

Lake Osceola Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with Fred Sauls at his home on Lake Osceola 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 Sauls



Fred Sauls, longtime Lake Osceola resident and oral history informant

Fred Sauls and his wife Delores moved to Lake Osceola in 1963 and were one of the first four residences on the lake. His sister planned on investing in lakefront property but lacked the down payment. In return for a \$2000 investment, Fred's sister gave him 900 square feet of lakefront property that would become his and Delores' home. They initially planned on building a weekend cabin, but after putting in all the work they did, it became their home. "...This was before chainsaws and tools to

work with so we did it by hand. My wife and I came out with shovels and axes and ...crosscut saws. We cleaned it off."

At one point in time, Fred and both of his sisters lived on the lake's West Side. His niece has also been a lake resident and they have raised a daughter in the same environment. The Sauls have since moved out of the home that they originally built on the lake and into the house his sister used to own. They sold their house, but only after a land dispute which was based on the Port Authority's previous ownership of the lake due to its navigability.

The Sauls are very conscientious about the health of the lake. When they moved to the lake in the 1960's, the lake was surrounded by cypress swamp. They bathe in the lake in the summer and Fred is an avid fisherman and has a great story about the "big one that got away."

Development both on and around the lake has drastically altered the environment that the Sauls loved. Fred comments, "I thought when I moved out here, I would be in the country for the rest of my life. I guess in a manner of speaking I'm still here, but..."

Lake Osceola

Lake Osceola, previously known as Lake Jackson, is located on the border between Hillsborough and Pasco Counties. When asked about the name change, Fred commented that he couldn't figure it out. There are at least six Lake Osceola's in Florida. Older residents speak of the lake being spring fed at one time, but the spring cannot now be located.

Dredging occurred in the 1960's and created holes in the lake that Fred maintains helped the lake to make it through dry spells in the 1980's. "I'm glad we were able to pump...at that time, we didn't realize that it could damage the lake...for about four years we had a dry spell...I think those holes out there helped our lake considerably".



Cypress swamps historically surrounded the lake, a legacy that can still be seen in the scattered cypress remaining a distance from the shoreline. One stand of swamp is still in existence on the northeast corner of the lake and is now protected as wetlands. The lake maintains some of what used to be an unusual level of clarity for a lake bordered by swamp, but this

anomaly is fading as development takes its toll. Another causality to development is the sandy, white bottom of the lake, now buried under a layer of trash and sediment.

The quality of the water in the lake is being affected by the alteration of the lake's drainage system. Blocked culverts and the influx of runoff from the retention ponds of a fairly recent development cannot help but have an impact, which seems to be negative in terms of water quality.



In the 1960's, the lake environment was home to fox, otters, quail and alligators. They still have squirrels, but the quail, rabbits and alligators are all gone. What does remain strong is the fish population. Fred comments, "This is a great lake for fish. We have a minnow in here, we call it a grass minnow. They're very thin and long...the yearlings feed off them. There

are lots of brim, shellcrackers, bluegills, speckled perch...the bass feed off of them. It's well balanced as far as I can tell".

Lake Osceola was at one time the site of a railway bridge passing just beyond the east end of the lake. Under the bridge ran a culvert connecting the lake with Lake Parker to the north, a connection that no longer remains.

Development

Development was late coming to Lake Osceola, but has had a major impact on the lifestyle of pre-1980's residents. Development in the 1960's was focused on the western shore of the lake and then stalled until the early 1980's. Fred remembers times when he would be working in the yard and hear a car miles away. Most times he would know who was in the car. The enhancement of the highway and the lure of lakefront living altered that lifestyle.

In the late 1960's, a developer attempted to connect the lake with a smaller lake to the north, but was dissuaded by lakefront property owners and the threat of legal action. Progress took its toll though and the early 1980's saw the shoreline from the southwest end of the lake all the way to the northeast side slated for development as subdivision. Truckloads of dirt were hauled in, hundreds of cypresses were chopped down, and retention ponds draining directly into the lake were added. Fred comments "Because of the retention ponds, it's just my opinion, the quality of the lake is going down."



The deluge of development has impacted the lives of pre-1980's residents and the quality of the lake. Taxes have skyrocketed during that period, indeed Fred says, "We're beginning to wonder how much longer we can afford it". Neighbors have resorted to somewhat of an "old meanies vs. newcomer" feud. It is the old-meanies, though, who have concern for their

way of life as they have seen it change so drastically. Of the newer residents, Fred observes, "Truthfully, I don't think they have an interest in their property and the lake"

The Future

Fred comments, "...the quality of the lake is improving so fast and so good, it's just amazing. I'm jesting of course." Residents on the west side of the lake have repeatedly brought environmental issues such as the removal of cypress, spraying of other shoreline vegetation and the drainage of retention ponds to the attention of the EPA, only to have no action taken. "I guess I just don't understand the system" is the conclusion Fred has arrived at.

Residents of the lake have attempted to initiate an organization to address some of these problems. They realize, "We need to all get together and be active... You have to group together to have a voice", but have had no success.