

Lake Virginia Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with Bill Buel at his home on June 7, 2001. A twenty-eight year resident of Lake Virginia and a LAKEWATCH monitor, he had a number of things to say about issues affecting lake residents over the years.

Personal History



Bill Buel at his home on Lake Virginia (Source: USF)

Bill has worked as both a college professor and consultant in several locations in North America. Following a stint in the army, he completed a bachelor's, master's, and a PhD in Industrial Psychology. He moved to Lake Virginia in 1973, having long wanted to live on a lake. A fan of the outdoors, the area was ideal for him to enjoy some of his favorite pastimes: fishing, kayaking, and hiking. His home is also a place where he has enjoyed many visits from family and friends, but he feels that the best part of living on a lake is the solitude.

Along with other lake residents, he has been active in questioning development in the area. Some years ago, he was involved with the Coalition of Lake Associations, a group formed by citizens of Pasco County when lake levels were threatened, the group attributing the problem to pumping in nearby well fields. Hillsborough residents were also involved, and the coalition addressed other lake relevant issues. Additionally, Bill has worked with several environmental groups with strategies aimed at restricting development in the Lutz area.

Lake History

Lake Virginia is a 20.4 acre lake located in Lutz near the Lutz-Lake Fern Road-Dale Mabry Highway intersection. Its maximum depth is approximately 20 feet, although at the time of the interview it was significantly lower due to drought. In contrast, he recalls high lake levels during El Niño. The current drought is the worst Bill can remember, there being no water in the creek feeding the lake. There has also been a significant decrease in vegetation (duckweed and hydrilla) but an increase in algae, changes Bill associates with the onset of the drought.

The fish population in the lake remains healthy: bass, crappies, bluegills, red eared sunfish, and catfish, among others. Bill regularly sees deer, raccoons, armadillos, turtles, and alligators in and around the lake, spotting seven alligators at one time during the present drought. There are also sand hill cranes, egrets, herons, hawks, ospreys, and eagles. He sees a number of wild turkeys as well:



The current drought is the worst Bill can remember (Source: USF)

"When I take a hike in the winter...I take a handful of corn down there [to a nearby pine forest]. And I will be completely surrounded by wild turkeys...These are beautiful birds."



The creek that feeds into the lake has dried up completely (Source: USF)

He has noticed that the turkeys seem to disappear in the early spring and summer, which is when they breed. Recently, again perhaps because of the drought, Bill has seen a number of flamingos, roseate spoonbills, and as many as fifty to one-hundred wood storks at a time, all of them typically found in the Everglades and areas south of the Tampa area.

Harvey.

Since Bill first moved to Lake Virginia, the immediate area has not changed much. There were about twenty homes on the two lakes when he moved there and now there are twenty-eight. And even land use has remained much the same over the years: three quarters of the shore of Lake Virginia and about half of the shore of Lake Harvey is still cattle land or forest.



Lake Virginia in 1998, in comparison

Development

In terms of the area south of Lake Virginia, there has been a good deal of change over the years. Bill recalls that there was very little between his house and Busch Boulevard when he moved there:

"There was nothing... except a residence or two. There was a little bait and tackle store and a hardware store...and that was it. Dale Mabry was a little two lane thing that you drove about fifty miles an hour on."

As Bill remembers it, the area north of Busch Boulevard began to “explode” with restaurants, retail stores, apartments, gas stations, and strip malls fifteen or so years ago. A major oil company proposed building a gas station in his area, but the neighbors “made so much of a fuss that they backed off and put it somewhere else.” Over time, there have been plans for a strip mall, a high school, and similar developments, but Lutz residents have been fairly successful in protests about the amount of traffic they would create. But because of the development that has occurred, prior to his retirement in 1989, Bill found himself getting to his office at 6:30 AM and leaving about 3:00 PM to beat the traffic.

The Future

While the drought is likely the issue weighing most heavily on the minds of lake residents, continued development, which Bill sees as inevitable, may be a more significant determinant in the future of the area. He recalls that the area from Van Dyke north on Dale Mabry was intended as a “green way” when it was four laned, but already it is being commercialized and developed.

With respect to further development near Lake Virginia, the closest would be about a half a mile from Bill’s home:

“I won’t be able to see it or hear it, but I would rather have countryside than a mini mall and that attitude will be with me no matter where I live.”

He concedes that development will come, but he believes that concerned citizens will be important in determining how extensively the lake area is affected.

Written by: Ashley Spalding