

Mud Lake



Doris Sussman with daughter Sheryl (USF)

The following narrative was derived from an interview with Mud Lake residents, Doris Sussman and her daughter, Sheryl, on January 18, 2002. During the interview they discussed living on Mud Lake and how it has played a role in their lives.

Personal History

Doris Sussman moved to Mud Lake in the mid 1970s. She is originally from New York where she grew up on Lake Champagne near the Canadian border. She and her husband, now deceased, lived in Connecticut for a number of years before a work transfer brought them to central Florida. About finding the home on Mud Lake, Doris recalled:

"We were looking around and had a real estate agent help us find someplace. We were just looking at houses in the area. I like trees, I like the yard, a good size yard if possible and the house was new, so we just picked it."

When asked how living on the water has affected her life, Doris responded: "It's been pleasant. I like coming down here and watching the birds." Doris raised four children, one of whom grew up on Mud Lake. The home Doris and her husband bought on an acre of property 25 years ago is the same one in which she lives today with her daughter, Sheryl, and pet dog, Sesame.

History/Information

Mud Lake is an 18-acre lake located in the Soldiers Creek Watershed of Seminole County in the City of Longwood. An aerial view of the lake shows a circular sort of canal that centers around an island of land with three offshoots. At the time of the interview, the water levels were fairly low, resulting in a muddy swamp like area. According to Doris, water levels have fluctuated over the years. She reflected on the early days:

"There was a lot more water in it at the time because we used to come down and fish. My son and I, the kids would come down and fish. They used to catch some things, but I never did. They used to catch bass in there, but it was quite a bit larger then."



Mud Lake at the time of the interview (USF)



Mud Lake with high water levels (Sussman)



Mud Lake with moderate water levels (Sussman)

Doris believes that part of the reason, Mud Lake has become smaller is because of the opening of a dam on a connected lake. She says in the late 1980s the dam was opened to improve water flow and prevent flooding in response to heavy rains. Doris shared, “When they opened that up, I don’t think they ever closed it, so it [the water] probably just keeps flowing down that way.”

At the time of the interview, Mud Lake appeared as a swamp filled with brush. According to Doris, the growth of vegetation was not always so predominant. When asked about the water quality, Doris replied, “It’s muddy!” It seems the lake is appropriately named. A few years ago, the City of Longwood attempted to clean out the overgrown vegetation, which seemed like a waste of time and resources to Doris. She realized the intent was to make the lake bottom deeper with the hopes of containing more water, but that is not what happened. She shared:

“They had a big digger in there that they kept getting stuck in the mud and he was digging it out. I don’t know why. I never could figure it out. It [the brush] was just going to come back again. But they had the money and had it dug out and here it is again, the same way.”

In terms of the wildlife supported by Mud Lake, Doris and her daughter, Sheryl, reported diversity with fluctuations in both number and kind. According to Doris, most likely the reasons for the fluctuations are seasonal:

“It’s changed a lot because when we first came, we had a lot of raccoons and possums, probably some beaver, and armadillos too. A lot of birds, all kinds – anhinga, ducks, blue herons and all kinds of herons, but they were here all along and stayed around. Then they all disappeared. We get very few birds any more...once in a while. I guess when the lake changes. Sometimes in the winter when there is more water, they will come. But then they’ve been gone all summer.”

Sheryl agrees that the fluctuations in bird species might be partly due to migration patterns. She says, “They come and go. Some birds like a lot of water and some don’t.” Doris mentioned that she missed the family of cranes that used to live nearby:

“They would come up and eat about three times a day. The two of them and then they had two babies. They were so cute. It was fun to watch. I miss them because they used to come up all the time.”

The overall trend of wildlife, however, has been a decrease in diversity. Doris says that although the trends of birds and fish are most likely related to water levels, the declining number of land animals is more closely tied to development. For instance, she used to see many different kinds of rabbits, but hardly spots them anymore. Sheryl added:

“There is definitely less wildlife than when we first came here. I still see rabbits occasionally and I see possum and raccoons too, but not a lot. I was never here a lot to see what was before, but I know there was more of everything.”

Doris credits some of the decline in land wildlife to the increased in development. She said: “all around us there has been a lot of building, so that probably discourages them.”



View of Mud Lake with homes in background (USF)



Pathway leading from lake to Doris' home (USF)

Development

According to Doris, the number of homes around Mud Lake has not changed much, although the surrounding area has experienced significant growth. When she first moved to Mud Lake, in the mid 1970s, her house was the last built-up piece of property north of Longwood. Beyond that, Doris says, there was “nothing, you know just rural and then they started building of course”. Interestingly, she adds, the beginning of the growth spurt that has continued to present day coincides with the opening of Disney.

In the years that Doris has lived on Mud Lake, she has noticed only one new addition directly on the lake. For years there was undeveloped land directly next door to her house where a family owned and lived on roughly 10 acres of undeveloped space. Recently, however, the land turned into a small housing development with roughly 15 tightly packed and fairly large homes. Doris said they had to put in a retention pond to catch any road run-off that might occur. She explained: “Once you start building all those homes, you’re going to get a lot of run off”.

Sheryl added: “The neighborhood hasn’t change much, but everything around as far as from here to Orlando has changed a bunch.”

The Future

In terms of the future of Mud Lake, Doris doesn’t predict much change unless something drastic occurs. She said:

“It just seems like it will stay the same, I guess. I would like to see the weeds gone, but nothing is going to change that. That is just the way it is.”

One positive point about living on a lake that is swampy is the unlikelihood that building will occur. Doris said: “I just enjoy being here and knowing that nothing can be built there, that’s the main thing. It’s a good thing.”

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