sure to include your comments.

For additional information about the proposed draw down, contact Beacham Furse at (941) 462-5190 or Ken Denson at (941) 648-3203.

Survey results

The lake draw down survey was put together in a hurry in order to

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get member feedback prior to the Lake Istokpoga Management Committee meeting. We apologize for the short notice and want to thank every member that returned the survey.

The results of the survey were overwhelmingly in favor of the draw down. Many of the returned forms contained suggestions, opinions or caveats. The forms are being circulated through each director so that they will know how you feel.

SURVEY RESULTS:

400 mailed
256 returned (64% of mailed)
208 endorse (81.3% of returned)
14 undecided (3.5% of returned)
34 opposed (8.5% of returned)

Election of Officers

The Articles of Incorporation require an election of directors and officers annually. Our terms expire at our next general meeting in March. It is not known at this time if all of the current directors will seek reelection or not. Regardless, if you want to be considered for election as a director for Friends of Istokpoga, or have questions, please contact Bill Dwinell at 465-6913.

All that is required is that you be willing to work hard for the association, attend monthly Board of Directors meetings and quarterly general meetings, and not have any obligations that would be considered a conflict of interest.

The actual election will be held at our march general meeting.

1999 Membership Renewal Time

With the new year, it becomes necessary for you to renew your

membership to the lake association. I want to encourage each of you to renew your membership. Our ability to influence the agencies is directly related to our membership number. Also, if your spouse is not already a member, I encourage you to have them join.

Enclosed in the center of this newsletter you will find a renewal form. Since many of you have already paid your 1999 dues, it will not be necessary for you to submit these forms.

Not sure if you paid for 1999? You can check the attached mailing label to see. The label will indicate 1999 or 1998 by your name.

If the label has 1998, you need to complete the renewal form and send it in with \$5.00 per member as soon as possible. The deadline is March 1, 1999. If we have not received your renewal by then you will be dropped from the membership roles and will not receive future newsletters.

If the label indicates 1999 by your name, then you are already paid through the end of the year and do NOT need to return the renewal form.

Please notice that you may also make donations to the association using this form. Donations can be made even if you do not need to renew at this time. Please consider a donation. A donation will help us keep our membership dues at \$5.00 so everyone can afford to join.

December General Meeting Review

Our December 10 meeting turned out to be the best one yet! We had a total of 102 people in attendance, and we signed up 23 new members.

If you weren't able to attend, you missed some really fine speakers. Paul Gray, National Audubon

Society, talked to us about the wildlife on the lake, and how changes to the lake might effect this wildlife.

Jeff Schardt, DEP, talked to us about weed control on the lake and all the problems we are currently experiencing, including the re-growth of the hydrilla. He explained the need for hydrilla treatment this winter, but was unsure there was adequate funding available to do the treatment. According to Jeff, if the lake is not treated this winter we could have more than 15,000 acres of hydrilla by next year.

Message From The Membership Committee

Our membership climbed to 399 as of December 31, 1998. Even though our goal was 500, I feel we made tremendous steps forward for the future of Lake Istokpoga. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every member. What a great first year we had, we could not have been this successful without you. Your love and concern for Lake Istokpoga will continue to make us a strong lake association. We are approaching the end of our first calendar year and so far we have averaged 39 new members per month. This is FANTASTIC!

I look forward to 1999. I know it will be a very interesting and exciting year and our membership will continue to grow. Your involvement is what made us one of the largest lake associations around, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I wish each and every one of you a very happy and healthy new year. THANK YOU! By Debbie Galloway

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Message From the Cookbook Committee

In our last issue of the Newswire, we told you about our cookbook fund raiser. At our last general meeting we ask for additional recipes from our members. You were fantastic, the recipes came pouring in and we exceeded our 200 minimum!

We are now in the process of editing the recipes to the publishers format and then we can go to print.

It is a little later than we had hoped, but I am so excited that I will see the names of our members in the cookbook. The wait was well worth it and we expect to have the cookbook material to the publishers by the end of the month. It will be a great cookbook! Watch for purchasing details in the next issue of this newsletter.

Once again, Thank you "Friends Of Istokpoga" we will soon have our own cookbook with some really wonderful recipes for you to try. THANK YOU!

By Debbie Galloway

Contacting Our Lawmakers

Here is the contact information our lawmakers representing us:

U.S. Sen. Bob Graham, 101 East Kennedy Blvd., Barnett Plaza Suite 3270, Tampa 33602; 813-228-2476. or 524 Hart Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510; 202-224-3041; FAX 202-224-2237. e-mail bob_graham@graham.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Connie Mack, 1342 Colonial Blvd. Suite 27, Fort Myers 33907, 941-275-6252 FAX 941-275-0120; or 517 Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510, 202-224-5274 e-mail connie@mack.senate.gov

U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, 4440 PGA Blvd. Suite 406; Palm Beach Gardens 33410, 561-627-6192 FAX 561-626-4749;

or 113 Cannon House Office Blvd., Washington, D.C. 20515, 202-225-5792 e-mail mark.foley@mail.house.gov

U.S. Rep. Charles T. Canady, 129 S. Kentucky Ave. Suite 910, Lakeland 33801, 941-688-2651 FAX 941-683-4453; or 2432 Rayburn House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, 202-225-1252 e-mail rep.charles.canady@mail.house.gov

Governor Jeb Bush, The Capitol, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001, (850) 488-4441 or FAX (850) 487-0801 e-mail fl_governor@eog.state.fl.us

Lt. Governor Frank T. Brogan, The Capitol, Tallahassee, Florida, 32399-0001, (850) 488-4711 or FAX (850) 921-6114 e-mail fl_ltgov@eog.state.fl.us

State Rep. Lindsay Harrington, 115 Tamiami Trail Unit 2110, Punta Gorda 33950, 941-575-5820 FAX 941-575-5822; or 12026 Capitol, Tallahassee 32399, 850-488-9175 e-mail harrington.lindsay@leg.state.fl.us

State Rep. O.R. "Rick" Minton Jr., 2300 Virginia Ave., Fort Pierce 34982, 561-595-1380 FAX 561-595-1382; or 207 House Office Bldg. Tallahassee 32399-1300, 850-488-5588 e-mail minton.rick@leg.state.fl.us

State Rep. Joseph R. Spratt, 205 S. Commerce Ave. Suite B., Sebring 33870, 941-385-5251 FAX 941-386-6002; or 316 House Office Bldg., Tallahassee 32399-1300, 850-488-3457 e-mail spratt.joseph@leg.state.fl.us

State Sen. John Laurent, 403 S. Commerce Ave., Sebring 33870, 941-519-7595 FAX 941-519-7599; or 211 Senate Office Bldg., Tallahassee 32399-1100, 850-487-5044 e-mail laurent.john.web@leg.state.fl.us

State Sen. John McKay, 2424 Manatee Ave. W. Suite 101, Bradenton 34205, 941-741-3099 FAX 941-741-3106, or 318 Senate Office Bldg., Tallahassee 32399-1100,

850-487-5078 e-mail mckay.john.web@leg.state.fl.us

Contacting Friends Of Istokpoga

President: Bill Dwinell 465-6913
Vice-president: Jim Berry 655-5573
Sec/Treasurer: Debbie Teter 655-4949

Debbie Galloway 655-3439
Don Linton 465-6882
Walter Monroe 655-1358
Jim Wilkins 655-1127

Send mail to:
Friends of Istokpoga,
36 Bald Cypress Street,
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Next General Meeting - March 4, 1999

Our next general meeting will be held on Thursday, March 4, 1999, 7:00 PM, at the Lorida Community Center. It will mark the end of the first year of our organization.

This meeting will be our annual election of our directors and officers. We hope each of you will come out to this very important meeting. **If you are interested in becoming a director, please call Bill Dwinell as soon as possible.**

Please don't miss this meeting!

Why we meet in Lorida

Many have asked me why we always meet in Lorida. It is pretty simple. First, we get the Lorida Community Center at no cost to the association, and so far it is big enough for our meetings. Second, since it is a county facility, we do not have to pay for liability insurance.

If you know of a place in Lake Placid that meets these criteria, let us know.