

May 2021

LAKE OKEECHOBEE

INTERAGENCY

FLYER

Lake Level: 14.00ft

What's Goin' on Around Lake O?

Did you know mosquitos breed in water hyacinth and water lettuce? These floating plants provide a perfect breeding ground for mosquitos, particularly the species, *Mansonia sp.* which can carry diseases. Mosquitos have been known to breed in the root structures of water hyacinth for over a hundred and fifty years. Multiple studies including one from the USDA explains that the mosquito larvae use the root structures from these plants as a haven to grow. The root structures are so dense it makes it difficult for predators like the native mosquito fish (*Gambusia holbrooki*) to find them. The roots from these invasive plants also helps protect them from larvicide that is applied to help treat the population of mosquitos.

Agency Updates

USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Invasive Sp. Branch)

Conducting interagency surveys via airboat, monitoring for floating aquatic plants throughout the lake. If you spot a navigational way that is blocked, please notify either Jessica Fair, Ian Markovich, or Brendon Hession (FWC). The Corps will be conducting aquatic plant management treatment via contractor on Lake Okeechobee to maintain navigation and flood control structures around the south end of the lake. Area of responsibility will include the rim canal from Port Mayaca to Old Sportsman's canal and in lake from Pelican Bay to Uncle Joes Cut. Current aquatic plant management work will take place from Pelican bay to Ritta island. Contractors are also treating terrestrial invasive plants on the HHD going north towards Kissimmee.

FWC IPM (Invasive Plant Management)

Contractors will be working finishing up managing floating plants in zone 6 (from the Harney Pond canal to the Indian Prairie canal). After completing a sweep of zone 6 contractors will move back to the edge of the western marsh to complete managing floating plants there. *Scleria lucustris*, a seasonal invasive species that has been expanding in the inner marsh and will begin to be targeted this month. Germination of *Scleria* begins with the drying out of the inner marshes in the north west and western portions of the lake. Managing *Scleria* early in its growing season not only helps control the species better but lowers the rate and in turn amount of herbicide being used as well as greatly diminishing the chance of non-target damage

FWC AHRE (Aquatic Habitat Restoration/ Enhancement)

Working with IPM, *Scleria lucustris* treatments will be completed in the northwest marsh. Management of vines, Phragmites and other invasive species will be managed by hand pulling, machetes and backpack sprayers on spoil islands. In addition, over 4800 trees and shrubs will be planted within a historical cypress fringe in the northwest marsh

FWC (Freshwater Fisheries Management)

FWC is continuing to develop its Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Management Plan for Lake Okeechobee. Over the next few months, staff will be preparing the first draft of the plan to be released by summer, when we will open the plan for public comments and convene small focus groups to discuss the draft in detail. To learn more about this effort and how to get involved, please visit <http://myfwc.com/conservation/management-plans/lake/okeechobee/>

SFWMD (South Florida Water Management District)

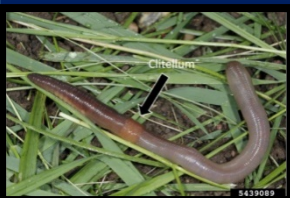
SFWMD staff are continuing to monitor the environmental conditions within the seasonally dry portions of the lake in the interest of using prescribed burns to manage vegetation in these areas. Environmental conditions may be appropriate by early summer to resume prescribed burning operations near Moore Haven and Lake Port. The District is scheduled to begin conducting surveys for the Federally endangered Okeechobee Gourd (*Cucurbita okeechobeensis*) throughout the South end of Lake Okeechobee May-June.

Friend or Foe?

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

Earth Worm (*Lumbricus terrestris*)

Is a very important native and a decomposer in our ecosystem. Earth worms help replenish the soils nutrients, create better drainage, and helps generate a more stable soil structure. These benefits together help our forests, gardens, and farms to grow bigger and healthier. Not to mention they make great fish bait!



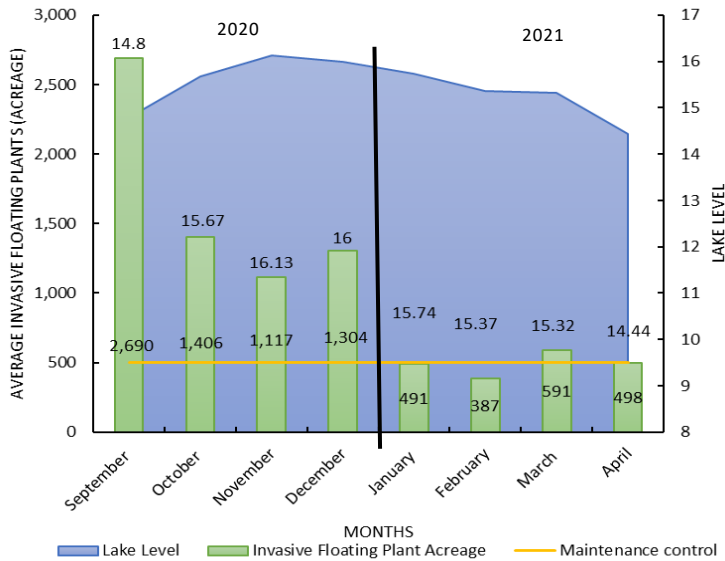
Asian Jumping Worm (*Amyntas agrestis*)

Aka crazy worm or snake worm. This invasive worm from Asia is wreaking havoc right underneath our feet! These worms devour organic soil much quicker than our native worms which makes it difficult for plants to grow and other soil dwelling animals to survive. Research is showing that these worms are reducing the plant numbers in our forests and gardens.



Interagency Monthly Flight Data

Flight Data of Invasive Floating Plants on Lake Okeechobee



This graph shows the average invasive floating vegetation (hyacinth and lettuce) that was observed by interagency members during the interagency flight each month (2020-2021) compared to the lake level for that month.

Quick Reference:

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

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.

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/report/>

Helpful Websites

Want to know specific information on your lake including hunting information, plant control data, fishing data, boat ramp locations and so much MORE! Go to:
"What's happening on my lake?"
<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/habitat/invasive-plants/lakes/>

Need help with plant identification of native and invasive species of Florida? Go to:
<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Need to access the aquatic plant management task force interagency meeting minutes? Go to:
<https://www.floridainvasives.org/okeechobee/>

Like to know real time Lake Okeechobee water levels, input and discharges? Go to:
<http://w3.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/reports/StatusDaily.htm>

Need information on algal blooms in your area?
<https://floridadep.gov/AlgalBloom>

Interested in the educational processes that all applicators go through and why plant management is so important? Go to:
<https://www.fapms.org/>
<https://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/manage/>

Important Contacts

USACE

Jessica Fair, jessica.m.fair@usace.army.mil

Ian Markovich, ian.j.markovich@usace.army.mil

SFWMD

Kaitlyn Quincy, kquincy@sfwmd.gov

FWC (AHRES)

Steve Gornak, steven.gornak@myfwc.com

FWC (IPM)

Brendon Hession, Brendon.Hession@MyFWC.com

FWC (Freshwater Fisheries Management)

Mason Smith, Mason.smith@myfwc.com