

Turtle Lake Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with Arthur Marks at his home on Turtle Lake on June 14, 1999. His perspective, lends insight into the reality of life on Turtle Lake in the past and present, and indicates issues of concern for the future.

Arthur Marks Family History

The Marks family moved to Turtle Lake in 1986 when Arthur's employment transferred him to Tampa from Tennessee. Arthur explains the conditions directing their quest for a new home. "We wanted a pool and to be on a lake if practical," he says. He and his wife began their search, looking at several houses. He remembers,

"I guess we looked at a house on Lake Magdalene and one on Old Lake Carroll. The real estate lady took my wife out to a couple of places in Land O' Lakes, but we were never serious about [moving out there]."

They found their house, with a pool, on Turtle Lake and settled into a Florida lifestyle, periodically visited by their two children who live in Tennessee. The Marks have become active in maintaining the health of the lake and the wildlife the lake supports. Arthur has attended **LAKEWATCH** meetings with the current volunteer monitors for Turtle Lake, Maria and Stephen Croy. His wife teamed up with other neighbors on the lake to shape development decisions that had the potential to negatively impact their lake and lifestyle.

Arthur grew up on a farm and is accustomed to rural living and the types of behavior that contribute to a beneficial relationship with the natural environment. His background, and the actions it informs, contribute to the ongoing health of Turtle Lake.

Turtle Lake



Turtle Lake is located in central Hillsborough County.

Turtle Lake is a seven-acre lake located in the Curiosity Creek Watershed in Central Hillsborough County. The lake is also known as Lake Butler and was renamed only when the **LAKEWATCH** volunteers needed to know what to call the lake and were unaware of the previously existing name. The lake is home to a healthy crop of fish and Arthur has caught good-sized bass in the past. In addition, thirty-five acres of undeveloped land located to the northwest of the lake provide habitat for alligators, armadillos, raccoons, foxes, turtles. The residents on the lake's shore have installed houses for wood ducks to nest to keep them up off the ground, away from the foxes and snakes that could threaten their population.

Many lakes in Hillsborough County have been affected by infestations of aquatic vegetation; however, in the thirteen years the Marks have lived on the lake, vegetation has not been the cause of problems. Arthur comments about the lily pads that cover the inlet behind his house.

"There are more out here than there used to be. We have had so many dry years, and allegedly lily pads only grow in about four or five feet of water. If the water stays up, they eventually rot out; if it stays dry, they tend to creep out. Last year with the rain, a lot of them died because the water stayed up a while. There are a few now." In addition to lily pads, Turtle Lake, and the land surrounding it, supports cattails, pine and oak hammocks, and a growing population of maleluca whose encroachment is warily viewed by Arthur.

Development

Central Hillsborough County has become thoroughly urbanized over the past five decades. Turtle Lake, located within this area of the County, has not been spared the effects of the development. At the time the Marks moved on to the lake, it was the setting for two residences, including theirs. Since then, four more have been built,



bringing the total of single family residences up to six.



Development around the shores of Turtle Lake is predominately single-family residential.

Turtle Lake's vicinity to Fletcher Avenue causes impacts on the lake and the residents associated with the high-density traffic utilizing this busy thoroughfare. Arthur comments,

"We had more privacy before they widened Fletcher and [removed] a lot of the vegetation over there, although [the vegetation] is coming back now....In the wintertime, you really see an increase in the cars and the noise because the vegetation dies down, the willow trees drop all their leaves."

Arthur and other neighbors put up a bamboo privacy fence to mediate some of the visual impact of Fletcher Avenue, but the lake is still subjected to trash and runoff from the road. Arthur feels that a more substantial privacy fence would not only mediate the noise of the traffic but would also benefit the lake by deterring some of the runoff and trash directly entering the lake from

Fletcher Avenue.

Land use around Turtle Lake is not limited too residential. An office complex that was constructed in the early nineties occupies the south central portion of the lake's shore. The residents living around the development were concerned that the land would be developed as apartments or high use commercial, so they became involved with the zoning restrictions for the land. Their efforts facilitated the zoning of that area for low use commercial and the office condominiums that were built are an amicable addition to the lake and the people that live there.

On the southeast portion of the lakeshore is the Hamner Fire Tower, named after B.E. Hamner, one of the major land developers of the Forest Hills North Tampa area. The tower is a remnant from when this area of the County was more rural. The eighty-five-foot tower was constructed in 1936 as a fire lookout. As this area of the county became more urbanized and served by the fire department, the structure fell into disuse. In the early 1990's, the fire tower and the 8.7 acres surrounding it were threatened by impending sale and subsequent development. A group of residents banded together to save the historic treasure and the natural environment surrounding it. Hillsborough County bought the land and the tower through the Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP) and turned the small parcel on the corner of Fletcher Avenue and North Boulevard into its first urban wildlife preserve.



The Hamner Fire Tower is a reminder of Tampa's past.

The Future

Turtle Lake may be impacted by many changes in the upcoming years. The property to the north and west of the lake, owned by a single landowner, has an uncertain future. As it is, the lake is the setting for a bit of wilderness that is hard found in rapidly developing urban Tampa. The open space around the lake, consisting of the land surrounding the Hamner Fire Tower and the thirty-five acres on the northwest shore, operates as a natural floodplain and helps to control flooding that has long-plagued this section of the county. Only the passing of years will supply the answer as to what the future will bring. As it stands now, Turtle Lake remains a preserve for wildlife and a bucolic setting for homeowners fortunate enough to reside on its shore.