

Lake Estes



Mike and Krunch Mossey (USF)

Mike and Krunch Mossey have lived on Lake Estes for the past 22 years. The following narrative, based on an interview with the couple at their home on the lake, relates their experiences living on the lake and perspectives on issues affecting Lake Estes.

Personal History

Mike and Krunch Mossey met in 1973 while attending the University of South Florida. Ever since they married in 1975, the couple has lived on some type of water body. Krunch had enjoyed living on St. Pete Beach with her family during high school, and her love of the water was a major part of the Mosseys seeking out places near water to live. The couple had a house on the Hillsborough River until they moved to Lake Estes in 1980.

When the Mosseys bought their house on Lake Estes, it was a 600-square-foot "Jim Walter" stilt home that consisted of only one bedroom, one bathroom, a walk-in kitchen, and a combined living/dining room. The house was built around 1972, and the Mosseys added a 1200-square-foot addition in 1982. Mike and Krunch actually did the construction. Although 28 cypress trees had to be removed to make room for the addition, the Mosseys kept as many as they could. In fact, Mike ended up shaping the roof around one cypress tree in order to keep from cutting it down.

Although Mike and Krunch own a canoe and a kayak, they do not spend as much time on the lake as they did in their early days of living on Lake Estes. Krunch remembers how she and Mike used to spend their weekends on the lake:

"I can remember when we'd blow up the rafts on Saturday and Sunday and we'd just kind of, you know, float in the lake. With the water level having gone down so much, it's just been kind of poor quality of lake water to be floating around in."

Krunch also pointed out that to get in the water now, she would now have to walk 30 feet in, because the water level is so low. Mike added that getting older is another part of spending less time on the lake; over the years, he and Krunch have found themselves spending more time taking care of their yard and house than on lake activities.

Although they now spend less time on the lake, the Mosseys continue to enjoy living so close to the water. One of their favorite parts about living on Lake Estes is watching and feeding the wildlife. Mike related:

"We started with bird feeders and that led to feeding squirrels because you can't keep them out of the bird feeder. We used to have quite a few ducks and put some bread out. That attracted some fish..."



The "Jim Walter" stilt home before additions (Mossey)



Lake Estes in 2002 (USF)



Lake Estes before the problem with aquatic vegetation (Mossey)



An alligator that visited the Mosseys' yard (Mossey)



Lake Estes in 2002 (USF)

Krunch told a number of amusing stories about the antics of the lake area's wildlife inhabitants. Among these stories were that an alligator once came up almost to the house. After spotting the alligator through the kitchen window, Krunch ended up scaring it away as she went outside to photograph it. Another story was about a neighborhood peacock that was best friends with a neighbor's dog. Krunch remembers: "The dog and the peacock were always best pals. Wherever you saw one, the other one was always close by." Krunch also described a turtle that used to come up to her when she approached the lake, to eat out of her hand.

History/Information

Lake Estes is a 12-acre lake located in Lutz, in the Sweetwater Creek Watershed. Its maximum depth is 21 feet, although the water level is presently relatively low. According to current LAKEWATCH data, water quality is "good," although residents remain concerned about an overgrowth of vegetation, mainly spatterdock, water lilies, and cattails on the lake.

Among the many varieties of wildlife Mike and Krunch have spotted in the lake area over the years are: peacocks, ospreys, cranes, geese, pileated woodpeckers, screech owls, bats, an occasional eagle, wood ducks, mallards, raccoons, armadillos, opossums, and a bobcat sighted once in the backyard. In the lake itself live turtles, otters, and alligators. Bass, brim, catfish, gar, and shiners are among the lake's fish.

Although Lake Estes has no formal lake organization, a number of lake residents are actively involved in maintaining the lake's health. Mike has served as Lake Estes's LAKEWATCH volunteer for the past six years; he is actually the lake's first LAKEWATCH volunteer. Many residents have recently become active in addressing overgrown vegetation on the lake. According to Mike, overgrown vegetation has been a problem for the past ten years. The problem worsened this past year, with vegetation covering sixty to seventy percent of the lake's surface, according to Mike's estimation. A year ago, a concerned neighbor organized a meeting to bring together lake experts and Lake Estes residents to discuss a chemical treatment for the vegetation. At first Mike was concerned about using chemicals on the lake, but one of the lake experts provided the following analogy:

"He explained that if you had an oak tree in your yard and for 30 years you raked up the leaves and the dead limbs and everything that fell off, you would have a pile of stuff because throughout the [tree's] life expectancy, the living tree would give off more stuff. And so he was trying to make the point that if you kill some of the plants, sure they're going to settle down to the bottom. And that's not the best thing. But over a period of years the stuff that dies would be greater."

Lake residents decided to pay for the chemical treatment of the lake's vegetation, and as Mike and Krunch understand it, this treatment is currently underway.

Although the vegetation makes the lake less aesthetically pleasing to the Mosseys and other residents, it may not be harmful to the lake. Mike has actually noticed an increase in water clarity in the past three to four years, as the vegetation has increased.

Low water levels is another issue affecting Lake Estes. Thirty feet of shore is currently exposed that remains covered by water when the lake is full. The last two years have been the most severe. However, during the past 22 years that the Mosseys have lived on Lake Estes, Mike can recall five or six times in the springtime months when the lake level was low. During *El Niño* in 1997 and 1998, however, the water level was so high it reached the Mosseys' house.



Vegetation on the shoreline in 1999 (USF)



The southwest shore of Lake Estes in 1999 (USF)



A view of Lake Estes in 2002 (USF)

Development

According to the Mosseys, much of the immediate area has undergone very little change since they first moved to Lake Estes. Only three additional houses have been built on the lake and most of the Mosseys' neighbors have remained the same. However, in the larger area, there has been tremendous growth in residential and commercial development over the past 22 years.

As Krunch understands it, the Lutz lake area was previously a place where Tampa residents built small vacation houses, not a place where many people lived year-round. At that time, the area remained relatively undeveloped and offered urban residents a respite from Tampa's growing residential and commercial development. The Mosseys described their 1980s surroundings as "rural" and Highway 41 as just a small two-lane road at the time. One of the Mosseys' neighbors had goats and horses on their property. However, over the past ten years the Lutz Lake area has undergone tremendous residential and commercial growth. As Mike indicated, "With [the widening of] 41 being completed [around eight years ago], it's not as quiet here as it used to be."

As the area's lakes have increasingly become residentially developed, commercial development has also increased, especially in the last ten years. A prime example of the area's development is the growth of a prestigious gated community called Avila in the late 1980s. The Mosseys perceive some recent commercial development as an attempt to serve this population. For instance, an elaborately designed Publix is currently being constructed down the road from the residential community.

The Future

Overall, the Mosseys seem optimistic about the future of Lake Estes. Krunch sees the future of the lake as resting in the hands of its residents: "I think the future of the lake is going to be determined by the people who live on the lake and what they do about it." Mike knows through first-hand experience that lake residents can be well-intentioned but ignorant, resulting in harm to the lake. He now regrets having built a seawall at the shoreline to help stop erosion caused by jet-skis, for instance; seawalls can actually be more damaging to the lake than erosion. Along these lines, Mike and Krunch suggested that a lake organization might be helpful in ensuring the future health of the lake. However, they feel that many residents might resist a formal lake organization that implements regulations regarding the lake. Rather than dwelling on individual lake issues, Mike's approach is to perceive them in the broader context of Lake Estes's life cycle: "The lake has been here for a long time and I'm sure that it's been through these cycles when nobody was around to witness it."

Written By: Ashley Spalding