The following narrative is based on an interview with Tad and Lulu Denham in their home on Lake Chapman South in August 1998. 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.

The Denhams

The Denhams have been residents on Lake Chapman in Brandon for four years. Their decision to become lake residents entailed a bit of an about-face in lifestyle choice. Tad comments, "We actually had a lot in a subdivision that we purchased. We were working on plans for a house…I said, 'I don't know if that's really what we want', so we decided to put it on hold and look around and see what else was out there". While driving down Lakewood Drive one day, they saw a "for sale sign" and decided to check it out. They realized the potential the property held, "so we jumped on it".

They enjoy Lake Chapman for its central location and the fact that it retains, "such a natural setting, so close to everything". They subscribe to a preservation ethic. The property had been for sale for about five years and had at one time been considered by a developer for high-density residential development. Tad comments, "When we saw it we said, 'we don't have any intention of doing that'. We want to live here and would certainly love to preserve the history of the place".

Their five-acre lot is the site of the old Maxwell fishing cottage. Judge Oliver Maxwell of Tampa built a small two room cottage out of cypress in the 1930's and the family and other friends used the cottage on weekends to swim, fish and boat. When the judge retired in the 1960's, he built the larger house and moved his law library into the cottage. The Denhams purchased the property from the daughters of Judge Maxwell.

Tad and Lulu feel they have found a bit of an oasis amidst the rapid Brandon area development. They are new parents to triplets and Tad is already scoping out the perfect tree for a tree house for their children.
Lake Chapman

Lake Chapman is located in the Alafia River Basin of Hillsborough County, just a stone's throw away from Brandon Towne Center and twenty minutes from downtown Tampa. The lake is essentially a shallow lake and has in the recent past experienced extreme water fluctuation. On this subject, Tad comments, "I don't know exactly what has happened, but the level of the lake has changed. In the four years we have lived here, our dock has been inaccessible." Whether it is the result of an increase in rain, added drainage from storm-water drains and culverts that are located on the east and west sides of the lake, or the fact that there is no natural runoff point of the lake, the issue of high water has been of concern to lake residents.

The lake is home to a great variety of waterfowl.

Tad, an avid birdwatcher has seen wood storks, herons, ospreys, rosette spoonbills, egrets, ibis, cranes and even a visiting eagle. The idea of the lake as an oasis amidst development is further supported by the existence of a family of fox who live on the Denham's property. "It seems like every winter and spring there is a new family of foxes…"

In addition, the lake supports a steady population of nutria, a variety of South American rodent introduced to the gulf coast in the 1800's for its fur. Tad remarks, 'I guess when the nutria fur trade dropped off, people just let the nutrias go…during the breeding season, I'll sometimes see a large nutria with three or four smaller nutrias…"

When asked about fishing, Tad commented that he does when he can access the dock. The lake is home to brim and bass; he has seen 2-4 pound bass being caught out of the lake and has heard of 8-10 pound bass caught in the past, but does not feel that there is enough fishing going on for people to be documenting their catches.

The lake experiences cycles of aquatic vegetation growth. "In the winter, it's very clear, very nice…I think in the summer you have higher temperatures that cause the algae to bloom and populate…we've had record rainfalls, so … more nutrients or fertilizers have been washed in the lake than normal…"

In addition, the recent rains have caused septic tanks to leak, increasing the bacteria level of the lake, and making the residents leery to swim in its waters.
Development

Lake Chapman is the setting for diverse styles of development. The lake is home to a Rotary Club camp that caters to special needs children, but is also rented out to private groups for gatherings. In addition to the camp, the shorelines are populated with 12 single-family residences and an apartment complex. The impact of the high-density apartment complex is mediated, as its residents are not allowed lake access. The Denhams comment, "They have property on the lake but the residents are not allowed to use the lake for boating or swimming or fishing or anything…it's in the contract that if they do try to have lake access, they get thrown out."

Development on the lake has occurred sporadically. Tad comments, "I'd say most of the homes are probably ranch style homes that were built in the 1960's or so." Some of the residences predate that period, such as the Gornto residence, which has been around long enough for a road to be named for the family and the Denham's cottage. Several of the ranch style homes Tad refers to are located along Camp Florida Road. These homes are situated in closer proximity to each other than the development, such as the Denham's, which occurred on Lakewood Drive. The Denham's five-acre property is the largest single family parcel.

The Future

Lake Chapman is indeed an oasis amidst the rapidly developing Brandon. The majority of the developable property has been utilized and there is not much chance that the lake will experience an increase in density. The Denhams are supporters of preserving what they can of the natural state of the lake. This wish includes revegetation plans, "My plans are to add cypress trees and other water plants that would be appropriate for two reasons. One, to create a natural habitat and two, to block out the apartment complex. That's my plan…" It is a forward-looking plan that will help to protect the lake for future generations of Denhams.