



Along the WaterFront

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Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association, Inc.

August, 2020

Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association Inc. is a non-profit, grassroots organization dedicated to the protection of Lake Santa Fe as designated by the State of Florida as an Outstanding Florida Water.

Letter from our President

Greeting All Santa Fe Lake Lovers,

How things have changed since SFLDA met in January for our Chili Supper/Winter Social, when over 80 of us came together to share food, fellowship, and news. The SFLDA Board sincerely hope all our friends and members are safe and keeping their spirits up in spite of the Covid-19 challenges. We are especially thankful to have a healthy lake for all to enjoy boating, paddling, sailing or swimming while safely distancing in the great outdoors.

Due to pandemic concerns, our Annual Membership Meeting will not be held in person this year. This newsletter was designed to bring a variety of news items to your door (or computer), since we will not be able to update you in person. **Also included is our annual membership drive along with the election of our Board of Directors for 2020-2021. Please take the time to participate in our association's business and to renew your membership.**

One article you won't want to miss is about the long-awaited acquisition of the Johnson/Black Lake property. At the southern end of Big Lake Santa Fe, Black Lake (previously "Old Lost Lake"), and its associated wetlands, is a relatively untouched area of the highest protective value for Lake Santa Fe. Your association has been working since the early 2000s to find a way to conserve this unique property, with both Alachua County Forever (ACF) and the Florida Forever programs. After years of inaction because of a lack of funding, this dream has finally come to fruition. ACF, with funds from the Wild Spaces & Public Places initiative, has closed the sale. At long last, we can celebrate the permanent protection of this largest privately owned property on Lake Santa Fe, so crucial in protecting our water quality into the future. Our deep gratitude goes to Sandra Vardaman and Charlie Houder of ACF for their work on this purchase, especially to Sandy who has tenaciously kept after our project from the beginning! Be sure to read Ryan Kennelly's article on page 2 for more information. As the Johnson (Black Lake) Preserve Manager, we look forward to working with Ryan as the plans for public access and management of the property are developed.

We hope you will read and enjoy all of the informative and varied news items and articles in this newsletter. Be sure to check in for important items on our website www.lakesantafe.org where you can also reach out to us with your questions or comments.

SFLDA wishes you and yours all the very best during this period of great uncertainties. Please stay safe and well and know that we look forward to the time when we can all be together again, sharing our stories and love for our beautiful watery home.

- Jill McGuire
President

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Johnson Property / Black Lake Acquisition

The Alachua County Forever Program is happy to announce that we have acquired the Johnson Property, also known as the Black Lake Property, on the south end of Lake Santa Fe, just west of Melrose.



This property is approximately 287 acres and includes three main pieces: a block between NE 221 St and NE 225 St (Totem Pole Road) north of State Road 26 that is virtually undisturbed natural flatwoods, the central block north of SR 26 east of NE 225 Street with a mix of natural areas and historic agricultural footprints, and a small block located just west of West Boulevard that

has access to Black Lake. The area between the West Boulevard and central blocks is sovereign submerged lands

comprised of swamp and Black Lake. The site is mostly flatwoods and swamp habitats. The Johnson Property protects a portion of the undeveloped south end of the lake and buffers an extensive wetland system surrounding Black



Lake which will help protect the water quality of Lake Santa Fe.

ACF staff will spend the next year or so getting to know the ins and outs of the property and determining the best way to care for the preserve's natural

resources and create public access. This will result in a draft management plan presented for local community input and then used as our guiding document for management and to open the preserve to

the public. Recreational opportunities could include hiking trails, interpretive signage, a canoe and kayak launch to Black Lake, and more. Natural resource management will likely include prescribed burning, exotic plant control, and native plantings. We are excited to be part of the neighborhood and to provide a place to connect with nature so close to

Lake Santa Fe. This will be a preserve for all to enjoy, and we look forward to working with you!

- Ryan Kennelly
Senior Environmental Specialist
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MVFD Marine Unit

Here are the latest updates with our marine unit! During this quarter we have successfully trained each shift and a good portion of our volunteers on boat operations and safety. Everyone has completed their boaters safety class and most have gotten the 24 hours of required training to be able to operate the boat.

Our department has approved the creation of a GoFundMe account for the marine unit. The link is currently live and we will be posting about it on our main page soon. The page can be found here: <http://bit.ly/MarineUnit>

The marine unit has gone on 5 deployments since its inception. We have responded to locations as far as Crescent City to assist with marine emergencies. Locally, we have responded to two incidents but thankfully they were able to be mitigated and didn't turn into major incidents. One of such was searching for an individual who had not been seen after going into the lake after two hours. The marine unit was deployed and we found the individual in less than 10 minutes. Once we found the subject they notified us that he was training for an event and was free swimming in the lake.

The creation of our marine unit has also seemed to create a need for other departments to follow suit. Cross Creek just put their marine unit into service and other departments are talking about the need for one. Locally, we have had support from businesses that conduct business regarding the lakes, such as DJ's Kayak rental.

We currently still do not have a dedicated source of funding for equipment, maintenance, and/or fuel costs. We have one motor at Fitches Marine Depot where it is currently undergoing maintenance for which we are expecting an invoice soon. We will be relying on donations to cover the cost that is expected to be around \$1,000.

- Joshua C. Florence,
FF/EMT
Melrose Volunteer Fire Department
Post 242 Advisor



Similar to last year's report, this year's can be summarized in two words, "relative stability", when it pertains to water quantity and trophic quality. Water levels as calculated by the Suwannee River Management District gauge in Big Lake Santa Fe reflected an 11.4 inch net decrease in level from August, 2019 to July, 2020 (140.01' to 139.06'). This marks the second consecutive year our levels were between 139' and 140', close to the ordinary high water line. Of course, the peak of a busy hurricane/tropical storm season is upcoming. No telling what that will bring to us. The lake is currently nearly 4 feet lower than the level left in the wake of Hurricane Irma in September, 2017 per our Lakewatch records and notes. Regarding water sampling, the LAKEWATCH Program was closed in March, April and May due to the coronavirus pandemic. The nine remaining months of trophic sample results were promising. Total phos-

phorus, nitrogen and chlorophyll showed lower counts and Secchi disk readings reflected greater visibility. Also, there were no algae bloom events apparent in or near our sample stations.

The presence of torpedo (invasive), eel and southern naiad (native) emergent grasses persist. However, they may be contributing to "washing out the nutrients" and helping lowering the trophic chemistries of the past year. Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) monitors our lakes for hyacinth, water lettuce, Cuban bullrush and hydrilla. The presence of hydrilla (apparently confined to the two public boat ramps and two canals on the east shore of the big lake near Melrose) is new to us although it has been present since 2018 in a similar consistent area size of about 6 acres total). We will be inspecting it shortly and apprise Jill. It's positive news that FWC has been controlling it and keeping it from spreading. It's imperative for all of us (and guests and visitors) who visit waters with hydrilla **to insure that we clean our boats and motor props before launching our boats here.**

Periods of stability or improvement are not uncommon, but we cannot be complacent as the long term trend to higher nutrients still exists. Residents and visitors must continually employ responsible stewardship in every home, yard, septic tank, and water activity. It takes ALL of us to make it work!

So...What's the Problem?

Florida's lands and flows of water have been changed greatly by unrestrained development and excess pumping.

Once upon a time, Florida had a growth management agency, until developers teamed up with legislators to gut the Department of Community Affairs. That gave developers the green light, regardless of water conditions, sprawl or quality-of-life issues.

SFLDA urged the veto of this bad legislation (HB 7207), arguing among other things that it allowed local communities to approve new development without adequate roads, schools and other resources to support it.

Other problems include inadequate Water Management District and FDEP resource protections, lack of legislative and gubernatorial will - all influenced by corporate political clout and large dollar contributions - which have been carefully woven together to ensure that water permitting maintains the status quo.

In spite of Florida's new Clean Waterways Act, our springs are still endangered and half our rivers are polluted, some in recovery or below minimum flow levels.

While helpful in several areas, the Act unfortunately eviscerated the long-revered policy of Home Rule by denying the rights of citizens and charter counties to protect their own waters, health, safety and welfare. SFLDA has

long lobbied for implementation of a septic system inspection and monitoring program, but this provision was not included.

The bill also failed to mandate that agricultural polluters reduce the damage they now cause to our springs and other waters. The water management districts, Department of Environmental Protection and Legislature almost never fail to align themselves with weaker plans and lax enforcement. Self-policing Best Management Practices are naturally going to be favored by industry interests but, unless mandatory, water quality is just going to keep getting worse.

Not surprisingly, "protections" and recovery have been largely illusory as the deterioration continues. The Seven Springs-Nestle bottled water permit is currently the poster child for irresponsible Water Management permitting decisions affecting the impaired Santa Fe watershed. The Suwannee River Water Management District voted on August 11th to table the vote on this permit. Log on to Our Santa Fe River's site to stay informed and to speak out about this upcoming decision.

It is time for Tallahassee to get serious about protecting and restoring our endangered waters.

- Terry Brant
Legislative Chairman

-Tom and Peggy Prevost
Your LAKEWATCH Volunteers

Improvements Underway at Santa Fe Park!

Visitors to Santa Fe Park will soon enjoy a new playground, adult fitness area, and restrooms.

The playground and fitness area purchase orders were approved by the Board of County Commissioners at their June 9th meeting. Installation is now underway and should be complete in the coming weeks. The new playground will offer swings, spinners, climbers, slides, monkey bars and some shade...all on a surfaces that allow children of all physical abilities to play side-by-side. There will be additional picnic tables with attached shade by the playground and the tables under the existing pavilions will be replaced.

The adult fitness area will offer a variety of fitness equipment to promote health through exercise with fun, and easy-to-use equipment.



The new restroom, which will be relocated to a more central location

within the park, will be installed once engineering for the water and sewer lines is complete. This part of the project will take slightly more time because of the required engineering and permitting, but is expected to be complete in early 2021.

Alachua County is thrilled to invest a portion of your Wild Spaces Public Places funding at Santa Fe Park to make it a destination to reconnect with nature, your health and each other.

- Gina Peebles, CPRP
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- Chief of Staff
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www.lakesantafe.org

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4th of July Boat Parade

Everyone agreed that the 4th of July, Lake Santa Fe Boat Parade was a huge success! By many accounts, the parade had around 60+ boats. I counted 50, as I came through the pass back into the big lake. (A few boats had dropped out by then). The feedback I got was that it was by far the best parade we have ever had! High praise for sure. I know I was very proud to be a part of it!



Thank you to all the participants for showing your patriotism to this wonderful country and holiday. A very special thanks to our Melrose Fire Department for leading off the parade and setting a good pace. Also, Deputies from Alachua County Sheriff's Office and Florida Wildlife did a great job of keeping the boaters and people on the

lake safe. We appreciated it, guys! There were no issues reported during or after the parade. Thanks to MBCA for sponsoring the event.

It took about 1 hour and 15 minutes to circumnavigate the lake. At the end, many boaters treated the residents of Melrose Bay to a very slow parade around the bay.

We are already looking forward to next year!

- Tom Germano
President Melrose Business and Community Association

Aquatic and Invasive Plants Management

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is charged with managing invasive aquatic plants because they can out-compete native plants resulting in degraded fish and wildlife habitat, reduce recreational opportunities, and create threats to human health and safety by blocking navigation and interfering with flood control. Because they can grow much faster than Florida's native plants, they require some type of management action to prevent negative impacts to desirable vegetation and water quality.

Water hyacinth and water lettuce are the top two, non-native invasive plants that infest Florida waters and in near shore areas they can completely

cover the water surface creating an anoxic environment beneath them. From July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 we treated 17 acres on Lake Santa Fe. In addition, three acres of *Cyperus blepharoleptos* (aka Cuban bulrush or burhead sedge) and 6.5 acres of *Hydrilla verticillate* were treated in the same time period. Information on all four of these species can be obtained on the UF IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants website <https://plants.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Outside of these four species, the FWC does not fund any work for private properties, but we do have a permit program that allows riparian property owners to manage a portion of the vegetation on their shorelines for lake access. Please visit the FWC Invasive Plant Management website for infor-

mation on our invasive plant and permitting programs <https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/habitat/invasive-plants/>.

Be sure to visit our new website "What's Happening on My Lake?" for a variety of information including the Schedule of Operations, Annual Survey data, fisheries, and more. <https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/habitat/invasive-plants/lakes/>

- Chris Boever
 Christopher.Boever@MyFWC.com
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 Florida Fish and Wildlife
 Conservation Commission
 Suwannee River - Invasive Plant
 Management
 Office: (386) 754-1664

Santa Fe Lake Dwellers has and will continue to be the lake's greatest advocate. However, our only real influence comes from the number of people we can rally to support the continued health of our lake. We need all of the people who appreciate and love Lake Santa Fe to support the organization so that we may continue to be successful advocates for the lake area. Won't you please join or renew now so that we all can continue to enjoy the wonderful lifestyle that our precious lake provides us?

Yes, I accept this invitation to support the Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association

Please check: \$35 \$50 \$100 Additional contribution What I can contribute: \$ _____

I would like to become a New Member I am a member renewing my membership Contribution Only Add me to the e-mailing list

My/Our Interests: Political Action Social Water Quality Board Member Newsletter Website Please Contact me

Name: _____

Address changes if any: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

*Please make your tax-deductible payment payable to SFLDA, Inc., and bring with you to the Annual Meeting, or mail to Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Assoc. P.O. Box 1268, Melrose, FL 32666 www.lakesantafe.org
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ELECTION OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020 - 2021 Board of Directors Nominees for terms ending August, 2021

Carl Bennett
 Mary Bennett
 Ruth Berkelman

Terry Brant
 Sally Chesrown
 Wiley Dixon

Gary Faircloth
 Tom Germano
 Mark Goldstein

Jill McGuire
 Jim Reid
 Joe Rush

I accept this slate for the 2020 -2021 Board Directors Write-in nominee: _____

In the event of a vacancy on the board, I would like to serve.

Coronavirus, Our Lake, and Our Community

How has the pandemic affected our lake? Lake Santa Fe is a refuge for so many more this summer who want to be outside and able to distance from others during the pandemic. Many people have “discovered” Lake Santa Fe and we are glad our lake can accommodate so many types and sizes of boats! The increased use of the lake this summer as a “safe” activity contributed to one of the best boat parades in recent years. It is also great to see the improvements beginning at the Lake Santa Fe Park (see article by Gina Peebles, Alachua County Manager’s Office, in this newsletter).

The Melrose Bay Beach Park, owned by the Melrose Business and Community Association, is open after a brief closure, and our swimmers can now enjoy the park more, and more safely. Beach users asked for picnic tables and a dock as well as a way to keep boats out of their swimming area and members of our community delivered! Mike LeVane, Karen Goff, Patrick Ward, and Joe Rush all pitched in to make it happen. Mike LeVane, a finish carpenter, gets a special shout-out. The day before his baby boy JJ was born, he delivered and floated the dock he had designed and had built (he also built and delivered the picnic tables!). Thank you, all!

The Florida Department of Health has reported an increase in COVID-19 cases in our communities around the lake as well as neighboring areas. The number of reported cases by day are provided by county and the total numbers reported by zip code and county from the Florida Department of Health dashboard (go to <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov> and click on the dashboard). Measures to prevent the spread of the virus are also available from this website as well as many other sources. It is likely that recommendations to physically distance and wear masks will continue through the fall, and possibly the winter, until a vaccine (or better treatment) is available.

In Keystone Heights (zip code 32656), 121 cases have been reported: 16 cases were reported through the end of June, 49 additional cases in July, and 56 more cases the first 23 days of August. In Melrose (zip code 32666), 56 cases have been reported: 8 cases were reported through the end of June, 24 additional cases in July, and 24 more cases the first 23 days of August. Fewer than 5 cases have been reported in Earleton. Case totals are updated and posted on the Melrose Center board.

The virus is a formidable foe. Each of us has a part to play in controlling it. Decreasing the widespread transmission will serve our communities; and also help relieve the burden on the front-line healthcare workers.

Be smart. Stay safe. Enjoy the lake.

- Ruth Berkelman
US Public Health Service (retired)

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