

Halfmoon Lake



Craig Hutchinson (Source: USF)

The following narrative is based on an interview with Craig Hutchinson at his home in November of 2000. Over the twenty-seven years he has lived on Halfmoon Lake, he has seen tremendous change in the lake area.

Personal History

Before moving to Halfmoon Lake in 1975, Craig and his family lived in Town and Country in a neighborhood of houses on small lots. Craig had been working as a hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey where he was studying the water situation north of Tampa Bay. His interest in water led him to look for property on one of the area's lakes.

Craig and his wife Tai raised their three children while living on Halfmoon Lake. Among other activities, the family enjoyed water skiing together. Craig remembers teaching the children to ski when they were very young:

"We started them out on child's skis. The little ones are about four feet long and tied together. Eventually they got to be better skiers than me."

In addition to skiing, he enjoys fishing, boating, and swimming in the lake:

"I like to go fishing. I like to take the boat and cruise around the lake and look at the shoreline. When I'm out working on a hot day, I can just take a dip and cool off."

Craig's wife frequently fishes off the end of their dock, and the couple has a canoe and a small johnboat that they take on fishing expeditions. Craig also swims in the lake regularly.



Ten-year old Brant Hutchinson with his water-ski in 1980 (Source: Craig Hutchinson)



Craig and his daughter, Shelby, holding up their catch in 1986 (Source: Craig Hutchinson)

History/Information



Halfmoon Lake at a particularly low level in April 2000 (Source: Craig Hutchinson)

Halfmoon Lake is a 32-acre lake located in Odessa, near Veteran's Expressway. The lake is considered to be part of the Keystone Lakes region of Hillsborough County.

Craig reports seeing a number of different kinds of wildlife in and around the lake area, including ibis, heron, mallard and muscovy ducks, hawks, owls, possums, raccoons, and armadillos. Years ago, one of Craig's sons researched the varieties of fish in the lake as part of a 5th grade science project and found that there were 15 different types of fish, including red eared sunfish, catfish, bass, garr, and bluegill. Among the lake's extensive vegetation are cypress trees, corn lilies, and cattails.

Craig has seen the water level of Halfmoon Lake drop considerably over the years, which he attributes to a combination of pumping from nearby well fields and decreased rainfall. According to Craig, when the water level became extremely low in 1992, concerned residents met and decided to take action to protect their lake. They applied for a permit from the Southwest Florida Water Management District and drilled a well to pump water into the lake; pumping began in April of 2000 at a rate of 700 gallons per minute. Craig estimates that the well pumped about 40 million gallons of water into the lake in 2000 and raised the lake about two feet. In future years, the well will be used to augment Halfmoon Lake only when the lake level falls below the extreme low management level of 39 feet above sea level. According to Craig, the well water alters the lake's chemistry by increasing the calcium concentration and raising the pH slightly.

In addition to changes in the lake itself, the surrounding community has changed tremendously over the years as it has become more commercially and residentially developed. Traditional land uses, such as citrus, have been replaced with subdivisions, businesses, and highways. According to Craig, quite a few residents have responded to the development by moving out of the area to more rural surroundings (see the Dead Lady Lake Narrative on this website as an example: www.lakeatlas.usf.edu/lakedata/lakes/deadlady/default.htm).

Development

Halfmoon Lake is residentially developed on all sides of the lake. As Craig understands it, the 10-acre peninsula on the west side of the lake where his house is currently located was originally developed for mobile homes in the late 1960s. Craig moved into a new doublewide mobile home on the Halfmoon Lake lot in 1975. Gradually, as the homes became older, they have been replaced with standard houses. He estimates that the area on the north side of the lake has been developed since around the 1950s, and the southern part of the lake was not developed until the 1970s.

The following quote from the interview reflects Craig's perception of the history of residential development in the area:

"When people moved out here in the '50s they built small vacation homes or shacks to live in. As the city of Tampa moved out and we got more and more people here...people built nicer homes. ...Gradually the older homes are being demolished and the new homes are being built. For example, a family on the north side of the lake...bought two houses, took them apart, and built one big house."

As residential development increased, Craig also saw the growth of commercial development:

"When I moved out here the closest grocery store was at Dale Mabry and Waters. An Albertson's store, which was about seven or eight miles away. With all the new homes and subdivisions that have been built out here, the stores, offices, and restaurants have also moved to provide goods and services. Several of these are only a mile away from our house now."

One of the most obvious effects of residential and commercial development in the area is increased traffic. Craig takes his wife to work every day because of the heavy traffic on Hutchinson Road. He explains:

"I'm afraid that she's going to pull out into traffic on Hutchinson Road. They come barreling around the curve to get to work."

Craig cited septic problems as another effect of residential development. In 1975, when he moved to Halfmoon Lake, he understood that lots had to be at least a half an acre in size to obtain a septic tank permit and that the tank had to be at least 75 feet from the well supplying the household with water. Most lots in Craig's subdivision are smaller than the half-acre minimum but were "grandfathered in" because the regulations were passed after the land had been subdivided. Additionally, while every yard seems to adhere to the well-septic tank regulation, neighboring septic drain fields and wells may be close to each other. As Craig sees it, residents have met the requirements on their own properties, but in terms of the larger picture, neighbors may be affecting each other's water sources.

Another change Craig discussed is the effect of development on citrus groves, one of the traditional land uses in the area. An orange grove in the Halfmoon Lake area has managed to survive development, but Veteran's Expressway now cuts through the middle of it. Craig understands that the construction of the expressway destroyed a considerable number of trees and decreased the economy of the grove:

"It was a small grove to begin with and now it's even smaller. I've been talking to the grove manager and he says that he has a hard time getting the pickers to come out because there's only about four tractor-trailer loads of oranges there. They don't want to do low volume groves."

He perceives that in the general area, orange groves are becoming subdivisions,

and the grove near his home may soon follow this trend. According to Craig, the owner of the grove proposed a plan to the Hillsborough County Zoning Board to clear out the grove on the west side of Veteran's Expressway and build eight homes in its place. Craig was relieved when the owner's request was turned down. He recalls that the same man also wanted to rezone an area on the east side of Veteran's highway to build 140 condominiums, and this proposal was also rejected.

Another nearby area, that is currently a "cow pasture and an open field with hay bales in it," was also recently proposed for rezoning. As Craig remembers it, the proposal requested to zone the area for houses on very small lots, so narrow that "you could...practically spit across the lot." He is not sure whether or not the request was approved.



The shoreline of Halfmoon Lake in 2001
(Source: USF)

The Future

Craig sees the future of the Halfmoon Lake area with a mixture of optimism and realism. He hopes that the lake's residents can continue to protect their lake by pumping water into it, but he is also aware of the potential impact of additional residential development:

"A hundred years from now this lake will be the same as it is today because we'll be able to pump water into it hopefully. Pumping from well fields will only increase because as more people move out here, more water is going to be pumped...The orange groves are being replaced with subdivisions, and if the subdivisions have a central water supply, it's usually from the well drilled on the property. If water is supplied by the county it's from a well field that's near the property."

Although zoning may continue to prevent residential and/or commercial development in certain areas, for the most part, Halfmoon Lake and its residents will need to continue to adapt to new development and to rely on the aquifer to maintain the level of the lake.

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