

Lake Weeks



Betty Herbert (USF)

This narrative is based on an interview with Betty Herbert in October 2002. Betty first came to Lake Weeks during the 1950s and has seen the lake and its surrounding area change from rural to residential. During the interview, Betty spoke about her personal experiences on Lake Weeks, as well as the health of the lake, and the wildlife that have made the lake their home.

Personal History

Betty Herbert first came to Lake Weeks in 1950 when her parents purchased property on the lake. Betty said about her parents' choice to move to the lake:

"They just liked it out here. It was like farmland then and we had a farm. We grew vegetables and we had pigs and a couple cows. There were only like two or three houses on this road."



The lake with wading birds in 1999 (Herbert)

Betty graduated from Brandon High School in 1956 and remained living on Lake Weeks for a number of years. She moved away from the lake in 1968 when she reunited with and married her high school sweetheart, Henry. Since Henry was in the Marines, she and their family of five children relocated to Camp Lejeune. When Henry retired from the Marines in 1977, the family moved back to Lake Weeks and built their home on the lake. The family enjoys many fond memories of swimming and fishing in the lake.

In the 1990s, Betty and Henry were the LAKEWATCH volunteers for Lake Weeks. When the two would go out to take their monthly lake samples, Henry often enjoyed teasing Betty about alligators in the lake. Betty shared:

"When we'd go out there to take the samples, my husband got the biggest kick out of that [the alligators] because you'd have to dip your arm way down to get the samples. I think he waited for that day when we'd get the samples because I'd dip my arm way down and he'd say, 'What's that?' He'd always do that. 'Did you see that?' I'd always jerk my arm back. He couldn't wait to do the sample day...He'd get a big kick out of seeing how fast I could move my arm. But we had fun out there. Those are memories that are just precious to you."



View of the lake in 1977 (Herbert)



Aerial view of Lake Weeks (Herbert)

Unfortunately, Henry passed away in 2000. Betty no longer takes lake samples for LAKEWATCH, but hopes that some of the newer families on the lake might be interested in taking up this task. Betty's family continues to enjoy fishing in Lake Weeks, especially her grandchildren because it provides them with the opportunity to enjoy nature in their grandmother's backyard.

History/Information



The ditch full of water in 1998 (Herbert)



The ditch during low lake levels in 2000 (Herbert)



The ditch full of water in October 2002 (USF)



A duck at Lake Weeks in 2002 (USF)

Lake Weeks is a 53-acre lake located in the Pemberton Creek/Baker Canal Watershed. During the more than fifty years that Betty has lived on the lake, she has seen its water levels fluctuate from high to low conditions. She estimates that this fluctuation has occurred on an approximate three-year cycle. One of the most considerable flooding events occurred in 1960 with Hurricane Donna. With the heavy rain that came with this hurricane, the lake water came up past homes and reached the nearby dirt road, now Chastain Road. According to Betty, after the rainstorms, people were able to pick up fish on this road. In contrast, the drought conditions of the late 1990s allowed the Herberts to mow from the shoreline 175 feet into the lakebed.

The lake's shoreline has been altered over the years by the lakeside residents; the result of this has left a ditch between the Herberts' yard and the lake. Betty told the story about how the ditch was created:

"Back in the '50s when my mother moved out here, she hired a man to clean her lakefront off 'cause it was full of these high willows; they were all around the edge of the lake. You couldn't see the lake or get to it, much less do anything. So, she had this man with this dragline. He didn't know what he was doing and instead of dragging it in and taking the willows out, he just picked them up and made a ditch. He ruined it...So here is this ditch...Now the waters come in. You don't know what's there. You got water... Well, three, four, five years later, the lake recedes. Abhh. I've got a ditch...Now, every year the lake goes out, the weeds fall down. The people come and they go boating and they wash this mud into this hole. You get a big back wash. That's what I get every year."

Betty has attempted to get this ditch fixed and the shoreline returned to its "natural" state; however, she has been unsuccessful in obtaining the correct permit to drag the shoreline and fix the ditch. Vegetation growing in this ditch, such as alligator grass and willows, continues to be a problem for Betty. Additionally, according to Betty, algae have affected Lake Weeks. She said about the algae:

"I know it's got a lot of algae in it because when I used to take the samples, it was like pudding. And whenever I would take my sample, you could scrape it off with a spoon. It was thick."

Now that the lake levels have risen, Betty says that the algae problem has diminished.

Lake Weeks and its surrounding area continue to be the home for a diversity of fish and wildlife. Bass and catfish still populate the lake. Betty assumes that fishing in the lake is still good, considering the many boaters she sees on the lake on the weekends. Some of the birds that visit the lake include ducks, egrets, cranes, owls and eagles. The small animals that Betty still spots around Lake Weeks include raccoons and rabbits. According to Betty, the alligator population on Lake Weeks has increased considerably since she first moved to the lake. She said about the alligators: "We didn't see things like that back then, like alligators. But now, I think this has become their favorite resting place."

Development



View of Lake Weeks in 2002 (USF)



Low lake levels in 2000 (Herbert)



Shoreline of Lake Weeks in 2002 (USF)

The area surrounding Lake Weeks has shifted from rural to residential during Betty's lifetime. When she first moved to the lake in the 1950s, people around the lake grew crops and raised animals. The area was sparsely populated, with few homes near the lake. Betty described the way the area looked in the 1950s:

"There was this house next door, our house, and then this big two-story house over here across the road. Around the lake there was a wooden house over there. It was the Nelsons' house and next to it was a big two-story house that belonged to LaBuff and that was all back then. Up in the woods here, there was an old, old house that was abandoned and we used to go up there and play in it. It was like a spooky house. We called it the spooked house. That was the only thing there in the '50s. People have bought up in there now and it's all built up."

Over the years, few individual homes have been built around the lake. According to Betty, in the southwest corner of the lake is a nursery, and this land has remained undeveloped with housing. Also in the southwest corner is a public boat ramp maintained by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.¹ However, recently, the north side of the lake has been developed into a housing subdivision called Lake Weeks. As Betty understands it, this subdivision will have a few lakefront homes; however, these have not yet been built. There is the potential that when completed, there will be over 200 homes in this subdivision.² The entrance into this subdivision is a separate road, so the new housing will likely not affect Betty's street.

The Future

There are a number of changes that Lake Weeks will likely encounter in the near future. The biggest change will probably be the completion of the Lake Weeks subdivision. Although only a few of the homes will be built directly on the lake, these new residents will continue to have access to the lake through the public boat ramp. The number of people using Lake Weeks is likely to increase. Although Betty enjoys seeing people use and enjoy the lake, there are potential environmental dangers with an increase in the number of motor boats using the lake. However, the people living around Lake Weeks will likely monitor closely any changes that occur in the lake.

ENDNOTES

¹ Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission < <http://www.floridafisheries.com/ramps/sw-ramps.html#29> >

² Hillsborough County Planning and Growth Management < http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/pgm/zoning/devsvcs/LakeWeeks_Ph1.pdf > and < <http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/pgm/zoning/devsvcs/LakeWeeksPh2and3.PDF> >

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