

Lake Norbert Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with Lake Norbert resident, John Cherry, in his home on June 11, 1999. The perspectives articulated by Mr. Cherry help to shed some light on the realities of life on Lake Norbert in the past and present and to illuminate some issues to be addressed by humans regarding their interaction with the natural environment in the future.

Family History

John Cherry has a life-long history with lakes that stretches back to his childhood in Michigan where he grew up on Highland Lake. After he relocated to Tampa, he lived on Lake Carlton for five years before he began an extensive search for available water front property of his own. He moved on to Lake Norbert in 1995 and comments about the location he calls home, "I sought after it. I wanted to live on a lake and basically drove around every lake in Hillsborough County until I found something." He found a house that was previously a weekend getaway for the original owners and he explains, "It had been in their family for 30 years and had passed down ...". When the family sold the property and house, they looked for someone who would appreciate the site as much as they. In John Cherry they found their man.



John Cherry's dock provides an excellent site to view the lake. source: USF

When queried about why he wanted the lakefront property he commented, "I love the water, to swim, to fish... When I look in my backyard, I am not looking into a wooded area. I am not staring into somebody else's backyard so to speak, it gives you a sense of open space."



The boardwalk on the edge of John's property provides a scenic walkway through a cypress bay head. source: USF

John owns approximately three fourths of an acre, bordered on one side by a cypress bay head through which a boardwalk runs. In the four years he has lived on the lake, he has transformed the weekend cottage into a year-round home, cleared and landscaped his property, and has gone effectively about educating himself on the nuances of lake living. He is the Lakewatch monitor for Lake Norbert and attempts to share the knowledge he has accumulated with other residents on the lake.

Lake History

Lake Norbert is a 16- acre lake located in the Rocky Brushy Creek Watershed. John fills us in on the name:

"Lake Norbert is basically named after a surveyor. His name was Norbert

Fuller and apparently he did the original survey in the area. This is one of five lakes in the chain...this is the first lake and it goes to Fuller, which is now Joy Lake. There is another lake that is unnamed as far as I know that connects to it and which in turn connects it to Lake Thomas [Wilson] which is the largest lake in the chain."



Lake Norbert source: USF

Norbert Fuller mapped out an area that has become a sought after destination for many seeking the benefits of rural living. Early residents in the area include the Wilson family who was instrumental in developing not only Norbert Lake, but also lakes Wilson and Allen. Betty Wilson Grossenbacher retains a tract of approximately 35 acres running among the lakes in the area upon which she still makes her home.

The lake has been affected in the recent past by the rains of El Nino. The runoff from the rains carried an influx of nutrients that have contributed to a drop in the lake's clarity from eighteen feet to three. John comments on the runoff:



Surface accumulation makes it difficult for sunlight to reach submerged aquatic vegetation. source: USF

"Phosphate is the killer. It is basically the third ingredient that fortifies your aquatic garden. If you don't keep up with the growth of the plants, like seaweed and so forth, what happens is it gets dark with micro organisms, the light doesn't penetrate. Nothing grows, it just stagnates, doesn't grow enough to absorb the nutrients."

John comments about the fish population:

"I see most varieties of the shiners, golden shiners to a green-back minnow. For the bait foods, grass shrimp, some mud minnows and then the brim. I've seen anything from sunfish, bluegill, shellcracker and there is of course numerous varieties of sunfish...I haven't seen many specks, but it is my understanding that they go through population swings and can look like there is none and then they repopulate...A lot of bass, not necessarily large bass, but a lot of descent sized bass populate the lake...Numerous turtles, everything from softshells to painters to box turtles..." Recently implemented catch and release practices have served to maintain a healthy population of fish.

The undeveloped land around the lake serves as an oasis for a diverse land-based wildlife population. John comments:

"I have seen anything from bald eagles to bobcats to wild turkeys to boar. Numerous animals, ...that 65 acres on the frontage of Dale Mabry [if it] does get developed, they are going to have to go somewhere. They are going to perish, get hit by traffic, or they are going to burrow themselves farther into residential communities...Ideally there is not enough property for those animals to live."



Undeveloped lands often play a vital role as habitat for wildlife. source: USF

Development

Like much of Northern Hillsborough County, the land surrounding Lake Norbert has been targeted for increased development ranging from residential to institutional. John comments hopefully,

"From what I understand, this section of Hillsborough County is going to be limited in growth. Where it meets up with Pasco is where the major amount of growth is going to be. Basically we'll be doing our shopping in Pasco and keep this as rural as possible."

Despite the good intentions of long range planning, threats of non-residential development loom large on the horizon of Lake Norbert's future. The Lutz Methodist Church has purchased an orange grove bordering Lutz Lake Fern Road and John expects they will build some time in the future. In addition, the lake's proximity to Dale Mabry makes the increases the possibility of non-residential development in the area. The proposed new Lutz High School provides one such example and John comments:

"From what I understand, the individual that owns part of the property, like 15 acres, [has] specific zoning that enables you to put certain buildings on it which increases the value of the property immensely. That 15 acres is worth probably as much as the remainder of the property for the school, which is 40 acres or something. "

Despite the possibility for increased density, John remains optimistic, "I am feeling more comfortable about the development. Anything that goes up has to follow more strict guidelines as far as septic tanks or wells..."

Today Lake Norbert is the site for approximately 25 residences. A couple of building lots exist around the lake, but otherwise the lake's capacity to support more people has been exhausted and the population on its shores may well remain stable.

The Future

As development continues to make strides into the rural lands in northern Hillsborough County, residents like John Cherry dig in their heels and hope for the best. Lake Norbert will be around for a long time and John is contemplating putting together a formal lake organization to help ensure the health of the lake through the coming changes.

Changes along Dale Mabry and Lutz Lake Fern Road are bound to have an effect on the natural landscape in the area. Wildlife habitat will be lost and commercial development will be introduced to the area. Residents living around lakes and others who have sought out the Lutz area and the trappings of rural life hope for the best and the continuance of the lifestyle that initially led them to seek out the lake.



People often move to secluded, rural residences to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of nature.
source: USF