

Crescent Lake Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with John Snyder at his home on October 10, 1999. The interview provided information which, combined with survey, biological assessment, and other data illustrates the past, present, and future trends of the lake.

Family History



John Snyder in his home -
USF

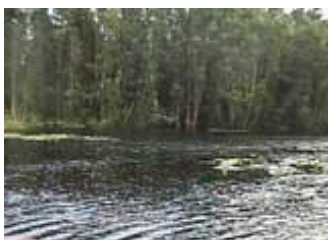
The Snyder's moved to Odessa in 1994 when they bought their home in the Wyndham Lakes subdivision, which is east of Gunn Highway. This new development wraps around the south and east shores of Lake Osceola, and the Snyders live a short walk from the lake. John has been a Lake Watch volunteer for Lake Crescent since the winter of 1997. He conducts regular observations of the lake and has become quite familiar with the lake and the surrounding area.

John's connection with Florida's lakes stems from his childhood in Central Florida. His fondness of lakes is evident in his reminiscences. "I grew up in Central Florida, one of my aunts and uncles had property on a clearwater [lake]...with sand pines around...it's kind of nice. I can recall learning to swim on a lake, near where my grandmother lives. I look at Florida Lakes in that type of history setting as far as I'm concerned personally." Eventually, John wishes to buy a home on a lake, although presently the high cost of lake front property prohibits him. He desires for his family to enjoy the advantages of lake front living, as he did in his childhood. As a boy, John lived close to Lake Monroe in Central Florida. He recalls time he spent with friends on the lake:

"I...lived about a mile or so from Lake Monroe which is where the St. Johns River opens up at Sanford Florida. Every now and then we would take our bikes and do crazy stuff...sometimes ride our bikes...off the boat ramps into the water. No one got hurt. And then some friends had a sailboat every now and then. And I think my scout troop one time did a stint on St. Johns. So, I kind of like the Florida Lake scene."

It is memories such as these that motivate John in his work as a LAKEWATCH volunteer. As a volunteer, John monitors characteristics of the lake environment such as turbidity (cloudiness of the water), water level, and rainfall. Through conversing with John, it is obvious he has maintained a close relationship with Florida's lakes throughout his life and intends to do so well into the future.

Lake History



Lake Crescent, a fifty-one acre lake, is located in Northwestern Hillsborough County, west of the Gunn Highway and Lutz Lake Fern Road intersection. It is a clear-water lake and is considered by John to be a jewel of the Keystone Lakes region. He reflects favorably on Crescent's quiet setting, "I rarely see that many people on the lake. There really isn't a lot of activity...it's kind of like a sleepy rural lake, which is nice. I have seen some guys fishing once or twice."

Just another serene day on
Crescent Lake - USF

John comments positively on the general condition of the lake, "Lake Crescent is one of the better lakes in the area, maybe because it does not have development like [Lake Osceola]." The lake is generally quite clear, and although John has witnessed fluctuation in the lake's clarity, the lake is currently the clearest he has seen on his watch.

The wildlife and vegetation in and surrounding Lake Crescent seem to be thriving. John reports that the vegetation is predominantly native to the area. "A lot of Florida native, I've seen holly, oaks, pine...where the girl scout camp is, it's basically an oak hammock...it's all oak trees in the area... I don't know if they do it on purpose. Maybe it's 'cause all the kids that go there, but there's not a lot of vegetation per se on the ground, it's sandy...I think it's probably the way it's suppose to be, as far as natural vegetation."



The shore of Lake Crescent is inhabited by various tree species (e.g., Oak, Pine) - USF

John does mention an increase in weed growth near the shore at the start of the summer. He associated this with rising temperatures, which is favorable for weed growth. He also spotted some unknown particules in the water and notes, "[There was] "...a kind of slimy stuff near the shore and then I'd see particulate when I do the water samples out near different sites. Not anything what I've seen when I was growing up in Central Florida, as far as some of the lakes that I use to live on or live near [and visit]. I figure if you can see six, seven feet [down], that's a pretty clear lake." He also recognizes non-native vegetation, which may have negative effects on the ecology of the lake. John comments, "There is a stand of melaleuca down here [southern end] and that's pretty thick and then there's some melaleuca over here [eastside], and I have seen patches of water hyacinths on this side [eastside], maybe as big as ten feet to fifteen feet across."

Currently, the wildlife population in and around Lake Crescent seems to be quite healthy. John speaks positively about the prevalence of local animals. He comments, "I've caught some bass. I've seen some gar in the area, not per se right there. I've seen wild turkey...armadillos...I've seen opossums around here (his home)...I've seen a fox along Crawley Road...And right near this area basically from this point out or through Lake Francis this is all a ranch so I am sure there is plenty of wildlife that migrates over." However, on a bittersweet note, John recalls seeing two otters over the summer months. John states: "I think two times I saw otters in the lake this summer...which was kind of cool." In past times otter sightings were extremely common in this area; unfortunately sightings have become a rarity.

Development



Camp Keystone - USF

Lake Crescent and the surrounding area are sparsely developed. John comments on the low density of development and the minimal use of the lake:

"I mean you got the camp and you got Old Mickey's farm and the girl scout camp, but... You don't have [that many long-term residents]...they're just like weekenders if anything, so it's not a whole lot of use throughout, day after day. You don't have guys on jet skis. I've never seen any jet skis out there. But there are days when I hear a jet-ski from Lake Osceola all day long even from here...The way I see it, it's pretty stable [development]. There's a little bit around Lake Maurine [located just north of South Mobley Road and west of Gunn Highway]. I would say you got some new development around, fairly new...I think most of the stuff is five acres plus. It would be nice if it stayed that way. At least not go anything below one acre."

Historically, Lake Crescent did not have much development on its shores. One of the oldest developments on the lakefront is Camp Keystone, a summer camp for children on the north shore of the lake, which opened in 1950. At one point in time there was also an orange grove located on the northeastern shore of the lake. The current owner pulled the remaining trees in the last couple of years. This property is now home to a nursery, which raises ligustrum and oak trees.

Lake Crescent is dotted with several prominent structures and a handful of homes and camps. To the north lies Camp Keystone, and to the east of the camp lies Old Mickey's Farm, a petting zoo. On the eastern shore lies the nursery, and on the western shores lies a Girl Scout camp. He fears that one of these structures might be sold and is concerned with the type of development that might replace it. There is a smattering of residential structures on the southwestern side of the lake. John notes the northern end of the lake has slightly lower levels of clarity than the southern end of the lake. He speculates about the cause of this discrepancy in clarity, but acknowledges that he cannot be certain. John detected a reduction in the lake's water level this past summer and cites several possible causes, including a higher use of lake water by lake residents, and higher air temperatures which increase evaporation.



One of the few homes on the shore of Crescent Lake - USF

John has strong feelings about rural living. He believes that people make sacrifices [i.e., proximity to work] to live in a rural area so they can enjoy the natural surroundings. However, John recognizes a contradictory relationship with people who choose to live in a rural setting (i.e., for solitude and the natural surroundings) but in doing so bring development further into rural areas. John comments:

"...People move out here [northwestern Hillsborough County]. They make choices as far as how they want to be able to ... as my brother-in-law says, he doesn't want to have to spit on his neighbor's property in his backyard. But, people make choices to live out here, at the same time you keep doing it, you end up with a lot of urban sprawl and maybe in a sense I'm part of it...being in the development."

John is not a proponent of development in the Lake Crescent area, although he notes that developers should work to preserve the natural setting when developing in rural settings. John comments: "They should take the natural settings that are there, that make it attractive when you buy there and try to keep it that way."

He believes that new residents are unaware of the negative environmental consequences their decisions concerning landscaping and home maintenance can have. John implies that long-time residents have a better understanding of the natural environment, which enables them to coexist with the natural surroundings with less impact than newer residents. John comments, "I think the people that have been in the area for a long time...that own property in the five acre plus area [on northern Gunn Highway to the west], they have an idea how to work the property and not really impact the lakes [negatively]."

The Future

Lake Crescent is presently one of the healthier lakes in Hillsborough County, and is truly one of the gems of the Northwestern Hillsborough County Lake Region, with its serene, natural setting. However, the future of Lake Crescent and the surrounding environment is a question of concern, due to the increasing need for housing and services in northwestern Hillsborough County. When asked to project the impact of development on the Lake Crescent area within the next five years, John offers a positive outlook on growth, noting the area's stability. However, he is concerned that the development of large tracts of land in the immediate area of the lake may have an adverse effect on the natural environment. John comments:

"As far as the lakes area (lakes to the west of northern Gunn Highway), they're pretty much built up unless they go...and sell...Crescent Lake [or] Camp Keystone, but most of the houses are established. There is not really new developments there. Basically, west of Gunn Highway will remain as it is [rural]. ...Now at the same time if they sell...[property on lakes surrounding Lake Crescent] that would impact a lot."

John hopes that Lake Crescent can retain its rural character in the future. It is with this in mind that he speculates about an environmentally sustainable management of the lake. A management that would allow the public access but also institute safeguards to preserve the lake environment for future generations. John comments:

"You're gonna have more Florida natural habitat around a lake like Crescent, than you are a lake like Osceola. ... In my opinion it would be nice to keep Crescent somewhat rural like it is, possibly make it into a public beach on that end [north]. I wouldn't see where that would be a problem, if it was for swimming or canoes only. That might be kind of nice. 'Cause there really isn't any public places out here. But if you do something like that, then that would almost mandate some type of water standards because public health would be involved there."

In closing, John discusses an environmentally proactive measure. John perceives that developers and building contractors are in an excellent position to promote a sustainable use of the environment, and that it is their responsibility to do so, as major players in local growth. In light of this, John believes that many new residents in the lakes region would desire to act in an environmentally friendly manner. However, he believes that they are unaware of domestic practices that could be implemented to instigate a sustainable use of the environment. John suggests that developers and builders be held accountable for educating new residents on environmentally friendly practices and on the fragile environment surrounding their homes. John points to the book *Living at the Lake* (Bachmann, Hoyer and Canfield 1999) as an example of a proactive measure to educate new residents. John comments: "I haven't gone through that book *Living at the Lake* yet, if that indeed is a good primer for living on a lake, then in my opinion anybody that buys property on a lake then that should be... [included in a greeting packet]. In my opinion that would be a super way to educate people."

Although John has never been a resident of any lake, he expresses a keen understanding of issues that are pertinent to the survival of Florida's lakes and ultimately to our survival in the long run. Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned from John is the important role Florida's lakes hold for all residents. Through his thoughts it is obvious that the environmentally sustainable management of Florida's lakes is truly in the best interests of all Floridians.