

Lake June- in-Winter Lake Vegetation Outreach

Sam Eriksen & Ben
Butler



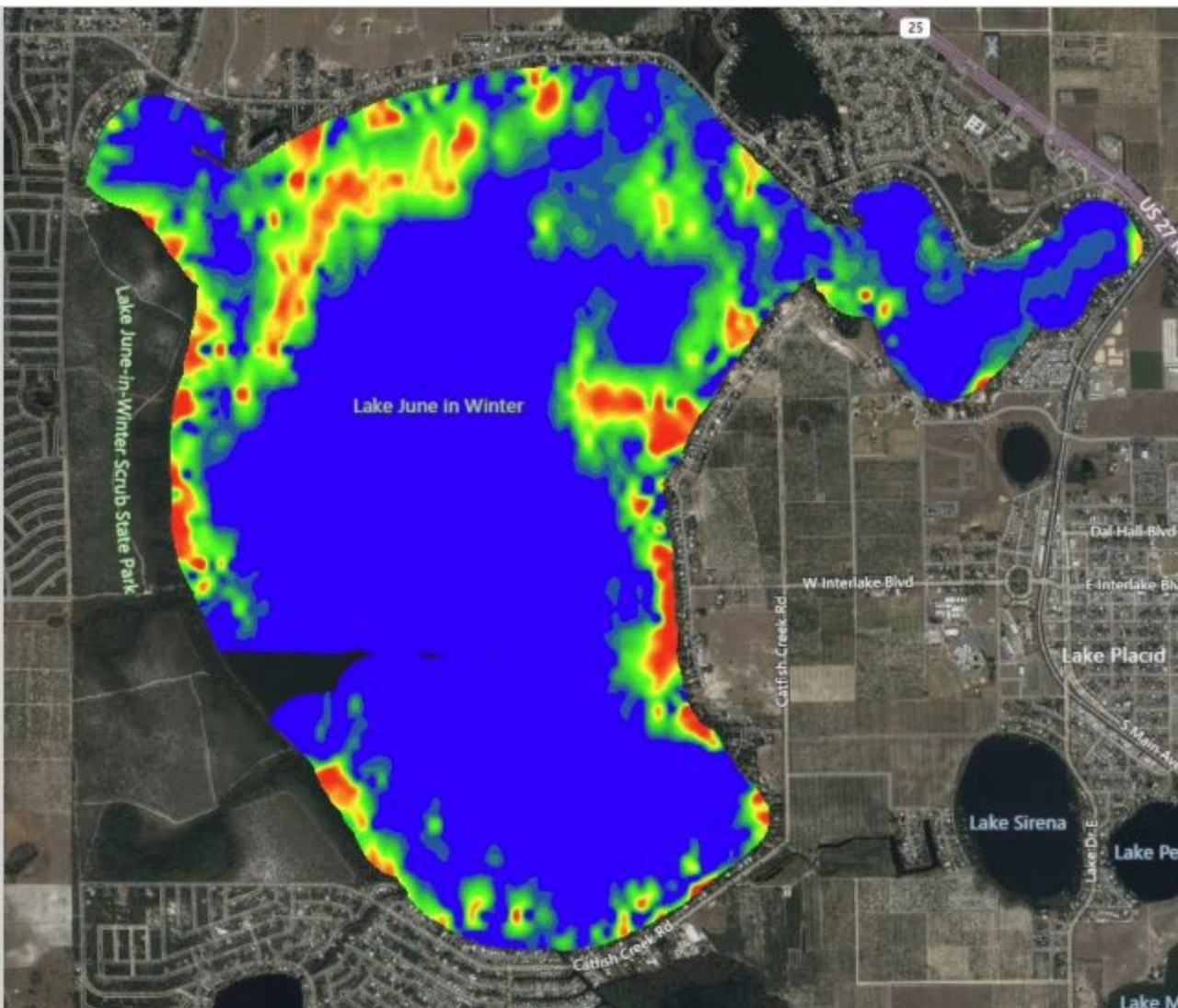


In 2012, FWC stocked triploid Asian Grass Carp at the request of residents to control Illinois Pondweed, a native species.

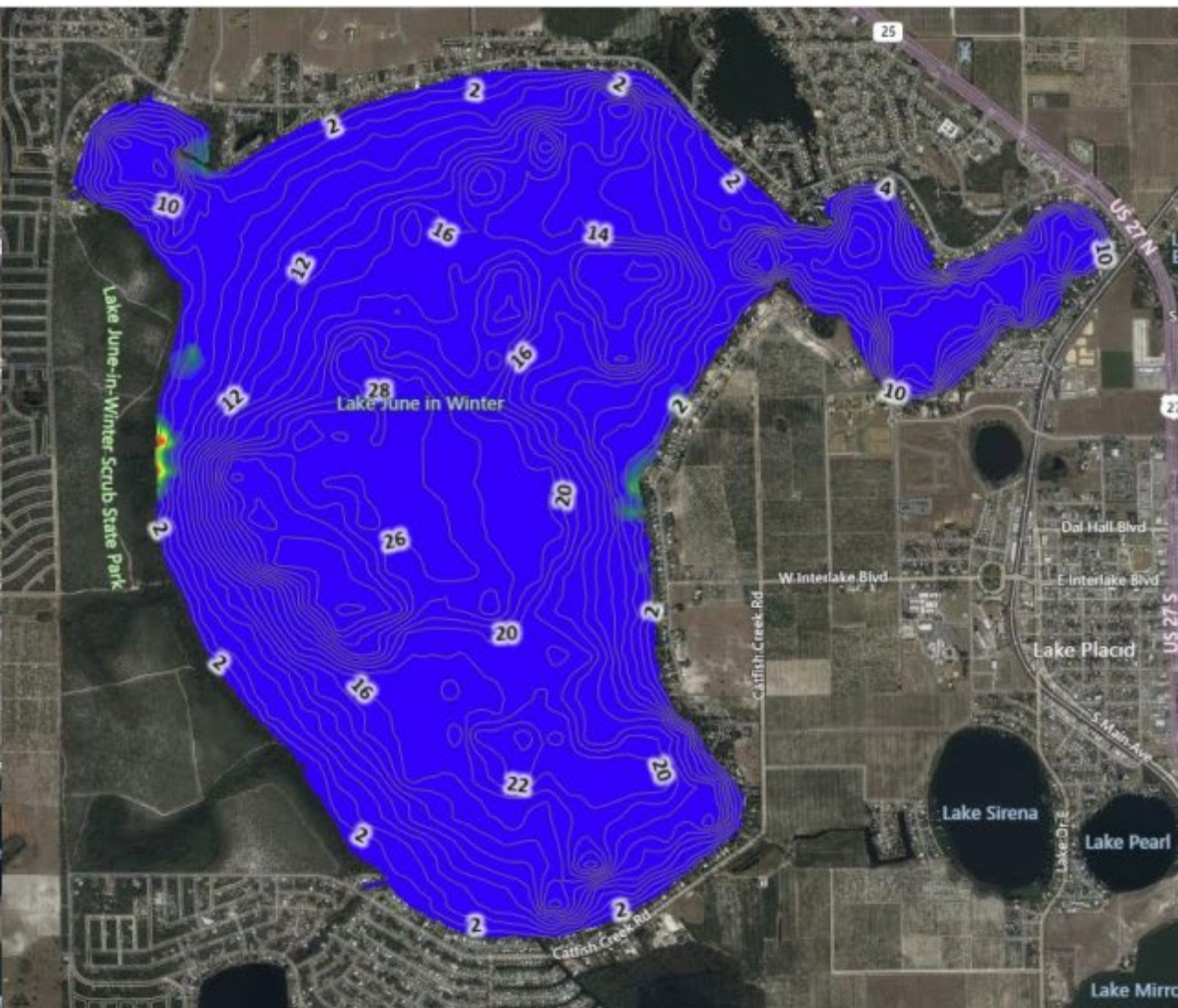
Residents complained about not being able to recreate due to clogged engine props and getting “dragged to the bottom” when swimming.

The Grass Carp did its job and then some, totally de-vegetating the lake.

What's the Problem?



June 2013



June 2022

What's the Problem?

- Nutrient and Chlorophyll levels have been steadily climbing in Lake June due to stormwater runoff.
- Water clarity has also decreased year over year.
- Algal blooms have been prevalent including blooms outside of what scientists consider peak season (June-September).
- Lake June was added to FDEP's draft verified impaired list and a TMDL will most likely be developed.
- The Town of Lake Placid received a \$40 million grant for septic to sewer conversion that become a **very contentious topic**.



August 21, Lake Placid Town Hall

- Special town hall meeting to discuss the septic to sewer conversion project.
- Roughly 300 residents attended.
- Residents did not want to convert to sewer due to costs, specific system limitations, and seeing no need to.
- Residents stated there was an extreme lack of transparency from the town government.
- Residents asked for state and county representatives to be present to provide input.
- Meeting quickly devolved into a shouting match with some residents calling for town councilmembers to resign and councilmembers questioning the residents love for the lakes.



August 21, Lake Placid Town Hall

Notable Quotes

- “Why aren’t the lakes being tested?”.
- “Septic doesn’t contribute nutrients, agricultural and residential runoff does”.
- “Why don’t we just aerate our lakes? I did a lot of research online and we should do this”.
- “Is this a forced issue? Is this a government mandate?” the mayor responded, “the timing is now, what happens when our lakes die?” to which the resident said, “you have no proof our lakes are dying”.
- “Mr. Mayor, we ask you refuse the grant and give the money back, I also ask you how you all are enjoying your last term in office”.
- “Are there alternatives to this project?”.

What's the Problem

- The Town of Lake Placid did a poor job conveying their message.
- They did not reach out to state or county SME's to provide input.
- Most of their data and in field pictures were collected and analyzed by Highlands County Natural Resources Specialists Sam Eriksen.
- Town continuously quoted a county BMP report done in conjunction with SWFWMD.
- The County did a poor job conveying the water quality of Lake June and all other lakes across the county.
- The County and FWC do a poor job of conveying the importance of native aquatic vegetation and the management of invasive aquatic vegetation.

An Area of Opportunity

- Due to legal constraints the county was not able to get involved with the septic to sewer “fight”.
- However, we did want to reintroduce and protect the native aquatic vegetation on Lake June.
- Through fish sampling from FWC and the regrowth on the lake we determined the Grass Carp had died out.
- The county and FWC wanted to take advantage and get public support for in lake restoration.

Who are the Solution Makers? (better word for stakeholder?)

- Town of Lake Placid.
- Lake side residents.
- Tourists and recreational users of Lake June.
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.
- Highlands County.
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The Plan

- Two community outreach and education meetings planned at HL Bishop Park Conference center on Lake June with a third in field planting event planned for some time in March or April.
- The first meeting held on December 13th would be an educational event with FWC Invasive Plant Management administrator Geoff Lokuta, FWC Fisheries Biologist Sara Menendez, FWC AHRES Biologist David Holmberg, Highlands County Natural Resources Specialist Sam Eriksen, presenting on their subject matter. Ben Butler would facilitate. Small Q/A session at the end.
- The second meeting, on January 17th, would be all about public input and collaboration. A small 10-minute presentation was provided by David Austin from UF IFAS on Florida Friendly Landscaping, and a short 5-minute recap of the previous meeting from David Holmberg and Sam Eriksen.

December 13th Outreach Meeting

- Roughly 30 residents attended as well as representation from the town.
- Plan was to hold questions off until the end.
- However, the very first presentation which was by David Holmberg devolved into the FWC IPM program on Lake June. This continued through Geoff Lokuta's presentation.
- Sara Menendez provided a fisheries update, and Sam Eriksen did a deep dive into the water quality and algal bloom issues of Lake June.
- Held as an informal type meeting, 100% transparency, and letting the residents know the truth whether they liked/agreed with it.
- Was only to be an hour meeting from 6:00-7:00 pm. Meeting didn't end until 8:30 pm.
- Provided feedback surveys to be filled out and turned in at the end of the meeting.
- Tried to do a NRLI type introduction, we asked everyone around the room to introduce themselves and what they loved about Lake June, this included the meeting leaders and government officials. We wanted to show that we all had a stake in the game.

December 13th Outreach Meeting



January 17th, the “NRLI” Meeting

- More than 40 residents attended, some from the previous meeting and some new faces.
- Provided a brief update on work done in the lake as well as a recap of the last meeting and feedback from it.
- Broke out the residents into three groups for a hybrid version of a “trade show”.
- Each group would rotate around the room giving their thoughts and ideas for what they would like to see each stakeholder group do to better the lake. The groups included government, residents, and tourism/recreation.
- This session took 30 minutes, 10 at each group. Once the trade show ended, we went through what each group wrote down on their flip charts one by one and provided feedback.
- We wanted to give residents their voice which many felt wasn’t heard and some visual feedback that a lot of things need to happen for a positive outcome to occur.
- We had no idea if this would work. But it worked great! Plenty of feedback and discussion as well as some good ideas!





Recreation/Tourism

EDUCATION

RESPECT

INVASIVE

BOAT WASH STATIONS

- DNR
- Planning some projects
- some for the community, all projects

Residents

✓ ✓ Slow down/stop to observe more birds

✓ ✓ avoid shore line degradation

✓ ✓ Education of residents -
- pamphlets
- educational signage
- signs & info

FLORIDA FRIENDLY LANDSCAPE

LESS MAINTAINED LAWN

Connect to water

Resident volunteer outings

Government

Round 1
3

Water Run off

Flow charts - using the stuff we have

Funding - Water Quality
Florida Vegetation

Watershed educational write-up
& history of the area (ex: Demand for the camp)

Waste chemicals are being sprayed

Plus the schedule: timeframe management
(sponsoring partner) = no

planting Native Plants

don't protect nonnative

Meeting w/ Regulators



April 6, NRLI Field Trip

- 15 residents attended a public planting event on the shores of Lake June-in-Winter Scrub State Park.
- Planted roughly 500 plants consisting of Bulrush, Maidencane, and Spikerush.
- Educational event showing the multiple benefits of aquatic vegetation.
- Left with the excitement of returning next year and seeing how well the planting does.





Meeting Outcomes

- Public support for large scale aquatic habitat restoration.
- FWC support for large scale aquatic habitat restoration, submitted a \$30,000 proposal for the planting of 5,000 Bulrush, 5,000 Maidencane, and 5,000 Spikerush.
- Better community understanding on water quality issues.
- Much better communication between residents and county staff.
- Residents who attended the field trip had firsthand experience of the amount of work that goes into restoration.

Lessons Learned

- NRLI tools work in the “real world”! However, you must choose the right time for interactive tools to be implemented in public outreach.
- Facilitation is hard when emotions dominate a session.
- Admitting faults goes a long way to regaining trust.
- Having a good agenda is key. Multiple prep meetings occurred before the first meeting. Multiple prep meetings occurred before the second meeting. Go in with a plan!
- Interactive field trips are a good engaging tool to highlight natural resources and the work it takes to protect them.
- Having a RSVP list or sign-up sheet would have helped with the field trip.
- Public planting events can be a great tool, limitations in where this can take place.
- Not everyone has the same level of knowledge.

Next Steps

- Public outreach meetings on aquatic habitat restoration and protection are being planned for Sebring and Avon Park. Multiple lakes in Lake Placid are also on our radar.
- FWC AHRES submitted a proposal for a large-scale restoration planting along the shorelines of Lake June Scrub State Park.
- Highlands County and FWC are increasing social media outreach.