

August 2020 LAKE OKEECHOBEE INTERAGENCY FLYER

Lake Level: 13.11 ft

What's Goin' On Around Lake O?

Watch out for birds! It's nesting season on Lake Okeechobee, which began in spring and will go to about the end of September. Lake O is home to approximately thirty bird species that nest on and around the lake. Many of these birds have specific nesting areas, including mud flats (Stilts and Killdeer), dense grasses such as bulrush or cattails that occur over water (Least Bitterns, Gallinules, Coots), and rocky soil islands (Least Terns). The Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) is considered an endangered species by the Federal Endangered Species Act since 1967. These birds nest on Lake O in cattails, bulrush and shrubs. It's important to watch out and avoid all nests while boating!

Agency Updates

USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Invasive Sp. Branch)

Conducting interagency surveys via airboat, monitoring for floating aquatic plants throughout the lake. If you spot a navigational way that is blocked, please notify either Jessica Fair, Ian Markovich, or Brendon Hession (FWC). USACE contractor is performing upland invasive species work along the HDD from Port Mayaca south to Canal Point. Target species are Brazilian pepper, java plum, lead tree, etc.

FWC IPM (Invasive Plant Management)

Invasive plant management is wrapping up in the North Western Marsh and Ritta Island. Treatments of *Luziola subintegra* in Fisheating Bay and the surrounding areas will continue by targeting boat trails and edges of the *Luziola* to minimize the potential of the invasive plant spreading further throughout the lake. With water levels on the rise mechanical harvesting operations are expected to return to the lake in the coming months

FWC Freshwater Fisheries Management

Throughout the month of August, FWC will be hosting virtual stakeholder workshops to discuss FWC's management of Lake Okeechobee. This effort will help identify focal areas, issues, and potential solutions as part of the FWC's Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Management Plan for Lake Okeechobee currently in development. To learn more about this effort and how to sign up for a stakeholder workshop, please visit <http://myfwc.com/conservation/management-plans/lake/okeechobee/>.

SFWMD (South Florida Water Management District)

SFWMD, FWC, and USACE are scheduled to conduct their monthly invasive plant management survey around Lake Okeechobee by helicopter on Aug. 6th. -Harvesting of floating aquatic vegetation is temporarily on hold due to low water levels on the lake and is expected to begin again when conditions improve. SFWMD continues to investigate new technologies and coordinate Aquatic Plant Management activities with agency partners. -COVID-19 has continued to force the SFWMD's Land Stewardship Section to temporarily pause the prescribed burn program on Lake Okeechobee. SFWMD intends to resume prescribed burns in the Sports-Haven Marsh and Curry Island areas of the lake once the environmental conditions are appropriate and COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

FWC AHRE (Aquatic Habitat Restoration/ Enhancement)

Staff are prioritizing areas for herbicide and burn treatments in the upcoming fall and spring. Staff are also working on putting together habitat enhancement projects for the upcoming fall, winter and spring. Projects will include native tree and shrub plantings on islands and northwest marsh and also include pondweed plantings in the spring. The pondweed plantings will also incorporate a research aspect to increase the success of future plantings.

Friend or Foe?

Please note: All projects are subject to change based on water levels, weather, funding, or any other means.

Alligatorweed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*)



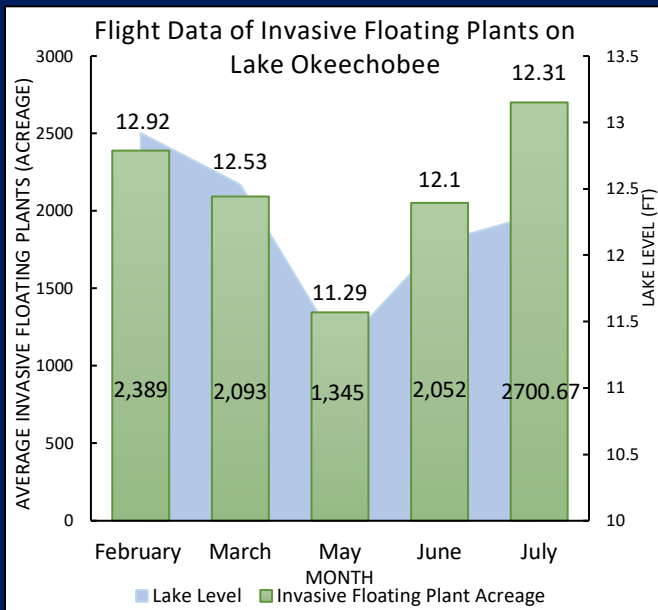
Is an invasive perennial plant that forms floating mats. This plant has long slender leaves with a white flower when bloomed. Alligatorweed has a biocontrol insect called the alligatorweed flea beetle. This beetle helps keep the plants population under control.

Smartweed (*Polygonum sp.*)



Aka knotweed, is a native plant to Florida. This plant also has long slender leaves but has small purple, pink, and white flowers that grow on a spike and are several inches long. This plant provides great habitat for wildlife including fish.

Interagency Monthly Flight Data



This graph shows the average invasive floating vegetation (hyacinth and lettuce) that was observed by interagency members during the interagency flight each month (2020) compared to the lake level for that month.

Quick Reference:

Native species - a plant or animal that normally lives and thrives in a particular ecosystem.

Non-native invasive species - a plant or animal that causes ecological or economic harm in an environment where it is not originally from. These species are usually from foreign lands brought over by humans.

Biological Control - (also known as biocontrol) the planned use of one organism (i.e. an insect) to control or suppress the growth of another organism, like a weedy plant species.

Terrestrial/Upland - relating to the ground/land environments.

Aquatic - relating to the water environments.

Wetlands- an ecosystem where the land is covered by water either all or part of the time.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Do not release pets or dump aquariums in waterways or ponds.
- Plant native species in your yards instead of nonnative ornamentals.
- Clean your gear! Wipe down your equipment when you leave boat ramps, camp sites etc. This will help reduce dispersal.
- If you spot an invasive plant or animal, log onto the "I've Got One" app and help scientists track where these nonnatives are located.
<https://www.eddmaps.org/florida/report/>

Helpful Websites

Want to know specific information on your lake including hunting information, plant control data, fishing data, boat ramp locations and so much MORE! Go to:

"What's happening on my lake?"

<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/habitat/invasive-plants/lakes/>

Need help with plant identification of native and invasive species of Florida? Go to:

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Need to access the aquatic plant management task force interagency meeting minutes? Go to:

<https://www.floridainvasives.org/okeechobee/>

Like to know real time Lake Okeechobee water levels, input and discharges? Go to:

<http://w3.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/reports/StatusDaily.htm>

Need information on algae blooms in your area?

<https://floridadep.gov/AlgalBloom>

Interested in the educational processes that all applicators go through and why plant management is so important? Go to:

<https://www.fapms.org/>

<https://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/aw/why-manage-plants.html>

Important Contacts

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