

Lake Frances

LAKE HABITAT ASSESSMENT, LAKE VEGETATION IDEX, SUBMERGED VEGETATION SURVEY AND WATER QUALITY

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Methods

STUDY AREA ANALYISIS

The watershed containing the Lake was analyzed using ESRI ArcGIS Pro. Using this software with 2023 ESRI Basemaps aerial, 2020 Land Use/ Land Cover (LULC), Landscape Development Intensity (LDI) Index values were calculated for the 100 meter buffer surrounding the lake following the procedures of FDEP (https://floridadep.gov/dear/bioassessment/content/bioassessment-ldi-hdg-bcg). "The Landscape Development Intensity index (LDI) is an estimate of how much humans have altered an area of interest around a waterbody. Various land use types (low density residential, row crops, industrial, natural) are assigned coefficients of land use intensity based on estimates of the amount of human energy that is put into those land use types. The LDI is calculated by multiplying each land use coefficient by the percentage of the area of interest occupied by that land use and then summing the results. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) uses the LDI as a tool to estimate potential land use impacts on streams, lakes, and wetlands. For streams and rivers, DEP typically uses a LDI calculated for the 100 m buffer of the waterbody for 10 km upstream of the point of interest. For lakes and isolated wetlands, DEP typically uses a LDI calculated for the 100 m buffer around the waterbody. LDI values less than two (≤2) can be considered minimally disturbed."

LAKE BATHYMETRY AND MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS ASSESSMENT

The Bathymetric Map[1] provides the lake's morphologic parameters in various units. The bottom of the lake was mapped using a Lowrance Elite 7 Ti Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS)[2] enabled Global Positioning System (GPS) with Totalscan transducer (bottom sounder) to determine the boat's position, and bottom depth in a single measurement. The result is an estimate of the lake's area, mean and maximum depths, and volume and the creation of a bottom contour map. Besides pointing out the deeper fishing holes in the lake, the morphologic data derived from this part of the assessment can be valuable to overall management of the lake vegetation as well as providing flood storage data for flood models.

[1] A bathymetric map is a map that accurately depicts all of the various depths of a water body. An accurate bathymetric map is important for effective herbicide application and can be an important tool when deciding which form of management is most appropriate for a water body. Lake volumes, hydraulic retention time and carrying capacity are important parts of lake management that require the use of a bathymetric map.

[2] WAAS is a form of differential GPS (DGPS) where data from 25 ground reference stations located in the United States receive GPS signals form GPS satellites in view and retransmit these data to a master control site and then to geostationary satellites. For more information, see end note 2.

LAKE VEGETATION INDEX ASSESSMENT

Hillsborough County requested the implementation of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection methods for Lake Vegetation Index (LVI 1000) (http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/sas/sop/sops.htm) using forms FD 9000-03 (Physical/Chemical Characterization), FD 9000-06 (Lake Habitat Assessment) FD 9000-27 (LVI Field Sheet) and FD 9000-31 (Lake Observation Field Sheet).

The Lake Vegetation Index (LVI) is a rapid assessment protocol in which selected sections of a lake are assessed for the presence or absence of vegetation through visual observation and through the use of a submerged vegetation sampling tool called a Frodus. The assessment results provide a list of species presents and the dominant and where appropriate co-dominant species that are found in each segment. These results are then entered into a scoring table and a final LVI score is determined. LVI scores provide an estimate of the vegetative health of a lake. Our assessment team was trained and qualified by FDEP to conduct these assessment as an independent team and must prequalify each year prior to conducting additional assessments. The LVI method consists of dividing the lake into twelve pie-shaped segments (see diagram below) and selecting a set of four segments from the twelve to include in the LVI. The assessment team then travels across the segment and identifies all unique species of aquatic plant present in the segment. Additionally, a Frodus is thrown at several points on a single five-meter belt transect that is established in the center of the segment from a point along the shore to a point beyond the submerged vegetation zone. For scoring, the threshold score for impairment is 43.

Four metrics are utilized in the Lake Vegetation Index Survey; Dominant Coefficient of Conservatism (CoC), Percent Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council Type 1 (% FLEPPC), Percent Native Taxa, Percent Sensitive Taxa.

The Dominant Coefficient of Conservatism (CoC) metric for the dominant or co-dominate species in each section. The CoC applies a score of 0-10 to each species based on its ecological tolerances and fidelity to pre-settlement conditions. Species with higher scores show a high fidelity to native, undisturbed habitats and are typically sensitive to alterations. Available CoC scores can be obtained from LT 7000 from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection at: http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/sas/sop/sops.htm.

The percent FLEPPC (Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council) Category 1 invasive exotic taxa in a single sampling unit (pie slice) by dividing the number of FLEPPC Category I taxa by the total number of taxa in that sampling unit. Multiply result times 100. Refer to Appendix LVI 1000-1 to determine which plants are on the FLEPPC Category 1 list. Note that not all exotic taxa should be included in this metric, only those listed in Appendix LVI 1000-1 as Category 1 FLEPPC. If the FLEPPC updates their list of Category 1 exotics, those updates shall not be reflected in this calculation until they are included in Appendix LVI 1000-1.

The percent native taxa in a single sampling unit (pie slice) is calculated by dividing the number of native taxa by the total number of taxa in that sampling unit. Multiply result times 100. Nativity status is determined by the Plant Atlas from the Institute for Systematic Botany, and is listed in Appendix LVI 1000-1. For informational purposes, visit the website

http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/. Taxa that are native according to the Plant Atlas from the Institute for Systematic Botany but are not on the list in Appendix LVI 1000-1 may be included in this metric calculation, but inclusion of these additional taxa is not required.

The percent sensitive taxa in a single sampling unit by summing the number of taxa with a C of C (Coefficient of Conservatism) score >= 7 and then dividing by the total number of taxa in that sampling unit. Multiply result times 100. Refer to Appendix LVI 1000-1 for a list of C of C scores.

The collected bathymetric data is analyzed for submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) calculations including the percentage of the surface area of the lake inhabited by SAV as well as an estimate of the percent volume of the lake inhabited by SAV. SAV is an important component to a lakes nutrient cycling as well as chlorophyll concentrations due to the SAV and phytoplankton competing for available nutrients in the water column. In addition SAV serves a vital role as habitat for many species of macroinvertebrates and fish as well as substrate for epiphytic algae.

WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Physical water quality samples were taken using a Eureka Manta Sub-2 multiprobe pre and post calibrated on the day of the assessment. Measurements taken with this device include: depth, conductivity, pH, Dissolved Oxygen (mg/l and % Saturation) and salinity. Chemical water parameters were collected and preserved on ice by USF Water Institute staff and analyzed at the Hillsborough County Public Utilities Laboratory Analysis include; Chlorophyll (a, b, c, t and corrected), Alkalinity, Color, E Coli, Enterococci, Ammonia, Nitrates/Nitrites, Total Phosphorous, Kjeldahl Nitrogen and Total Nitrogen. The results of the water quality sampling effort will be discussed in the framework of the FDEP Numeric Nutrient Criteria. Due to the lack of public access to the majority of lakes in Hillsborough County, the majority of available water quality samples are from the resident volunteer LAKEWATCH program. This data is being included in the analysis of Hillsborough County lakes.

Study Area

Lake Frances is located in the Coastal Pinellas/Anclote Watershed in north western Hillsborough County, Florida. The Landscape Development Intensity Index of the 100 meter buffer around Lake Frances is dominated by pasture (51%), natural (44%) and residential (4.7%) land uses. The resulting LDI value for the 100 meter buffer around Lake Frances is 2.55.

FIGURE 1: 2025 LAKE FRANCES ASSESSMENT STUDY AREA MAP



Lake Frances
WBID 1461

Sample Date - June 26, 2025
Surface Area - 43.3 acres (1,886,095 sqft)
100m Landscape Development Intensity - 2.55
Dominant Land Use 100m Buffer -
Field/Pasture (51%)
Natural (44%)
Lake Vegetation Index - 41
Water Clarity - 0.45 m (1.48 ft)
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
Percent Area Covered - 0.26%
Percent Volume Inhabited - 0.00%
SAV Volume - 443 cubic feet



Lake Bathymetry and Morphological Characterization

At the time of the assessment, Lake Frances was experiencing normal water levels (37.10 feet NAVD88 on staff gauge) resulting in a 43.3 acre water body. Lake Frances at the time of the assessment had a mean water depth of 5.4 feet and a maximum observed depth of 12.69 feet. The volume at this time was approximately 75,744,414 gallons. Figure 2 shows the resulting bathymetric contour map for Lake Frances from data collected on June 26, 2025.

Table 1: Morphological Calculations for Lake Frances

Parameter	Feet	Meters	Acres	Acre-Ft	Gallons
Surface Area (sq)	1,886,095	175,222	43.3		
Mean Depth	5.4	1.64			
Maximum Depth	12.69	3.87			
Volume (cubic)	10,125,485	286,719		232.5	75,744,414
Gauge (NAVD 88)	37.10	11.31			

Figure 2: 2025 2-Foot Bathymetric Contour Map for Lake Frances

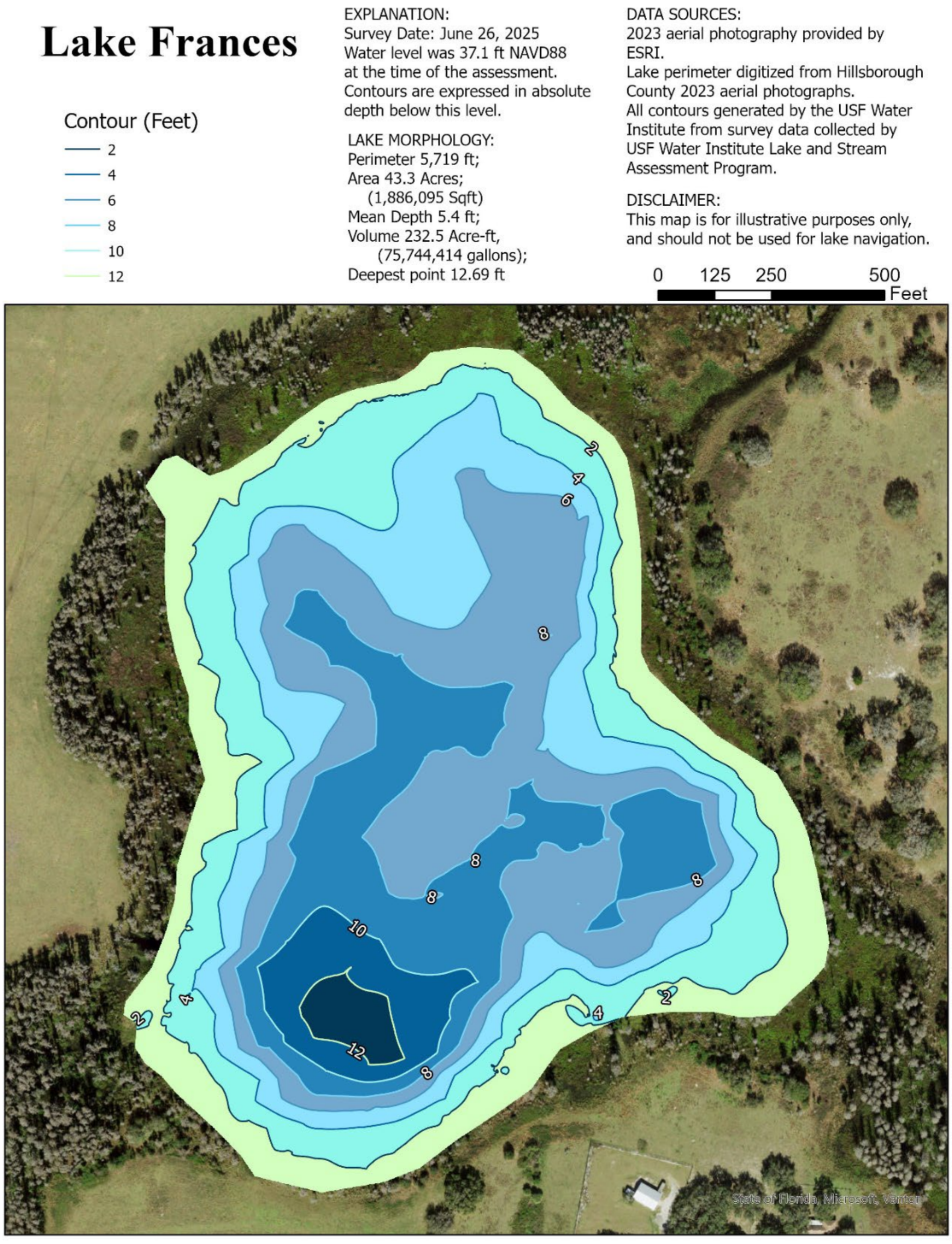



Figure 3 Overview photograph of Lake Frances showing the undeveloped shorelines

Lake Habitat and Lake Vegetation Index Assessment

The lake assessment for Lake Frances was conducted on June 26, 2025. The water in Lake Frances was characterized as tannic with moderate turbidity. The secchi disk depth was 0.45 meters (1.48 ft). The vegetation quality of the plants in and buffering Lake Frances are predominantly native species with extensive growths of *Oxycaryum cubense.* The percentage of non-native FLEPPC 1 species ranged from 6.67% (region 12) to 16.67% (region 6). Stormwater reaches the lake predominately via surface flow over non-cultivated vegetation. The bottom substrate quality was dominated by sand and a buildup of coarse particulate organic matter. The shorelines have not been heavily modified for residential land use and a buffer of greater than 18 meters exists for the majority of the lake.



Figure 4 The emergent vegetation rim of Lake Frances was dominated by Oxycaryum cubense and Sacciolepsis striata.

The Lake Vegetation Index identified 31 species of wetland vegetation growing in the four selected sections along Lake Frances. The majority of these species (25) are native species. The remaining 6 species (*shown in Table 2*) are non- native or invasive to this region. The vegetation community along the shorelines of Lake Frances has not been altered by residential housing removing the buffer vegetation. The edges of the lake are dominated aquatic species able to grow across the surface and on tussocks. The vegetation community was dominated by *Oxycaryum cubense* and *Sacciolepsis striata* in regions 3 and 12. Region 6 was dominated by *Ludwigia peruviana* and *Nuphar*. Region 9 was dominated by *Ludwigia peruviana* and *Sacciolepsis striata.*

At the time of the assessment the water transparency was 0.45 m (1.48 ft). Low annual average secchi disk depths reduce the littoral zone preventing the establishment of floating leaved and submerged aquatic vegetation. One species of submersed aquatic vegetation was observed during the lake vegetation index, this species was *Eleocharis*. The floating leaved vegetation community had 2 species present, including *Nuphar and Hydrocotyle.*

The calculated LVI score for Lake Frances was 41, below the impairment threshold of 43 indicating the vegetation community is showing evidence of being "Impaired". Figure 5 shows the map of Lake Frances detailing the LVI regions used for the assessment (Regions 3, 6, 9, 12). Table 2 details the species list results of the Lake Vegetation Index. Table 3 details the scoring result for the Lake Vegetation Index.

By analyzing the collected sonar chart, submerged aquatic vegetation potentially covered approximately 0.26% of the surface area of Lake Frances. This submerged vegetation inhabits an estimated 0.004% of the water volume in Lake Frances. The average height of submersed aquatic vegetation was 0.03 ft. Figure 6 shows the results of the SAV analysis indicating the location and height of SAV estimated from collected sonar readings.

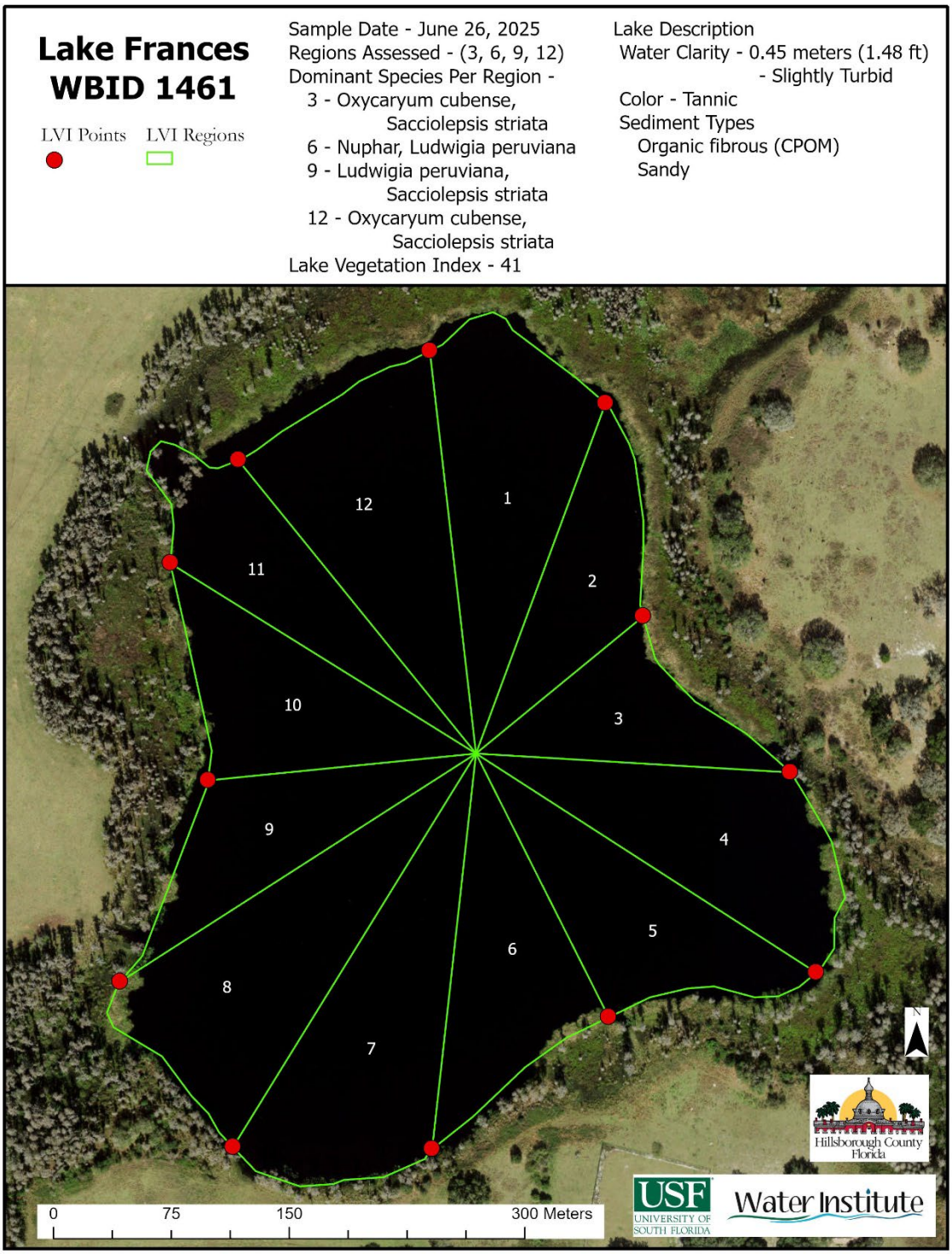

Figure 5 Lake Frances Lake Vegetation Index Sampling Map

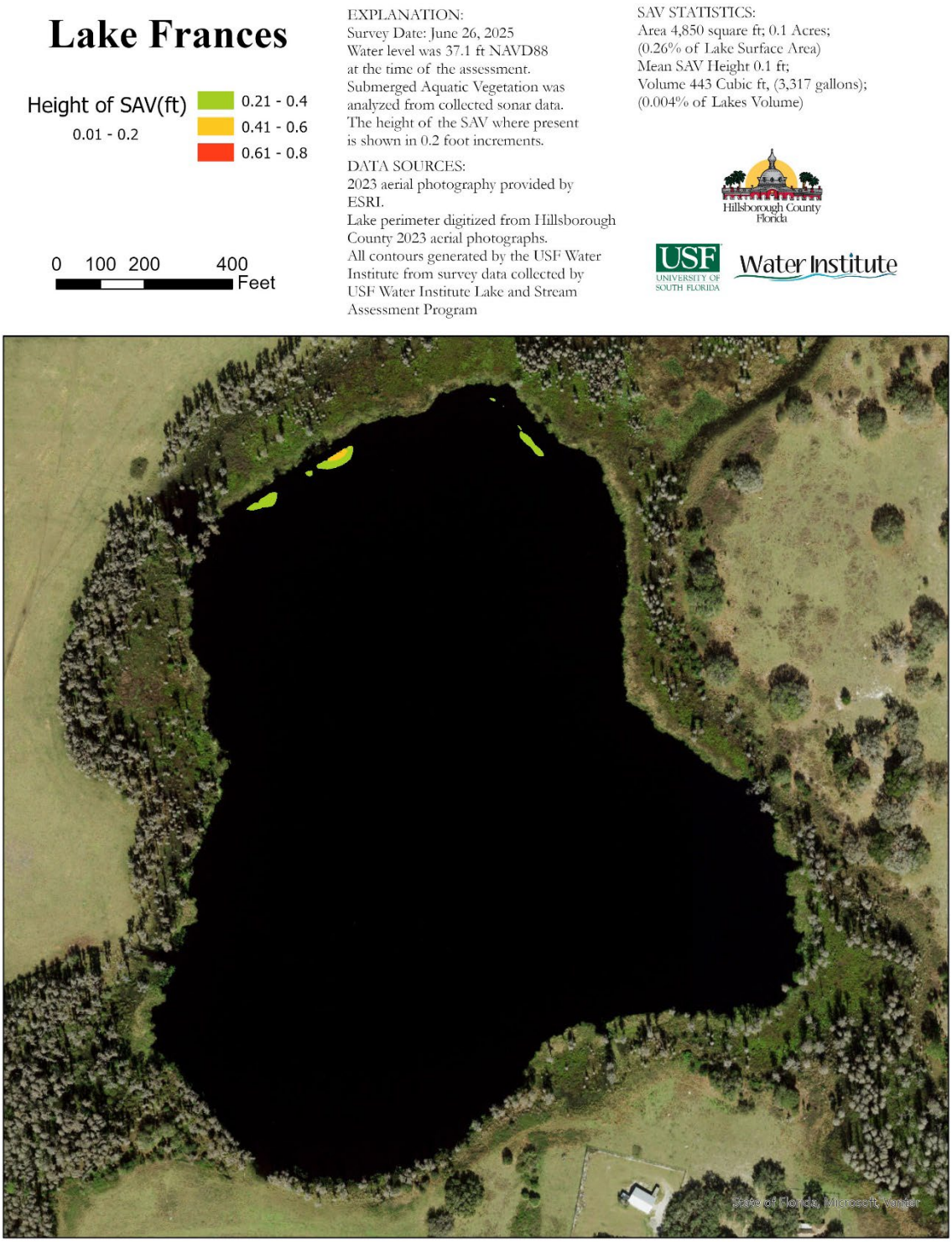

Figure 6: Lake Frances Sonar Derived Submersed Aquatic Vegetation Map

Table 2: Lake Vegetation Index results for Lake Frances June 26, 2025. In this table, "p" represents the taxa was present in the region while "c" and "d" denotes the taxa as being co-dominant or dominant in the vegetation region.

Taxon	Region				Occurrences	C of C Score	FLEPPC Status	Wetland Status	Nativity
	3	6	9	12					
Acer rubrum			p		1	4.65	Not Listed	FACW	Native
Alternanthera philoxeroides	p	p	p	p	4	0.00	Category 2	OBL	Exotic
Blechnum serrulatum	p	p	p		3	5.50	Not Listed	FACW	Native
Cephalanthus occidentalis			p		1	5.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Eleocharis submersed viviparous (species unknown)		p			1	3.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Erechtites hieraciifolius			p		1	1.00	Not Listed	FAC	Native
Eupatorium capillifolium		p			1	0.83	Not Listed	FAC	Native
Gordonia lasianthus			p		1	7.00	Not Listed	FACW	Native
Hydrocotyle	p	p	p	p	4	2.00	Not Listed	FACW	Native
Hymenachne amplexicaulis		p	p		2	0.00	Category 1	OBL	Exotic
Juncus effusus			p		1	2.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Ludwigia octovalvis	p	p			2	2.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Ludwigia peruviana	p	c	c	p	4	0.00	Category 1	OBL	Exotic
Mikania scandens	p	p	p	p	4	1.95	Not Listed		Native
Myrica cerifera	p		p	p	3	2.00	Not Listed	FAC	Native
Nuphar	p	c	p	p	4	3.50	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Nyssa sylvatica biflora			p		1	7.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Oxycaryum cubense	c	p	p	c	4	0.00	Not Listed	OBL	Exotic
Panicum hemitomon		p	p	p	3	5.82	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Persicaria hydropiperoides			p		1	2.50	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Pontederia cordata	p	p	p	p	4	5.38	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Potamogeton diversifolius		p			1	6.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Sacciolepis striata	c	p	c	c	4	5.35	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Salvinia minima	p	p	p		3	0.00	Category 1	OBL	Exotic
Sapium sebiferum			p		1	0.00	Category 1	FAC	Exotic
Taxodium	p	p	p	p	4	7.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native

Taxon	Region				Occurrences	C of C Score	FLEPPC Status	Wetland Status	Nativity
	3	6	9	12					
Thelypteris interrupta	*p*	*p*	*p*	*p*	*4*	6.74	Not Listed	FACW	Native
Triadenum virginicum				*p*	*1*	5.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Typha			*p*		*1*	1.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native
Woodwardia virginica	*p*		*p*	*p*	*3*	3.50	Not Listed	FACW	Native
Xyris				*p*	*1*	-9.00	Not Listed	OBL	Native

Table 3: Scoring Summary for the Lake Vegetation Index

LVI Sample Result:				41
Region	South			
Metric / Section	3	6	9	12
Total # Taxa	15	18	25	15
% Native Taxa	73.33	72.22	76.00	80.00
% FLEPPC 1 Taxa	13.33	16.67	16.00	6.67
% Sensitive Taxa	6.67	5.56	12.00	6.67
Dom Taxa Count	2	2	2	2
CofC Dom Taxa	2.68	1.75	2.68	2.68
Section LVI	38.21	29.67	45.23	50.20

Water Quality Assessment

Long-term water quality data is partially available for Lake Frances. The available data was collected by Lakewatch and Hillsborough County Environmental Services. Table 4 provides a summary of the Physical/Chemical conditions recorded at the middle of Lake Frances during the University of South Florida/ Hillsborough County Environmental Services assessment in 2025.

Table 4: Lake Frances Water Quality 6/26/2025 (Field)

Meter Readings:	Depth m	Temp (°C)	pH (SU)	D.O (mg/L)	D.O Sat. (%)	Cond. (µMho/cm)	Salinity (ppt)
Top:	0.5	29.8	6.94	4.94	67.3	48.4	0.03
Mid-Depth:	1.12	29.3	6.94	5.08	67.4	47.8	0.02
Bottom:	2.25	26.9	7.01	3.25	39.9	51	0.03

The chemical water quality analysis for Lake Frances is shown in Table 5. These values are the geometric mean value of available data for each annual period as well as the period of record. The FDEP Numeric Nutrient Criteria splits lakes into separate types based on color at 40 PCU. The "clear" water lakes below this value are further split into alkaline and acidic based on an alkalinity value of 20 mg/L $CaCO_3$. The long term color and alkalinity data are insufficient to accurately classify the lake, as such the remaining discussion will be utilizing the available data. The long term color data have a geometric mean value of 123 PCU, classifying it as a colored water lake (greater than 40 PCU). The NNC thresholds for a colored lake with sufficient data to calculate NNC (Previous three years with at least 4 samples per year in separate seasons) are 20 µg/L for Chlorophyll-a Corrected for Phaeophytin, 0.16 mg/L for Total Phosphorous and 2.23 mg/L for Total Nitrogen.

Geometric mean Chlorophyll-a corrected values for the past three years are above the threshold with annual geometric means of 29.9 µg/L (2022), 27.1 µg/L (2023) and 10.7 µg/L (2024). The 2025 samples were 25.8 µg/L. The period of record geometric mean for chlorophyll-a corrected is 14.5 µg/L.

Total Phosphorous geometric mean values for the most recent data were below the nutrient threshold for colored lakes in the peninsula region with sufficient data with a value of 0.058 mg/l (2022), 0.043 mg/L (2023) and 0.092 mg/L (2024). The 2025 samples were 0.100 mg/L. The period of record geometric mean for total phosphorous is 0.047 mg/L.

Total Nitrogen values were below the nutrient threshold for colored lakes with sufficient data with a value of 1.057 mg/l (2022), 0.969 mg/L (2023) and 1.342 mg/L (2024). The 2025 samples were 1.347 mg/L. The period of record geometric mean for total nitrogen is 0.929 mg/L.

Table 6 includes this data in the numeric nutrient criteria framework using the data from this assessment and the previous 3 years of data collected by Hillsborough County and Lakewatch.

Bacteria testing showed low levels of E. Coli (31 colonies/100ml) and low levels of Enterococci (3.6 colonies/100ml) not exceeding the rules set forth in FDEP 62-302.530

(https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?title=SURFACE%20WATER%20QUALITY%20STANDARDS&ID=62-302.500) "Most Probable Number (MPN) or Membrane Filter (MF) counts shall not exceed a monthly average of 200, nor exceed 400 in 10% of the samples, nor exceed 800 on any one day. Monthly averages shall be expressed as geometric means based on a minimum of 10 samples taken over a 30 day period."

Table 5: Lake Frances Lakewatch and Hillsborough County Environmental Services Water Quality Results Laboratory Results

Parameter	2022	2023	2024	POR Mean Value	Units
Alkalinity	No Data	No Data	No Data	< 10	**mg/LCaCO3**
Color	138	113	87.5	123	**PCU**
E Coli	No Data	No Data	No Data	31	**#/100ml**
Enterococci	No Data	No Data	No Data	3.6	**#/100 ml**
Chlorophyll a	41.6	36.6	15.8	21.2	**ug/L**
Chlorophyll b	No Data	No Data	No Data	5.0	**ug/L**
Chlorophyll c	No Data	No Data	No Data	4.1	**ug/L**
Chlorophyll a Corrected	29.9	27.1	10.7	14.5	**ug/L**
Ammonia	No Data	No Data	No Data	< 0.073	**mg/L**
Nitrates/Nitrites	No Data	No Data	No Data	< 0.043	**mg/L**
Kjeldahl Nitrogen	No Data	No Data	No Data	1.360	**mg/L**
Total Nitrogen	1.057	0.969	1.342	0.929	**mg/L**
Total Phosphorus	0.058	0.043	0.092	0.047	**mg/L**

Table 6: Numeric Nutrient Criteria Framework

Parameter	Value
Geometric Mean Color (pcu)	123
Number of Samples	79
Geometric Mean Alkalinity (mg/L $CACO_3$)	10
Number of Samples	2
Lake Type	Colored

Year (# of Samples)	Geomean Chla Corrected (µg/L)	Chlorophyll a Criteria (µg/L)	Geomean Total Phosphorous (mg/L)	Total Phosphorous Criteria (mg/L)	Geomean Total Nitrogen (mg/L)	Total Nitrogen Criteria (mg/L)
2022 (11)	29.9	< 20	0.058	< 0.16	1.057	< 2.23
2023 (8)	27.1	< 20	0.043	< 0.16	0.969	< 2.23
2024(9)	10.7	< 20	0.092	< 0.16	1.342	< 2.23

Conclusion

Lake Frances is a predominately natural lake in the Coastal Pinellas/Anclote Watershed of Hillsborough County, Florida. The results of the assessment of Lake Frances shows healthy lake based on Total Nitrogen and Total Phosphorous concentrations according to the FDEP numeric nutrient criteria using a combination of Lakewatch and Hillsborough County Environmental Services datasets for the past three years. Chlorophyll-a corrected exceeded the threshold in 2 of the past 3 years.

The system does show impairment in the vegetation communities according to the Lake Vegetation Index with few total taxa and an overall LVI score of 41. The dominant species of vegetation were *Oxycaryum cubense, Ludwigia peruviana, Nuphar* and *Sacciolepsis striata.* The assessment revealed a submerged aquatic vegetation community comprising 1 species currently occupying only 0.26% of the surface area and 0.004% of the volume of Lake Frances.