



Oral history narrative from a joint program with Hillsborough County and the Florida Center for Community Design and Research

Crum, Jackson, Simmons & Starvation Lakes

The following narrative comes from an interview with hydro-geologist Frank Crum in his home on May 6, 2004. Frank shares his experiences with the Section 21 well-field that surrounds the lakes of Starvation, Crum, Simmons, and Jackson.

Personal History

Frank Crum was first introduced to Hillsborough County and its lakes through a professional relationship with the water well-fields. Frank explains his connection with the four closely related lakes of Starvation, Crum, Simmons, and Jackson:

"I was a hydro-geologist with the firm Leggette, Brasheares, and Graham, Inc., and we were the first firm to specialize in hydrogeology in the world. I worked on projects down here from 1959 until I retired in 1997. I think my first trip down here [Tampa] was in 1960."

That first trip brought him into what has been commonly referred to as the "water wars" between the City of St. Petersburg and Hillsborough County. The lakes themselves lie within Hillsborough County, but they are actually owned by the city of St. Petersburg, bought decades earlier to provide a future water resource for the city. The land surrounding the lakes is leased back to Hillsborough County to be used as a park for the citizens of the area. The land is continuing to be used in this capacity as Lake Park off of Dale Mabry Highway. The wells added in 1961 came to become collectively known as the Section 21 well-field. Frank explains:

"The city of St. Petersburg had bought Section 21 lake park property back in, I think, the early '40's. They owned the Cosme-Odessa well-field from the 1930's on, bought that piece of property for a future water supply. In 1961 we went and put in 10 wells-10 production wells trying to beat a proposed state law. We had 90 days, or something like that, to do it in."

When Frank first arrived to install the wells, only one of the four lakes was named, Starvation Lake. Frank explains the origins of the other three lake names:

"So, when I went into section 21, there were four lakes in there, the only one that had a name was Starvation. When we started out it was Lake 1, Lake 2, Lake 3, and Starvation- I couldn't stand it! So, I took it upon myself to name one after myself, and the other one was Simmons Lake after a guy I was working with, and the third one was Jackson and I named that one after Leon Jackson, superintendent of the St. Pete water plant over on Racetrack Road."

History/Information

The four lakes featured in this narrative, Lakes Crum, Starvation, Simmons, and Jackson, are all part of the same feature known as the Section 21 Well-field. Their health and conditions are linked by the engineering and control exerted on their water levels and amount of water pumped out of the area.

All of the lakes are located in the Rocky/Brushy Creek watershed. Starvation Lake is the most significant presence in the area at 16 acres. Crum Lake is a 2 acre lake located just to the south of Starvation Lake. Lake Simmons and Lake Jackson are also located within the well field area on the western side of Starvation and Crum.

The lakes are located in northern Hillsborough County at Dale Mabry Highway and Van Dyke Road. The area surrounding the lakes is currently being utilized by Hillsborough County as Lake Park. Pine flatwoods and hardwood hammocks surround the park. Activities the park is used for include fishing and picnicking. Other activities are facilitated by the BMX track, a radio-controlled car track, and equestrian area, and an archery range. (<http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/communications/commlink/resources/onlineservices/communitylink/progList.cfm?progId=HCAI271&keyword=Parks>)

Frank's long experience working in the area allowed him the opportunity to see many changes to the area over the years. He has seen how man-made constructions have affected the area, as well as the effects of natural change. Frank describes how changes to the water flow in the area resulted in a cascade of other changes:

"The only source of in-flow for Section 21 was a little ditch cutting across Van Dyke Road. St. Petersburg, I think somewhere in the early '70's, maybe late '60's, interconnected these four lakes. The reason they did it was, and I think it was our suggestion, particularly Crum Lake, had deep sinkholes. So, we connected the four lakes to help them out."

Frank describes other changes he has seen:

"It was very, very wet out there. 1959 and 1960 were very wet years. Parts of it were very swampy and you couldn't, honestly, get through all of the property it was so overgrown. If I were to go out there now I wouldn't recognize it, the parks people have neatened it up. It certainly does not resemble at all what I saw in 1961. Of course, you could say that about most of Northwest Hillsborough County if you wanted to... Another event was in the late '60's, there was a big fire out there, and the fire burned everything down. Now I worked from 1960-65 and I didn't come back down until about 1970, and when I came back I thought it looked like a desert because a fire had come along."

Frank notes the wildlife in the area:

"The only major thing out there besides gators and snakes were raccoons. Of course there were birds, but I don't know what kinds they were. It was a typical part of 1960's Florida that was uninhabited. Vicious snakes, I remember that, they would come after you."

Frank also remembers the lakes being the "typical tannic-acid color" found in many water bodies throughout this area. He also adds his thoughts on the water in the lakes:

"All the problems with those lakes have always been blamed on the well field- and any area around them- everything is always the well-fields fault. I think there are other things affecting them from drought to drainage to pumpage. The pumpage in both those well-fields is way, way down from what it used to be. Both those well-fields, at one time, probably pumped 20-million gallons of water a day."

In fact, due to new laws and regulations, the Section 21 well-field was reduced to pumping a maximum of 12-million gallons of water a day in the 1980's

Development

As is the case in any section of Hillsborough County, increasing development is also a concern for the lakes in Rocky/Brushy Creek Watershed. The land directly surrounding the lakes is unlikely to be developed, but the greater area surrounding the lakes continues to see increased traffic and development. A common side effect of development is the man-made regulation of the natural water flow through the watershed. This affects the lakes because they may no longer be receiving the same natural exchange of water as in the past. Frank believes this may be the biggest threat to the four lakes of the Section 21 well-field:

“I think the biggest threat from development in the area is changes in drainage. If you’re going to cut off surface drainage into them, then they’re not going to get replenished because they can’t do it from just rainfall.”

The Future

“There is probably as much development as there can be up there, to the extent that would affect drainage into the lake.” Frank notes that while the area today is predominantly built-out, there can still be changes made to the water drainage in the area. Each of these changes affects the water resources in the area, including Lakes Crum, Starvation, Simmons, and Jackson.

Frank also mentions that there is a study going on today to determine whether wastewater can be used to replenish the water resources in the area:

“There is a study going on in Section 21 right now, a replenishment study, and they’re talking about taking highly treated wastewater from North Dale Mabry and moving it up there to replenish the lake or the wetlands.”

Frank’s hope for the future of the lakes is Section 21 and all of Hillsborough County is that “more care is taken in regard to drainage changes that affect the natural flow of water in the area.”

Written By: Alexis Broadbent-Sykes