

Lake Harriet



Bill Stringer (USF)

The following narrative is based on an interview with Lake Harriet resident Bill Stringer at his home on August 25, 2001. Bill provides an account of the important issues that have affected the lake over the past 15 years.

Personal History

Bill has lived on Lake Harriet for a total of 15 years. In September of 1987, he moved from Daytona Beach in order to look after a house on Lake Harriet owned by his mother. When his mother moved into the house, Bill bought the house next door; this is where he and his wife currently live. He is retired from the military and spends a great deal of time at home on the lake. Bill related the following:

"I built it [the dock] so that the end of the dock, the last two boards, would be in the water. I had two little tree stumps sitting right here at the end that we'd just sit on. Bring the cooler down there, my cell phone, put my speakers out in the backyard. I lived in that lake, literally. I was in that lake every day."

Over the years, he has enjoyed many days swimming, feeding the fish in the lake, and relaxing on his dock.

History/Information



View of Lake Harriet (USF)

Lake Harriet is a 6-acre lake located in Altamonte Springs. Because of its small size, the level of the lake has fluctuated considerably over the years and, according to Bill, had dried up almost completely in June 2001. At this point, when the drought was at its worst, Bill was dismayed to see that the lake's large population of turtles had nowhere to go; some of the turtles were actually attempting to cross the street in search of water. He picked up about 80 turtles, put them in his truck, and moved them from Lake Harriet to Pearl Lake, which was not as affected by the drought:

"They had a better chance of living in there. Actually, that's where they were going to go anyway. If I hadn't done it, that would have meant they would have walked. They would have dug themselves to death up against the chain-link fence. Or...they would have marched...across 436 and gotten smashed."

Although the lake is currently of high water quality, Bill described several severe cases of water pollution in Lake Harriet's recent history. He has tried to play an active role in protecting the health of the lake, although he often feels there is very little he can do. As Bill understands it, Lake Harriet residents belonged to a homeowner's association when his mother first bought her house and would organize around important issues affecting the lake. The homeowner's association is now inactive, and Bill believes that there is no longer such a sense of shared responsibility for the lake among residents.

According to Bill, about six or seven years ago, the lake began exhibiting a yellow-gray frothy substance on top of the water. He immediately called the Division of Fish and Game and the Environmental Protection Agency who, after coming out to the lake, initially thought the substance was E-Coli. Further investigation revealed that a nearby dirt road was being sprayed with oil—to reduce dust—and then runoff would drain into the lake. Bill assumes that the wind whipped up the oil on top of the water, creating the foam. The substance finally went away on its own.

Around this time, Bill stopped sitting or swimming in the water due to additional indicators of poor water quality:



Photograph taken during a period of poor water quality (Bill Stringer)

“Me and my Buddy were stationed at the end of the dock. We sat there for like 3-4 hours in the water, you know, just chilling out. When we got out we had red marks all around where we were sitting. We had a little red line all the way around. I said, ‘That’s it.’”

Bill also expressed concern about the overgrowth of vegetation on the lake. At one point, Southern Naiad (*Najas guadalupensis*) covered the entire lake. Fish began dying because the water was depleted of oxygen, and anhingas were not able to fish because the vegetation was so thick. Bill tried to organize residents to help clean up the lake:

“The lake doctors wanted to charge like \$26,000 or something like that. Nobody was going to go for that. I talked to Fish & Game and...they gave the go-ahead. They said this lake was so small that I could treat it myself and they would tell me how and they did.”



Current overgrowth of vegetation on the lake (USF)

He was sick and could not be around the toxic substances required for the treatment, so the naid went untreated. After a number of years, when retention ponds were being built for the expansion of State Road 436, some of Lake Harriet's weeds were cleared out with a crane. Soon after, the lake's naiad died and the water was clear again.

Although the Southern Naiad situation was resolved, Bill continues to be concerned about the overgrowth of vegetation on the lake. At the time of the interview, duckweed covered a large portion of the lake's surface. Bill understands that having carp in the lake helps control vegetation, but since many of the lake's fish were killed by the overgrowth of naiad, he has not seen any carp in the lake. And because the lake does not have a homeowner's association, he does not see a way to obtain carp for the lake. The naiad also grows back during the warmer parts of the year.

In spite of Lake Harriet's periods of poor health, Bill reports that the lake supports a great deal of wildlife. Over the years, he has seen a number of anhingas, osprey, great blue herons, and wood ducks. The lake also has a decent population of brim, bluegill, bass, and perch.

Development



House being moved to make room for development (Bill Stringer)

Altamonte Springs has grown rapidly over the past several decades. According to Jerrell H. Shofner's book, *City of Altamonte Springs* in 1920, the year Altamonte Springs's 43 citizens incorporated it as a municipality, the city was a small rural community beside the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. Over the years, the city limits have been extended to an area of 9.4 square miles, and the population has grown to more than 40,000. In contrast to the few stores at the corner of SR 436 and SR 434 present in the 1960s, the number of businesses in Altamonte Springs was more than 3,200 in 1995. In the 1960s, the extension of State Road 436 and its connection with I-4 linked Altamonte Springs with the growing Orlando metropolitan area (Shofner, Jerrell H. Altamonte Springs, FL: City of Altamonte Springs. 1995.).

The continued commercial and residential development of Altamonte Springs has begun to affect Lake Harriet residents. According to Bill, a number of houses in his neighborhood were recently bought by the county and torn down in order to put in retention ponds for the expansion of State Road 436. Commercial developers bought additional houses in the area to make room for future projects. As Bill understands it, Altamonte Springs has plans for rapid development over the next five or six years, including skyscrapers and a city hall. In light of his neighborhood's imminent redevelopment, Bill expects to sell his house in about five years, for the right price.

The Future

Bill perceives the future of Lake Harriet as bleak unless actions are taken to maintain the lake. Despite his despondent outlook, Bill has not given up on the lake on which he lives. He will remain actively involved in maintaining Lake Harriet's health as long as he lives on the lake.

As Bill sees it, both residents and the local government should be responsible for a lake's health. In order to institute such responsibilities, Bill suggests that Seminole County tax all lake residents for the privilege of living on a lake and then use the money to maintain the county's lakes. Although he does not know the specifics of Orange County's lake program, based on his visits to several lakes in Orange County, Bill believes that their program might serve as a potential model for Seminole County to follow.

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