

September 2019 LAKE OKEECHOBEE

INTERAGENCY FLYER

What's Goin' On Around Lake O?

LAKE LEVEL: 13.89 ft

Lake Okeechobee water levels reached a low of 11ft during spring. The low lake levels brought back ~6,000 acres of submersed aquatic vegetation including musk grass, hydrilla and eel grass. This has also helped reduce turbidity in some areas. However, during the month of August we have seen a rapid increase in water levels from 11.63 feet August 1st to 13.55 feet August 30th. The current rate of increase (0.07 feet per day) exceeds the recommended rate of 0.03 feet per day (or 1.00 foot per month) by a factor of 2 and could cause SAV loss. We will continue to evaluate the SAV for negative impacts. If water level rates are reduced we expect minimal negative impacts. In addition to the increases in SAV, emerged vegetation including the threatened Okeechobee gourd has been found in the south end of the lake!



AGENCY UPDATES

USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Invasive Species Management)

-Conducting interagency surveys via airboat with FWC monitoring for floating aquatic plants throughout the lake. If you spot a navigational way that is blocked please notify one of the point of contacts.

SFWMD (South Florida Water Management District)

- On September 4th, SFWMD, FWC, and USACE will conduct a monthly invasive plant management survey around Lake Okeechobee by helicopter.
- Melaleuca treatments are being conducted along the northwest region of the lake.
- SFWMD is looking for the threatened Okeechobee gourd. If you find the plant, please take a picture and a GPS waypoint and email it to dbagiott@sfwmd.gov.
- SFWMD is surveying and collecting data for its annual Lake Okeechobee submersed vegetation report.

FWC AHRE (Aquatic Habitat Restoration/Enhancement)

During the week of September 9th, 190 trees (15-gallon) such as gumbo limbo, persimmon, laurel oak, cedar, bald cypress, popash, satinleaf and red maple will be planted on Gourd Island. In addition, 80 shrubs (7-gallon) such as firebush, coontie, beautyberry, cocoplum, privet and viburnum will also be planted. Gourd Island was one of six islands created in 2001 from a muck removal project in the northwest marsh.

FWC IPM (Invasive Plant Management)

Herbicide treatments for water lettuce and water hyacinth are currently approved for Eagle Bay and Eagle Bay Island, Indian Prairie marsh and Halifax Banks. Priority waterfowl habitat is currently being surveyed and coordinated for the possibility of treatment in preparation for the hunting season.

FRIEND OR FOE?

Please note: All projects are subject to change based on water levels, weather, funding, or any other means

Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)



Is known as one of the world's worst weeds and established in Florida in the 1800s. The floating invasive plant can be found around the lake and 1 acre can even reach six tons!

Okeechobee Gourd (*Cucurbita okeechobeensis*)



Is a threatened native plant species on the lake. It is a perennial high climbing vine that forms gourds. The plant may be found in the south end of the lake. Be on the lookout!

QUICK REFERENCE:

Native species - lives and thrives in a particular ecosystem a plant or animal that normally.

Non-native invasive species - a plant or animal that causes ecological or economic harm in an environment where it is not originally from. These species are usually from foreign lands brought over by humans.

Biological Control - (also known as biocontrol) the planned use of one organism (i.e. an insect) to control or suppress the growth of another organism, like a weedy plant species.

Terrestrial/Upland - relating to the ground/land environments.

Aquatic - relating to the water environments.

Wetlands- an ecosystem where the land is covered by water either all or part of the time.



IMPORTANT CONTACTS

USACE

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SFWMD

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HELPFUL WEBSITES:

<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/habitat/invasive-plants/lakes/>
<https://www.floridainvasives.org/okeechobee/>
<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>
<http://w3.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/reports/StatusDaily.htm>



DANGERS OF INVASIVES

- Disrupts native habitat
- Out competes native plants and animals
- Harmful to local economies
- Disrupts water quality

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Do not release pets or dump aquariums in waterways or ponds.
- Plant native species in your yards instead of nonnative ornamentals.
- Clean your gear! Wipe down your equipment when you leave boat ramps, camp sites etc. This will help reduce dispersal.
- If you spot an invasive plant or animal, log onto the "I've Got One" app and help scientists track where these nonnatives are located.

<https://www.eddmaps.org/florida/iphone>