

On Our Pond

**A NEWSLETTER FOR CLEANER WATER & BETTER
AQUATIC ENVIRONMENTS IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

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2009 Best Maintained Pond

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On Our Pond

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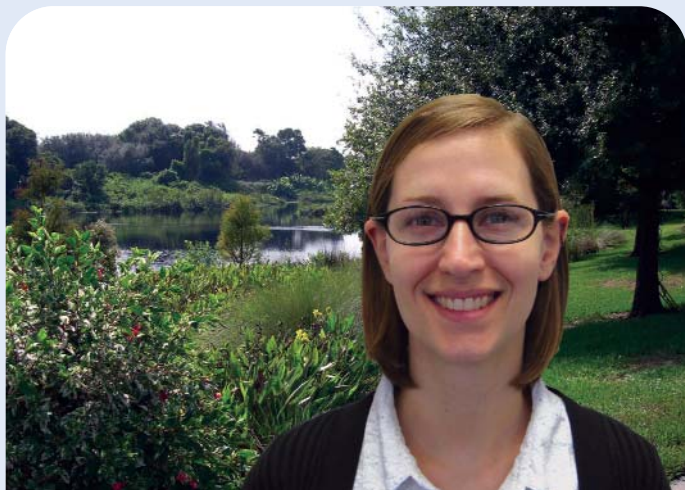
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Adopt-A-Pond is sponsored by Hillsborough County, and the
Northwest Hillsborough, Hillsborough River, and Alafia River
Basin Boards of the Southwest Florida Water Management
District, and YOU!



Welcome to Jennifer Aragon!



Jennifer Aragon is our new Adopt-A-Pond Program Coordinator.

By John McGee

As you might remember from past issues of this newsletter, our team has been undergoing some restructuring. For about a year, I have been covering all the programs myself, and what a job it has been! But at long last, I am pleased to announce that we have been able to hire a new Adopt-A-Pond Program Coordinator, Jennifer Aragon!

Jennifer comes to us from the Environmental Protection Commission Water Division where she has worked for four years. She has experience with our programs because she interned with us while she was in college. Jennifer has a bachelor's degree in Biology and a master's degree in Environmental Science and Policy, both from USF. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, canoeing, traveling and working with her husband on home improvement projects.

Since starting here in November, she's been busily getting up to speed on all of your projects and jumping right in to the world of Adopt-A-Pond. If you haven't met her yet, you will in the future! We're very happy to welcome Jennifer to our section and I'm especially glad to have her on the Stormwater Environmental Programs Team!

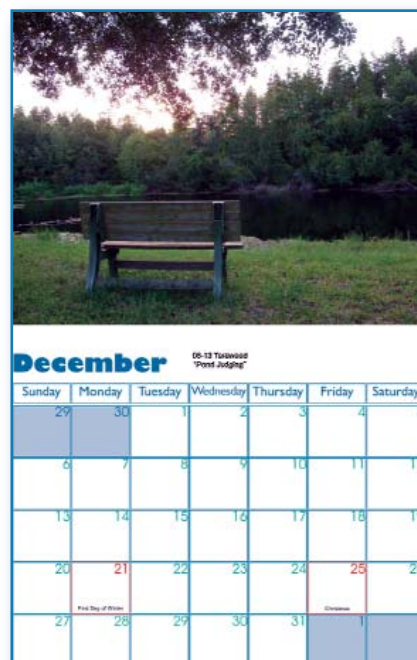
The annual Lake, Pond & Stream Night is coming this Spring! Look for more details on the event in our next newsletter.

2010 Calendars now available!

Our 2010 Adopt-A-Pond calendars are in! This year's calendar features photos from some of our adopted ponds, including the 2009 Best Maintained Pond (05-06 Spring Lake) as well as a couple lakes in Hillsborough County.

Each month's photo will give you a feel for the beauty of some of the ponds and lakes in the county, as well as highlight some of the restoration events within the Adopt-A-Pond program. The photos in this calendar were provided by pond group members or obtained from our historical database. Thanks to all of you who submitted pictures and congratulations to those whose photos are in the calendar.

If you would like one of these free calendars, please contact us at aragonj@hillsboroughcounty.org or call 744-5671. Get them before they're gone!



05-06 Spring Lake voted 2009 Best Maintained Pond!

Congratulations to 05-06 Spring Lake for being voted this year's Best Maintained Pond! It was a close race, but this pond won by the skin of its teeth...or shall I say more appropriately, by a shovel blade.

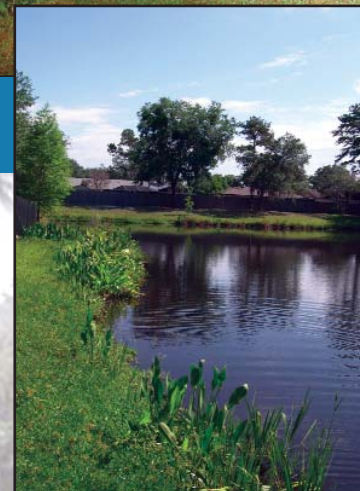
This pond is located in Valrico in the Bloomingdale East community. The Spring Lake pond group has been active in the Adopt-A-Pond program since 1994 and their efforts are evident in the landscape of this pond!

Some of the judges comments included remarks about the areas of this pond that provided habitat for wildlife, the variety of vegetation around the pond, and they also noted in particular that there was no litter. The pond group, especially the group's representative, has been working diligently to keep trash out of the pond, including installing and regularly cleaning a trash collecting device on the stormwater outfall. Congratulations Spring Lake pond group and keep up the good work!

A variety of native vegetation around the pond.



Duck Potato along the shoreline.



Pond Group	Total Score
05-06 Spring Lake	193
05-10 Black Pine	192
06-35 Lake Forest	188
05-14 Marsh Crossings	181
06-28 Lake Heather	159
06-34 Summer Springs	155
03-11 Keystone Manors	144
09-06 Pura Vida	143.5
08-16 Carroll Grove	116

Competition Re-cap

The annual Best Maintained Pond competition is a fun and informative opportunity for pond groups to show off all their hard work. It also provides an opportunity to receive productive feedback from judges who are local environmental professionals. This year, each pond had the chance of receiving a total possible score of 252 points. There were nine applicants in the competition and their total scores are listed on the left. Along with getting an overall score, each pond group received a copy of all of the judges' comments. They can use this information to enhance their aquatic landscape and prepare for next year's competition!

Most of the groups in this year's competition have been in the Adopt-A-Pond program from several years to over a decade. A couple of our newer groups in the competition (groups 09-06 and 08-16) have only been in the program for around a year or less! Although they haven't been in the program for as long as some of the other groups, they were still able to hold their own in the competition and kept their scores close to the other groups. With just a little more work and some more plants, these ponds could really put up a good fight in next year's Best Maintained Pond competition!

All of these groups have shown a lot of hard work and determination since they've been in the Adopt-A-Pond program. Their efforts, as well as the efforts of all the other groups in the program, are helping improve water quality in the area, provide habitat for wildlife, as well as beautify their neighborhoods. Good job to all of you, and keep up the good work!

"Skip a Week" of Irrigation

The Southwest Florida Water Management District recently launched a new campaign to encourage residents who irrigate their lawns to "Skip a Week" of watering during the cooler months of December, January and February.

According to research by the University of Florida, grass doesn't need to be watered as often during the cooler months. In fact, one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water every 10–14 days is sufficient.

"Over-watering in the winter can encourage pests and disease in your lawn," said Sylvia Durell, Florida-friendly landscaping project manager. Skipping a week of watering is easy to do, even if you have an irrigation timer. Durell says to "turn the timer to 'off' for the week that you want to skip, and 'on' for the week that you want to water."

Homeowners can determine that their grass needs water when:

- Thirty percent of the grass blades in the lawn are folded in half lengthwise.
- Grass blades are blue-gray.
- Footprints remain on the lawn for several minutes after walking on it.

Skipping a week of irrigation will help conserve drinking water supplies. Following the "Skip a Week" plan saves water that we all need for other critical uses during the dry season.

For more water conservation tips, information about the drought and the current water restrictions, please visit the District's web site at WaterMatters.org/skipaweek.

Set your timer to "off" to skip a week of irrigation.



Pond Plant Spotlight – Water-Spider Orchid

The Water-Spider Orchid is a unique-looking aquatic plant.

By Tiffany Linthicum

The Water-Spider Orchid (*Habenaria repens*) is a true Florida native. It can be found in lakes throughout the state. The water-spider is an emersed plant. It can be found on marshy shores and even in floating mats of vegetation at times.

The Water-Spider Orchid is erect growing 1 to 2 feet tall. It spreads by runners and seeds. It has thick, succulent leaves, 2 to 9 inches long and up to 1 inch wide. The narrow lanced-shape leaves taper to a point. There is a stalk of flowers that occurs at the top of the plant. You may be wondering why they call it a water-spider orchid. It's because these small pale-green flowers have narrow petals which resemble tiny green creepy crawly spiders.



water-spider orchid
Habenaria repens
Photo by Vic Ramey
© 2003 University of Florida



Lake & Stream News

www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org



How's Your Lake?

If you live on a lake, you have a special place and special concerns. Actually, lakes can even vary significantly from each other. While we often focus on the similarities among lakes and ponds, we also want to understand the differences.

To that end, we're asking about your lake. After all, you live there. You see, use, and hopefully monitor your lake. So, if you live on a lake, we'd like to ask you a few questions. It's nothing too difficult; we just want to know which lake you're on, how long you've been there, what you like best about your lake, and stuff like that. Your info will not only help us understand more about your particular lake, but it will also help us understand how we can help you keep your lake healthy. After all, no lake is in a vacuum. They're all affected by other things and affect other things in turn. We have to work together.

Water is one of our most important resources. As a lake resident, you know this as well as anyone. To tell us about your lake, please visit www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org.



What's New for Lakes & Streams

By John McGee

With Jennifer now on our team handling ponds, I can focus more on lakes and streams. One of my goals is to build our network of samplers back up. It has slowly eroded over the years. Our volunteer samplers are our eyes out there, so we need you. Part of that process involves making the programs worthwhile for you, which is one reason for the survey above.

I also wanted to remind you of what we do offer for lakes and streams. We contract with Lakewatch for lakes and with Stream Waterwatch for streams to have a presence here in Hillsborough County, to teach sampling and help keep our volunteers going. We provide technical assistance with all kinds of lake and stream management issues. This service provides free advice, unbiased by profit motive or private property interest, to help you care for your lake or stream. We also offer assistance in developing resource management plans, which we highly recommend for every community. The plans help identify historic and potential issues, find viable solutions, and lay out a plan of action. If we can help, please let us know by e-mail at mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org or call us at 744-5671.

Attention Stream Waterwatch Volunteers!

The new Stream Waterwatch pages are available on the Hillsborough County Wateratlas. Please visit www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org to submit information on your station.

Pete the Pelican Pirate joins our program



"One man's trash isn't always another man's treasure!"



Ahoy Matey! We have a new member who has flown aboard to help prevent water pollution...it is Pete the Pelican Pirate! He comes to us in partnership with Keep Hillsborough County Beautiful, and will be a part of our Environmental Education Program to help motivate children to get hooked on keeping Hillsborough County beautiful and to "treasure" Tampa Bay.

Pete the Pelican Pirate is a brown pelican that knows first-hand the affects pollution can have on someone. He has two large fishing hooks (one in his beak and one in his hat) that got stuck there one day while he

was trying to find some lunch. He was flying near the pier, minding his own business, when suddenly a fisherman snagged Pete with the hook from his fishing pole. Ouch!

Pete is now on a mission to stop the litter problem through education. He teaches children how to properly dispose of trash. As Pete says, "Yo ho, Yo ho, keeps me county clean!"

Nitrogen Management Regulation update

As many of you may have already heard, there have been recent discussions about a nitrogen management regulation going into effect for residential fertilizer usage in Hillsborough County. These discussions are based on a state model ordinance that requires governments along impaired waters to ban the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers, at a minimum, when heavy rains are predicted. Over the past couple of years, several cities and counties in Florida have established rules to regulate nitrogen in residential fertilizer ranging from restricting fertilizers when a heavy storm event is predicted to banning the use of nitrogen-containing fertilizers during the rainy season, from June through September. The reasoning behind establishing a regulation for nitrogen management is to minimize the amount of nitrogen running off into waterways, since nitrogen is a major water pollutant in the Tampa Bay area.

The Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners met as the Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) on December 9th to discuss implementing a nitrogen management regulation for Hillsborough County in response to the recent state mandate. The discussion focused on whether to adopt the state requirement or a stricter requirement based on recommendation from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP). The majority of the commissioners were on board to go with the TBEP's recommendation to ban the use of nitrogen-containing fertilizers during the rainy season, but no formal motions were made during the meeting. The EPC is working on rule language to be presented early next year.

Refresher Course: Homeowners Associations (HOAs)

In the past several years, communities with Homeowners Associations, Property Owners Associations, Special Taxing Districts, or Community Development Districts have grown in popularity. Each designation is a bit different in legality and structure, but they serve the same basic purpose: to manage the interests of the community. But as with any governing organization, there can also be controversies and confusions surrounding them. So let's look at how these organizations are set up and how they relate to ponds, drainage, and our programs. For simplicity, we're just going to refer to them all as Homeowners Associations (HOAs) from here on.

While many people know these organizations enforce deed restrictions and manage common property, they also serve another important function in government. This is to maintain the responsibility for community permits.

From previous articles in this column, you might remember that every new development has to get permits for its construction. Some of these permits stay in place permanently to ensure that the system functions as it should and doesn't just get filled in later. That means someone needs to be responsible for the permit. Developers often set up HOAs to serve as the "Operating Entity" once the community is completed. This means, the HOA has responsibilities to fulfill under the various permits. It is wise to understand what conditions those permits have for the various ponds and other features of your community so no one gets surprised when there's an issue. For instance, some ponds require plants, some don't and some HOAs take care of them, some don't.

The way HOAs are designed, and what responsibilities

they accept is highly varied. There is no general rule. In the strictest versions, the HOA controls all maintenance of streets, lighting, drainage, etc. Basically everything, except perhaps water and power, is operated by the community. These neighborhoods typically have controlled access and higher community fees. Highly private communities can also inadvertently close themselves to government services and programs such as Adopt-A-Pond. This can lead to problems if the community is not prepared to meet the very large demands of maintaining their infrastructure.



DEDICATION

THE UNDERSIGNED, AS OWNERS OF THE FEE SIMPLE TITLE TO, OR ALL MORTGAGE LIENS ON, AS INDICATED, THE LANDS DESCRIBED HEREON WHICH ARE BEING SUBDIVIDED AND PLATTED INTO A SUBDIVISION OF COUNTRY PLACE WEST - UNIT V. DEDICATE TO THE PUBLIC ALL ROADS, STREETS, AND EASEMENTS AS SHOWN ON SAID PLAT, TO THE USE OF THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL FOR PURPOSES INCIDENTAL THERETO.

The dedication may have turned certain things over to public use.

On the other end of the spectrum are HOAs with voluntary membership. These communities have turned streets, lighting, and drainage over to "the public" and the local government maintains them. The HOA is in place to help enforce minimal deed restrictions, such as no chicken farms in the backyard. In these cases, community fees are small or nil, and government programs are available. But government services can be slow and/or minimal, leaving residents to handle many minor issues on their own.

Where it gets tricky is that most HOAs fall somewhere in the middle, controlling drainage on certain parcels, but not others, streets, but not lights, etc. It is important to thoroughly read your community covenants and look over your plat drawings to understand the set-up where you live.

The best way to avoid any problems is to understand the details in your community and choose a neighborhood that fits your lifestyle and expectations.

The Adopt-A-Pond Program

Hillsborough County Public Works Dept.
Specialized Services
2420 N Falkenburg Rd.
Tampa, FL 33619
Bill to Mail Code 1384

Pre sort Standard
U.S. Postage Paid
Tampa, FL 33601
Permit No 295



Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners
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Pond in a Jar

Ever wished you could see what's going on inside your pond? Well, here's an easy project to do just that.

Start with a 1 gallon pickle jar. Put 2 centimeters of potting soil in the bottom. Then add 1 centimeter of clean sand on top of the soil. Fill the jar slowly with water (rain barrel water works great). Be careful not to let the water dig a hole into your sand. Pour it through your hand to slow it down.

Now gather some submersed plants. See what you can find. Carefully pull them up so you keep some roots. Keep them wet, until you can get them to the jar. Then carefully press the roots through the sand and into the black dirt. You don't need too many plants. Mine has 4 species. You can punch holes in the lid to let air in, or you can cover the top with some left over screen, like I did.

Put the jar somewhere with plenty of light and watch what happens. In a few days, you'll have a beautiful pond in a jar, complete with snails and other life that came in with your plants! If the water stays murky or algae grows, try adding some more plants. A balanced jar only needs a bit of extra water every few months.



What can you find in your pond in a jar?