

Buck Lake Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with Alex and Sharon Lancaster in their home on Buck Lake on February 16, 1999. The interview provided information, which combined with survey, biological assessment, and other agency's data illustrates the past, present, and future trends of the lake.

Family History

The Lancasters



Alex and Sharon Lancaster,
Buck Lake Residents and Oral
History Informants

The Lancasters have lived on Buck lake since 1997 in a house nestled into a 13 acre orange grove on the lake's southwest shore. When Sharon and her husband first married, they lived in Pensacola and

enjoyed the lifestyle that living near the water provided. When they relocated to Tampa, they spent two years looking for waterfront property and encountered the inflated prices that are typical of Florida lakefront property. The home in which they now reside was up for auction, and they "lucked" into it. Sharon comments, "We would have never found this lake, never...only one other person lives here and then next door there is a nursery...it's very quiet. It's perfect."



Two boys, Alex and Ryan, ages 10 and 12 round out the Lancaster family. After initial apprehensions, based on a potential lack of other children in the area of her boys' age, were allayed, the family has settled in, enjoying the tranquility and isolation that life in Odessa affords them. Although the lifestyle chosen by the Lancasters entails a lot of commuting, Sharon often spends 3-4 hours in her car on any day, she

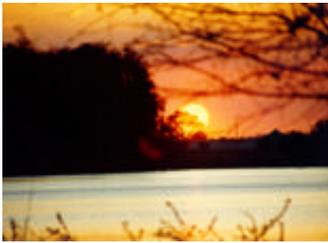


Alex and Ryan Lancaster are Avid Fisherman
photos by: Sharon Lancaster

comments that it is worth it, "It's worth it when you come home and you can breathe and just go, ahh." The Lancasters use the lake for swimming, fishing, boating and skiing. Buck Lake is a perfect size they feel, although the addition of more residents would constrict the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. They have become involved with Lakewatch in order to learn more about the lake and how they can facilitate its continued health, hence

guarantee the perpetuation of their ideal setting.

Buck Lake



Sunset over Buck Lake
photo by: Sharon Lancaster

Buck Lake is a 44-acre lake located in Odessa, within the NW Hillsborough Basin and the Brooker Creek watershed. The lake is a shallow, ranging from 9-11 feet in most areas and peppered with a few holes of 17 feet. The lake is the setting for two homes, a nursery, citrus groves and a natural looking shoreline.

The lake has survived well amidst the rapid development of Odessa and has not suffered the same level of intensity of many problems that other lakes in the area have experienced. The lake has been treated for water hyacinth in the recent past and the problem has not resurfaced. The lake has in recent times been supporting a growth of algae along its edges, which may be a result of increased nutrients entering the lake from the nursery. Sharon comments on this new trend, "...the only thing that I have noticed is that there has been some...algae. It's not just floating, it looks like a big green web all along the bank...I've noticed it's getting quite thick."



Alligators are attracted to Buck Lake by the small amount of human activity

The isolation of the lake and the few residences populating its shores is conducive to a diverse animal population, often not used to sharing their environment with humans. Sharon comments, "...one [alligator] across the lake that we watched for a long time, we named Big Joe. We kind of stumbled upon him one day. I was paddling around and I guess it [their house] had been vacant for a long time. He really wasn't used to people and we kind of snuck up on him...they are very, especially the adults, timid." Big Joe is not the only alligator in the lake. Three young ones ranging in age from 2-3 years occasionally visit the Lancaster property.

In addition to alligators, the lake supports a thriving fish population that is a source of entertainment and activity for

photo by: Sharon
Lancaster

the Lancaster family. Once a month, one can see Alex and Sharon fishing for bass, perch, alligator gar and catfish. Their only competition for the stock in the lake comes from the staff of the nursery next door. The nursery's owners have provided advice concerning fishing bait and on this Sharon comments, "Plastic worms...I tried live bait for awhile and the guys who come out fishing from next door were laughing at me...'oh, you must be using live bait.' Now I have the best luck."

Perhaps the wildlife is the aspect that took the most getting used to for the Lancasters. Sharon comments about snakes, "It just took a while to conquer my fear. I would just look for them and if you don't see them, the chances of you coming up on one when you don't see them [seems] less." Between alligators, snakes and a thriving fish population, the lake is well inhabited and maintains a favorable balance with the small human population.

The Development

Buck Lake is the site for two residences. The Lancaster's home is situated on the southwest side of the lake and the other resident, Mrs. Davis, resides on the northeast shore. The northwest shoreline is occupied by a nursery and landscaping business that has expanded recently. Their expansion may be having an effect on the lake's quality through added nutrients entering the lake in the form of runoff, which is facilitated by the existence of a dredged canal on the lake's north shore. The construction of the canal was cited as an infringement by the EPC, but continued unimpeded despite on-site inspections and warnings.



The nursery ran cattle on their property which may have effected the water quality
photo by: Sharon Lancaster

The remainder of the land surrounding the lake is occupied by agriculture. The majority of the land is owned by Birds Eye Foods and is under cultivation in citrus groves. Development in the Odessa and Citrus Park areas is increasing at an alarming rate for many present residents, the Lancasters included. The new Citrus Park Mall will bring more people into this, until recently, rural environment. Sharon comments on the trend, "There have been a few pieces of property sold ...lots of property has been

sold on Race Track Road. There are some businesses and subdivisions that are going in...We are just so, so glad that we have 13 acres. Hopefully this part will stay like this for quite awhile..."

The Future



The Lancasters are but one voice coming from Buck Lake. While their isolation is one of the most desirable characteristics of their lifestyle, it also minimizes the effect they can have when addressing lake health and development issues. When asked what her favorite thing about life on Buck Lake was,

Sharon commented, "The tranquility. My favorite thing to do is just to get into my paddleboat, especially on a Friday afternoon when the kids are home and it is time to relax, and just paddle around with my fishing pole. There's nothing better, there just really isn't." The threat of development encroaching on the lifestyle the Lancaster family appreciates so much is very real. Programs like Lakewatch go a long way to facilitate the gathering of data on lakes and trends affecting their health. Backed by facts provided by such efforts, the lone voice raised by isolated families like the Lancasters can be enhanced and made more effective.