

Cow House Creek/Slough



John Hamilton (USF)

The following narrative comes from an interview that took place September 11, 2003 with Cow House Creek resident John W. Hamilton. John has lived near the creek for many years and has seen how changes have affected Cow House Creek.

Personal History

John Hamilton, a life-long educator who has worked in many Hillsborough County schools, has lived near Cow House Creek since 1970, when one of his friends urged him to move to the creek:

“A friend of mine came out here and bought that lot and he said, ‘John, you come on down here!’ ... I guess I’m the oldest one living here now.”

John has enjoyed the advantages to living near the creek, including the secluded environment. While John and his family have enjoyed the creek in the past, John has not been using or visiting the creek as frequently. He comments:

“We used to use it a long time ago for canoeing when there was easier access to it. I used to come down here and fish. We would get bass, pretty bass out here... My son and I have canoed up the river past Lettuce Lake Park, up above that. We’d paddle up and just let the canoe drift.”

Today, John enjoys his pocket of paradise that remains hidden from both Temple Terrace and Tampa. Roads, restaurants, and apartment complexes have sprouted up all around in the area near Cow House Creek, but have left John and his piece of Cow House Creek alone- for the most part.

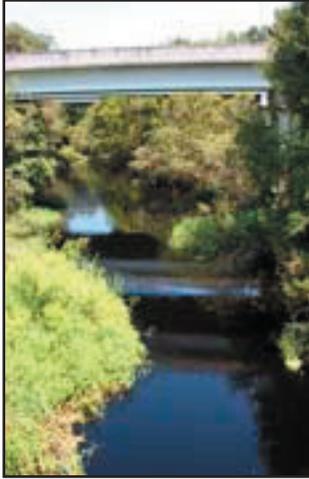


View of Cow House Creek/Slough in 2003



View of Cow House Creek/Slough from the Morris Road Bridge in 2003 (USF)

History/Information



I-75 Bridge going over Cow House Creek/ Slough. Picture taken from the Morris Road Bridge(USF)



John showing the high water mark on the creek near his home (USF)



Close-up of the water in Cow House (USF)

Cow House Creek is located in the Hillsborough River Watershed. Its headwaters are between Highway 301 and Morris Bridge Road and spans 18,351 feet in length until it reaches the mouth, which is located in the Hillsborough River.

John and other residents in the area more commonly know Cow House Creek as Cow House Slough. John says that the creek hasn't changed much in the years he has lived there, except that the vegetation has grown up around it and that it no longer floods due to the construction of the Tampa Bypass Canal. John remembers:

"I've seen water eight to ten feet higher than where it is now. Yes, ma'am, up to here. The guy that used to live here, it came up just within a few feet of his house. It was before they put in that bypass canal, so it was in the seventies."

John says that Cow House Creek has always moved slowly through the part of the creek where he lives, which is not far from where the creek meets with the Hillsborough River. He also says that the creek has always had its brownish tannic acid color, but that it is surprisingly clear.

John and his family enjoyed the creek's beauty and the fishing opportunities it provided, but they never used it for swimming. John explains:

"There was an alligator out there- we didn't want to go swimming! You could slap the water out there and it would come up."

Development

John has seen many changes to the area surrounding Cow House Creek since he first moved there in 1970. The area near the creek used to be a wooded area that supported a variety of wildlife and was frequently visited by local hunters. John shares:

"People used to come out here hunting. The development has cut out a lot of that hunting. I used to come down here and shoot my gun; I don't do that anymore."

However, in the more than thirty years that John has called Cow House Creek home, he has seen how development has affected the area near the creek. Two major pieces of development have had the most impact: Interstate 75 and the Tampa Bypass Canal.

Interstate 75, which crosses over Cow House Creek, was built in the early 1980's. Near the creek is the Fowler Avenue exit where on and off ramps for I-75 are located. Since the construction of I-75, hotels, restaurants and apartment complexes have been built where there were once just woods. John says about the changes:

"Before the apartment complexes and Shoney's [restaurant and hotel] it was woods straight down to the river."

One of the effects of this development is a decrease in the number of animals living near Cow House Creek. John has seen a reduction in the number of animals around his house:



Some of the electrical poles that cross Cow House (USF)



Some of the vegetation along the creek/slough (USF)



A bend in Cow House Creek/Slough (USF)

“I don’t have as many animals as I used to have around my house. I used to have birds, raccoons... I had foxes- I still have too many squirrels.”

However, John believes that the new development has had minimal direct effects on the creek. What he believes has had the greatest impact on the creek is the building of the Tampa Bypass Canal. John believes the canal had a much more significant impact on the creek than the interstate. John says that the canal reduced the amount of water coming down the creek. Another result was a reduction in flooding.

Housing development directly on the creek appears to be minimal, and John believes there are about six or seven houses located along the stretch of creek between the Hillsborough River and I-75. Other development near the creek includes a technology park on the northern side of Cow House Creek. However, much of the land belonging to the technology park that is adjacent to the creek has remained undeveloped. Considering how close the creek is located to Fowler Avenue and Interstate 75, it is surprising how very quiet it remains. John comments:

“It’s very quiet out here. You think you’re in the country. I have no one bothering me at all.”

The Future

Cow House Creek will likely continue to be affected by I-75 and the Tampa Bypass canal, as well as the development of new areas around it. However, the immediate area surrounding much of the creek is made up of homes that will help to keep it somewhat protected from over-development. John feels that development is inevitable:

“One of these days this is all going to be developed... Yes, we’re not going to have any water [in the creek] one of these days. There’s nothing I can do about it- I don’t own the land. It is growing up all around here. That building wasn’t here, that building wasn’t here, all these motels weren’t here, there’s a Bob Evans [restaurant] going in now. A lot of these buildings weren’t here just a few years ago.”

Written By: Alexis Broadbent-Sykes