



Corps of Engineers

**Special points of interest:**

- Newsletter hopes to bring better awareness
- Dry weather good for tow ditch project
- Park rangers build trails, habitat, and partnerships
- Aerial surveys aid biologists in tracking nuisance plants

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# Bigwater News

**Volume 1, Issue 1**

**May 9, 2007**

## The New Newsletter

Here it is - the first edition of our new in-house newsletter.

The aim of the newsletter is to share information between departments and help provide each other with a better awareness for what sort of work activities, projects, and events happen here at the South Florida Operations Office (SFOO). Eventually we hope to post the newsletter on our website and have it available to the public.

Because just about every work project undertaken here at SFOO is associated with

Lake Okeechobee, the name BigWater News was selected as the newsletter title.

The name Okeechobee is derived from the Native American words oki (water) and chubi (big), and literally mean "big water"...and, so, the inspiration for the name.

Optimistically, BigWater News will be published and distributed during the first week of each month. If you would like to contribute articles, photographs, project updates or other information please email them to

michael.e.boles @ usace.army.mil



A distant vantage point of Lake Okeechobee

## Low Water Good for Tow Ditch Progress

Currently, the lake level of Lake Okeechobee is about 9 1/2 feet and soon may reach its all-time low of 8.97 feet, hit on May 24, 2001.

Drought conditions have led to water shortages and imposed water restrictions to most local communities. The dry, desert-like conditions, however, have been very favorable to the tow ditch backfill project occurring along the east side of the lake,

just south of Port Mayaca. Dry conditions have negated the need for pumps and dredging, equating to savings in time and money.

Rehabilitation of the Herbert Hoover Dike is projected to span over the next 25 years.



Tow ditch filled with vegetation & peat



De-mucking of tow ditch



Backfilling tow ditch with sand

1

2

3

## Scouts Blaze Hiking Trail



Troop 822 receiving tool safety instruction.

Troop 822 of Palm City has begun trail work in the St. Lucie North Recreation Area. The goal is to build a 3.1 Mile (5K) hiking trail in a unused portion of Fee Property.

The new trail will allow for local running contests and general exercise while offering a scenic view of typical Florida habitat.

The Troop will be working on the trail during bi-

monthly camping trips until the project is complete.

Additional volunteers will be recruited to help finish the project as part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual National Public Lands Day event on Saturday, September 29, 2007. Mark it on your calendars.



Park Ranger Adam Tarplee and Boy Scouts inspecting first segment of new trail.

## View From Above



Northwest Marsh

What you can't see on foot or by boat, you can from a helicopter. Several times a year biologists in the environmental stewardship section fly the perimeter of Lake Okeechobee in search of nuisance floating plants, predominately water lettuce and water hyacinth.

The purpose the flights are to determine the total amount acreage of these plants, and whether they are accessible for herbicide applications.

The recent drought and falling lake level have left many of the unwanted plants high and dry.

For the moment, the lake seems to be in good shape with less than approximately 40 acres of floating vegetation observed during the April 17 flight.



Biologists Tyson Zobrist and Jon Morton surveying for invasive plants.

## St. Lucie Butterfly Garden

With the generous donations from five area nurseries the St. Lucie Locks Recreation Area Butterfly Garden has grown in leaps and bounds. All vegetation has been planted by area Scouts and community service workers.

The University of Florida Agriculture Extension of Martin County has provided us with services of a Master Gardener to aid in monitoring and maintenance of the Butterfly Garden.



## Navigation—Lock Statistics

	<u>OWW</u>	<u>Canaveral</u>
<u>1<sup>st</sup> Qtr FY 2007</u>		
Lockages	6317	1843
Vessels	9811	3749
<u>2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr FY 2007</u>		
Lockages	6315	1899
Vessels	10722	3981

OWW—Okeechobee Waterway

St. Lucie Lock



W.P. Franklin Lock

- Lock Restrictions at W.P. Franklin Lock began February 16, 2007
- Lock Restrictions at St. Lucie Lock started March, 26 2007

## Lake Information

<u>Lake Level</u>	<u>Feet above msl</u>	<u>Drought Conditions</u>
01/01/07	12.12	Total rainfall from Jan. 1- March 31 was 1.35 inches.
02/01/07	11.65	
03/01/07	11.26	<u>Aquatic Plant Management</u>
03/31/07	10.42	April 17 aerial survey revealed less than 100 acres of floating vegetation present on lake.

msl—mean sea level

“The great fact in life, the always possible escape from dullness, was the lake. The sun rose out of it, the day began there; it was like an open door that nobody could shut. The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you. You had only to look at the lake, and you knew you would soon be free.”

— Willa Cather

## Native Plants Thriving at Ortona

From July 31- August 15, 2005 there were 312 trees, shrubs and grasses planted on the east side of Ortona Campground by volunteers and Corps personnel.

Today, 85 to 90% of the plants are still thriving through the dry conditions of the winter months. All plants are native to the Florida landscape and give the campground a more authentic Floridian appearance.



The purpose of the planting was to provide shade trees and screening between the camp sites to give more privacy to campers.

In future years, all remaining exotic plants will be removed and replaced by native vegetation. Park Ranger, Rich Bailey is currently soliciting contractors to remove dead shade trees from the campground, and have them replaced with native flora .



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## Coming to the web

The US Army Corps of Engineers South Florida Operations Office (SFOO) manages and operates five navigation locks and dams along the Okeechobee Waterway. The lock recreation areas provide recreational facilities for public use year-round. The waterway serves navigation, flood control, recreation, drinking water, and agricultural irrigation purposes. The waterway has a major impact on the local economy, as users include both recreational and commercial marine traffic.



Herbert Hoover Dike Rehabilitation, just south of Port Mayaca  
(photo taken March 17, 2007)

## Staff Recognition



After 9 years at SFOO, Angie Huebner packs her bags and heads to Jacksonville to take a new position at the district office. She'll be greatly missed.



Donny Kinard takes the reigns as Chief Operations Manager while Steve Sullivan is on a temporary assignment in Palm Beach Gardens.



Jeremy Crossland receives honors as the 2006 SAD environmental stewardship employee of the year.



On May 10, Steven Synder will chalk up 40 years of service with the Corps, all at SFOO.



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