

Lake Harris EcoSummary

April 2011



Lake Condition Index (LCI): A biological assessment tool developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to indicate ecosystem health and identify impairment in Florida lakes

Watershed Characteristics

Located in central Lake County, the 15,087-acre Lake Harris is surrounded largely by a mix of residential, natural (wetlands and forest/rangelands) and agricultural lands. The largest single external phosphorus load to Lake Harris-Little Lake Harris was discharges from the Lake Harris Conservation Area, accounting for about 25% of the estimated load. Other phosphorus sources for Lake Harris-Little Lake Harris included atmospheric deposition (20%), tributary discharges (15%), urban-residential runoff (11%), muck farms (7%), septic tank effluents (4.5%), upland agriculture (1.5%) and point sources (0.9%). Because Lake Harris is larger than 1000 acres in size, two separate LCIs were performed, one on the east side and one on the west side. The 12 benthic grabs for Lake Harris East and for Lake Harris West were both taken in April of 2011.



Results

Lake Harris East and West received a good rating on the LCI. Nineteen different macroinvertebrate taxa were collected on Lake Harris West and twenty two different taxa were collected on Lake Harris East. The most abundant macroinvertebrate species collected on Lake Harris West were the oligochaete, tubificid worms *Limnodrilus hoffmeisteri* and the snail *Hydrobiidae* which comprised 37.5% and 26% of the total macroinvertebrate population, respectively. *Hydrobiidae* and *Limnodrilus hoffmeisteri* were also the most abundant species on Lake Harris East and comprised 23.6% and 43.6% of the macroinvertebrate population sample, respectively. The sediment in the benthic samples taken on the west side of the lake was predominately coarse particulate organic material with a mixture of muck and sand. Lake Harris West had the exotic submersed plant *Hydrilla verticillata* present in three of the twelve benthic grabs taken during this sampling event. This was the first time hydrilla had been encountered on Lake Harris since benthic sampling began in 2005. The east

side of Lake Harris was predominantly sand with some coarse particulate organic material and muck. No hydrilla was observed on the east side of Lake Harris. Lake Harris West and East LCI each received a Hulbert Index score of 6. The Hulbert Index is based on the number of pollution-intolerant lake macroinvertebrate species present. Therefore, higher Hulbert Index scores indicate a greater number of pollution sensitive species present or better water quality. Lake Harris East had 4 and Lake Harris West had 5 species of macroinvertebrates which are sensitive to pollution.

LCI SCORES

	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2011</u>
Harris East	44.53	31.21	38.00	33.46	40.92
Harris West	20.76	40.36	30.14	37.75	39.46



Photo courtesy of Dana Denson RCID

Hydrobiidae snails

Significance

The St. Johns River Water Management District is proposing a plan to increase the fluctuations in the water level in all the Harris Chain of Lakes. This could help Lake Harris-Little Lake Harris recover from pollution impacts by drying out large portions of mucky shoreline and helping to establish the aquatic plants essential for fisheries habitat and the overall biota of the lake. Improvement of the aquatic plant community is an important step toward the improvement of the benthic

macroinvertebrate community (and resulting LCI scores). The Lake County Water Authority will continue to monitor the macroinvertebrates in Little Lake Harris in order to assess ecosystem health.

Suggestions

Lakeside property owners can help keep the lake healthy by minimizing, or eliminating, the use of pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilizers, by preserving native shorezone vegetation, by minimizing impervious surfaces on their properties, by being careful with the use and storage of petroleum products, and by properly maintaining septic or sewer systems.



For more information, please contact:
Lake County Water Authority 107 North Lake Avenue Tavares, FL 32778
(352) 343-3777