

# On Our Pond

A NEWSLETTER FOR CLEANER WATER & BETTER POND ENVIRONMENTS IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Volume 14, No 3  
Fall 2008



## The Best Pond of 2008?

Who will it be? Find out more inside!

### Where We've Been

#### Education Meetings

- 08-12 Rolling Springs
- 08-13 Tarabrook

#### Plantings

- 97-248 Logan Place
- 08-12 Rolling Springs
- 08-11 Crystal Cove



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### On Our Pond

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Adopt-A-Pond is sponsored by Hillsborough County  
Specialized Services, the Southwest Florida Water  
Management District, and YOU!



## Illicit Discharges—Ewww

Illicit Discharges sound gross, and they pretty much are. When someone puts anything other than stormwater into the drainage system or a waterway, we call it an illicit discharge, and it's illegal. We can stop them, but we need your help to find them.

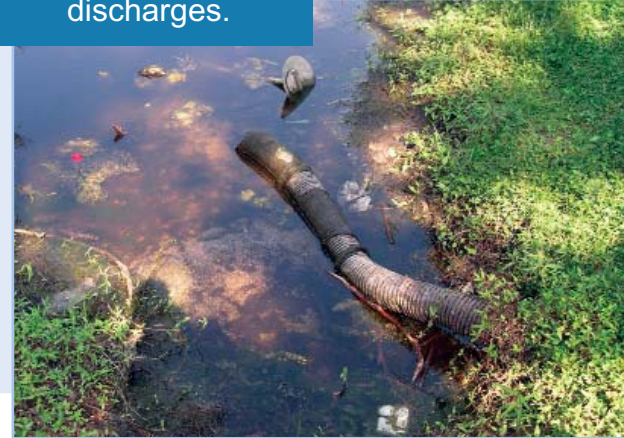
Debris (even yard waste) in a drainage area, discolored concrete in gutters or drains, strange smells, dead animals or fish, or flows during otherwise dry times, can indicate an illicit discharge. These symptoms can also indicate many other things, so there's no need to panic. But, if you think it might be an illicit discharge, report it to the Hillsborough County Environmental Protection Commission at **(813) 627-2600**. Or go to [www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org) and use the 'report pollution' link.

You should never touch or inhale anything suspicious and don't confront anyone caught in the act. We have specially trained investigators to do that. But, pictures are always helpful.

Contact us to get a free flyer with more info or visit [www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org) to download one yourself.



Two types of illicit discharges.



Florida Yards use nine principles to make a healthy, beautiful yard.



## Nice Yard = Stuff for Your Pond

A few months ago, we introduced a new incentive to Pond Groups who have officially recognized Florida Friendly yards in their drainage areas. Two groups have already claimed the first level incentive. But there still seems to be a bit of confusion about how it works. So we've recently simplified things and added one more incentive that many of you might be able to claim. Here's the new deal:

**Level 1** Pond Groups with 1-2 Florida-friendly yards get \$200 worth of free stuff for your pond.

**Level 2** Pond Groups with 3-5 Florida-friendly yards get \$500 of stuff and one free herbicide treatment.

**Level 3** Pond Groups with 6 or more Florida-friendly yards get \$500 of stuff and 2 free herbicide treatments.

**Bonus Incentive** Pond Groups that have a Florida-friendly common area in their community get \$200 of stuff!

To be eligible, you first need the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) program to recognize qualifying yards. Once you receive your FYN sign, contact us to claim your incentive. Remember, this incentive is only open to Pond Groups, but the recognized yard doesn't have to touch your pond. As long as it's in an area that drains to the pond (down the street or two blocks away), you're good. The common area can be anywhere in the development! And FYN will come out to help you get started. Seriously people, we're just giving stuff away here!

To find out more about the FYN program, check out page 6 or go to <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

## 2008 Best Maintained Pond Competition

It's time again for our annual Pond Judging! This competition comes at the end of every growing season when your ponds should be looking their best. It's a time to show off what you've done, get some feedback from our team of experts, and maybe win some **fabulous** prizes!

This competition is open to any Adopt-A-Pond group. But, you have to apply to participate. On an unannounced day in October, our team of environmental professionals will visit your pond to rank it according to several criteria including general appearance, beneficial plant species, habitat improvements, and Florida-friendly techniques. The score sheets get tallied up, and the pond that scores

highest wins! We typically have about 10 ponds apply out of more than 300 that have been through Adopt-A-Pond. You only compete against the ones that apply, so even newer ponds stand a good chance of winning. If nothing else, you'll get a nice prize for participating and some great professional feedback on how your pond is doing.

Applications will be mailed to all Group Representatives and will also be available on-line during September, so make sure to get yours in by October 8th! The winner gets a park bench, a special sign for the pond, a feature in this newsletter, and our brand new organic cotton t-shirts for your pond group. Now as ponds go, that's pretty fabulous!



The Pond Judging finds the best pond of the year!  
How does your pond measure up?



Storm drain markers don't get noticed by themselves, but people do.

## Storm Drain Marker Research

Storm drain markers are weather-resistant signs that are glued to drains and tell people not to pollute. It's a very popular program, but how well do the markers work? We recently decided to find out.

We selected five communities in various areas and income brackets, and invited all the residents to participate in a survey about environmental attitudes. Then, using one community as a control, we marked four of them and distributed door hangers. We followed up with another survey to see if people noticed the markers or any changes in neighbors' habits. While our sample set was too small to represent all of the County, it revealed that only 26

percent of the respondents noticed environmental signs of any kind, and only 16 percent noticed changes in behavior. Those who noticed were mostly predisposed to environmental issues, or in areas where markings were highly publicized. This indicates that while markers alone aren't very effective at getting people's attention, active and visible neighbors are.

How effective are the markers? If placed as part of a visible community effort, they can reinforce a norm that, 'it's not cool to pollute here.' And, that kind of peer pressure is well-proven to change behavior.

## Check Them Out: Lake Forest Ponds (06-35, 07-02, 07-03)

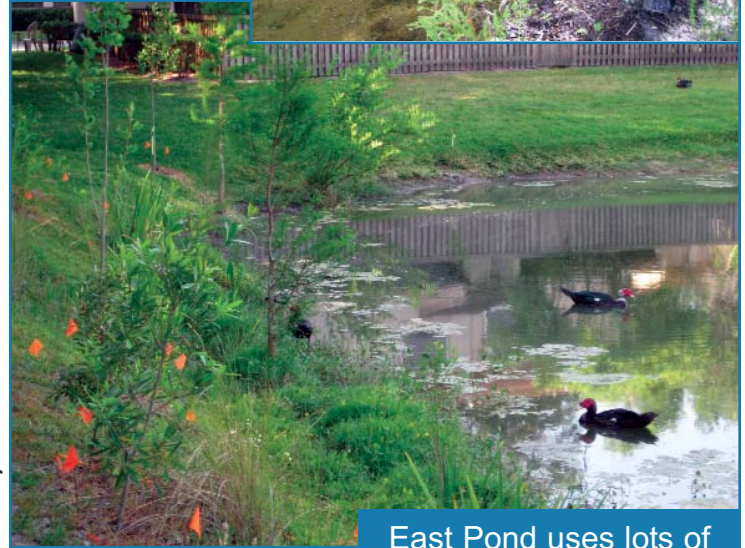
Lake Forest sits on the south side of Lutz right next to New Tampa. The community centers on a large borrow pit that is now a lake. It also has three other ponds. What makes this area unique is that it sits at the convergence of two large ditch systems draining the University area, and it discharges to Cypress Creek. Fortunately for all of us, this place is under the watchful eye of Jim Griffin and the Lakes Committee.

The committee manages all of the ponds. Lake Forest, the largest, has been managed for years through a combination of regular volunteer efforts and professional management. East Pond is a small body that feeds into Lake Forest. It has been planted in the last year. North Pond is the last stop between Lake Forest and the Cypress Creek wetland. It has also been planted.

The group hasn't stopped there. They're in the process of restoring the small creek that connects Lake Forest to North Pond, including the bend of drier land along the side. They've also taken one of the large ditches in hand, removing nuisance species and encouraging natives. And they've spoken up politically to protect the gorgeous wetland between North Pond and Cypress Creek. When they need help, they find it from programs like Adopt-A-Pond and apply for grants.

Next on their list is Mill Pond, which takes the water from the two ditches, and connects to Lake Forest. This community is a shining example of how to take ownership of an area, good and bad, and turn it into something great.

The creek leading to North Pond (07-03).



East Pond uses lots of shrubs and trees.

## Pond Plant Spotlight—Sand Cordgrass

Cordgrass is a beautiful, low-maintenance accent, wet or dry.



Sand Cordgrass (*Spartina bakerii*) is a hardy, drought-tolerant plant that can also tolerate periods of flooding. Its thick root system also holds well on slopes and helps stop erosion. In fact, you see cordgrass in medians and overpass slopes, as well as ponds.

The base of this plant grows to about 12 inches thick and the leaves spill out, like a fountain, to four feet. The leaf blades aren't sharp like some ornamental grasses. This plant has graceful plumes and is super low-maintenance making it a perfect choice for those hard-to-landscape areas of your pond or yard. We use it frequently to screen off unsightly items like control structures or headwalls and to create a visual frame from particular viewpoints. We also use it as a border plant on long dry littoral slopes and to hold banks on steep inclines. It even works well as a focal point in a plant bed. Best of

all, it survives on rainfall and doesn't need pruning. If you do decide to spruce it up, simply cut it straight across near the base, and the plumes will grow back. Remember to mark it well after planting. When cordgrass is small, it can be easy to mow over.



# Lake & Stream News

TRIM INFORMATION (2008)						
TAXING AUTHORITY	BASE TAXABLE VALUE	ADDITIONAL EXEMPTIONS GRANTED	TAXABLE VALUE	LAST YEAR PROPERTY TAXES	PROPOSED PROPERTY TAXES	ROLLBACK PROPERTY TAXES
General Revenue	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$2,156.97	\$2,089.52	\$2,259.96
Schools - State	\$367,492	\$0	\$367,492	\$1,796.29	\$2,055.26	\$1,864.03
Schools - Local	\$367,492	\$0	\$367,492	\$1,028.43	\$959.27	\$1,067.23
County MSTU	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$1,642.90	\$1,585.72	\$1,737.79
County Library	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$228.40	\$202.38	\$237.87
SWFWMD	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$145.15	\$140.14	\$158.23
NW Hills Basin	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$90.90	\$87.76	\$93.49
Port Authority	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$74.42	\$70.69	\$77.90
Children's Board	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$174.00	\$181.25	\$181.50
Transit Authority	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$168.78	\$181.25	\$175.92
Environmental Lands	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$22.68	\$21.89	\$21.89
Parks & Rec	\$362,492	\$0	\$362,492	\$9.72	\$9.39	\$9.39
<b>TOTALS</b>				<b>\$7,538.65</b>	<b>\$7,593.52</b>	<b>\$7,885.20</b>

	YEAR	JUST VALUE	ASSESSED VALUE	EXEMPTIONS	TAXABLE VALUE
LAST YEAR	2007	\$479,033	\$400,478	\$25,000	\$375,478
CURRENT YEAR	2008	\$413,977	\$412,492	\$50,000	\$362,492

[www.hcpafl.org](http://www.hcpafl.org) is a quick way to find general info about where your property taxes go.

## Property Tax Explained

Living on the water has many advantages whether it's a small pond, a huge lake, a creek, a river, or even the Bay. One of the substantial benefits can include property value. This can also be a cost, depending on how you look at it. There's also certain responsibilities that come with owning property on the water, such as maintenance, storm issues, and flood insurance. These responsibilities can become unexpected costs as well.

In the previous issue of this newsletter, we examined special taxing districts as a means to fund and manage lake or waterway maintenance. But I'm sure someone was reading that article and thinking, "but I pay a premium in property taxes to live here...that should cover the costs." This is a common

sentiment when people are facing expensive work on their waterway. But the truth is, there is no such thing as a waterfront fee in Hillsborough County.

Property taxes come in two forms: ad valorem and non ad valorem. Non ad valorem taxes are not based on the value of the property. This means everyone pays the same rate. Services like trash collection are non ad valorem. There is no countywide non ad valorem tax for living on the water. Ad valorem taxes are based on the value of the property. Naturally, if a property is worth more, the taxes will be higher. These taxes have nothing to do with the fact that a house is on a water body.

In short, the reason taxes are higher on waterfront property is because waterfront property is typically valued higher than non-waterfront property. The same rate is applied to waterfront properties as to non-waterfront. A \$400,000 dollar home on the water pays the same rate as a \$400,000 landlocked home.

### What's New

The new Watershed Atlas format is going live! Let us know what you think of the new design.

### Lake & Stream Volunteers Wanted

Lake volunteers need a boat, access to a lake, and a few hours of spare time each month. Stream volunteers need a few hours of spare time to take samples.

Training and equipment are provided!

**New volunteers in September and October receive a free T-shirt!**



## Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Principle: Recycle

By Lisa Strange, FYN Community Association Coordinator

The following is the sixth in a series of articles on the nine principles of Florida-friendly landscaping which are designed to produce attractive, low-maintenance, environmentally-friendly landscapes that also provide habitat for wildlife and reduce the spread of invasive plants.

Recycling is easy and also beneficial to the environment. You may already be recycling in ways you do not even realize. By leaving the grass clippings on the lawn after mowing, the decomposing grass blades replenish nitrogen and organic matter back into the soil. Over a period of time, the need for nitrogen fertilizer can be reduced up to 50 percent without a decrease in turf grass quality. By recycling yard debris, you are also reducing costs, as well as the environmental impacts of hauling and disposing.

Create compost by recycling kitchen scraps such as vegetables, fruits, egg shells and coffee grounds with yard debris. Combining these materials, in proper proportions of carbon and nitrogen, can create a rich organic matter that can be used as soil amendments, potting media and mulch. Compost, virtually a free resource, is the perfect medium to sustain healthy plants. Adding compost to soil improves soil structure and texture, increases the water-holding capacity, and provides habitat for microorganisms and larger critters such as earthworms. Unlike fast-release fertilizers, compost nutrients are released slower to be available for plant uptake without a lot of unnecessary leaching or runoff of pollutants into our water.

### Tips on cost-saving Florida-friendly recycling techniques

- Recycle grass clippings by leaving them on the lawn.
- Use fallen leaves and pine needles as mulch around trees and shrubs.
- Create self-mulching areas under large trees.
- Create and maintain a compost pile with the kitchen scraps and yard waste you generate.



The Extension Service teaches how to compost, or recycle yard waste & kitchen scraps.

To help reduce water usage and maintenance, create self-mulching areas under trees where turf grass is difficult to grow. If the area generates more leaves or pine needles than you need, compost them or share with a neighbor.



For more information on composting, visit Florida's Online Composting Center at <http://compostinfo.com>, or contact your local county UF/IFAS Extension office. For more information on Florida-friendly landscaping visit [floridayards.org](http://floridayards.org). To order a free Florida-friendly Handbook and plant list from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, go to [watermatters.org](http://watermatters.org). Adopt-A-Pond Groups also receive one in their Adopt-A-Pond Notebook. For more information on the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program, go to <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.



## Refresher Course: Nutrients

Nutrients...the word evokes lots of images for people. If you're into fitness, you probably think of nutrition. If you like gardening, you probably think of fertilizer. Both of these are correct. But nutrients also have a more negative image for those of us concerned about water quality. Unfortunately, for those who aren't familiar with how our natural systems work, the dangerous aspect of nutrients can be hard to imagine...mainly because we can't see it directly. Let's start at the beginning and see if we can help.

When we talk about water quality, we're mostly concerned with two nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorous. These are "major nutrients" that plants need in large quantities to grow. (They're also the first two numbers on the fertilizer bag.) They are naturally found in soil and water in different quantities. The problem comes, like most environmental issues, when we humans start messing around with the natural balance.

We want our yards to be lush and green regardless of the location or weather, so we artificially boost them with fertilizers. When it rains, the fertilizer the plants haven't used washes away. In addition, leaves and clippings can wash away, which also contain nutrients that are released as it decays. Further still, air pollution adds nutrients to the rain water, so rainwater already contains lots of nutrients. When you add up all of the nutrient sources and all the areas we need to drain, it makes for a whole lot of nutrients washing through our waterways.

In all of the ponds, ditches, streams, rivers, lakes, bays, etc., these nutrients fuel growth. But waterways don't naturally have that many nutrients, which means they don't naturally support that much vegetation. What is

good for plant growth in our yard becomes bad for waterways. Excess nutrients cause weeds to grow out of control; algae bloom and disrupt life; and other chemical and biological processes start breaking down.



Too many nutrients lead to algae blooms and fish kills. Overly managed ponds don't allow nutrients to be removed.

So let's stop the nutrients from getting in the water, right? Exactly, that's what we always say around here! The problem is we can't see nutrients. But, we can see stuff growing in our waterways. So many people think 'no plants, no problem' and kill them with herbicide. Every week, we hear people saying, "our lake used to be overgrown, but we sprayed it and now it's all clean." This indicates a big

misunderstanding. By killing the plants, we haven't removed the nutrient problem that fueled their growth, we've just freed up the nutrients to grow something else, like algae, or move them downstream where they mess up the next waterway.

In the same way, if your community's pond is bare because people come out and kill the weeds, you're pond is actually more polluted than it was with the weeds using the nutrients!

Remember that the nutrients don't go away, they will be used by something to grow. Excess growth in waterways can make them ugly and unusable. The weeds are nature's way of trying to heal the problem. To help, we should only put out as much fertilizer as our plants can use, and never use fertilizer near the water. Consider the soil type, location, and weather in designing landscapes. And, in waterways, encourage beneficial plants to use up the nutrients already there. Herbicide is a great tool to control weeds, but it doesn't clean up the water.

**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  
*An Affirmative Action-Equal Opportunity Employer*

## Visit These Websites

Adopt-A-Pond Webpages:  
[www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org/aap](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org/aap)

Extension Office:  
<http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu>

Frog Listening Network:  
[www.seaworld.org/fln/in.htm](http://www.seaworld.org/fln/in.htm)

Hillsborough County Watershed Atlas:  
[www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org)

LAKEWATCH:  
<http://lakewatch.ifas.ufl.edu>

Science Daily:  
[www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)

Southwest Florida Water Management District: [www.watermatters.org](http://www.watermatters.org)

Tampa Bay Estuary Program:  
[www.tbep.org](http://www.tbep.org)

## Toad Villages

In our Summer 2008 issue, we told you about Toad Villages and offered prizes to anyone who sent us a picture of your own Toad Village. We only got one response...and that was from my own kid! So we're going to extend this a little longer in hopes that some school groups might find this a fun and informative project.

Our toad village, and its first resident!



Build your own Toad Village and send us a picture. A Toad Village is a group of small shelters that toads might like to live in. They're really simple to make and can be made with almost any material. You just have to make them suitable for toady habitation. Check out the Summer 08 issue for details. Back issues are available online at [www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org/aap](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org/aap) or in print upon request. Send pictures to [mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org](mailto:mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org) or mail them to the address on the front page.