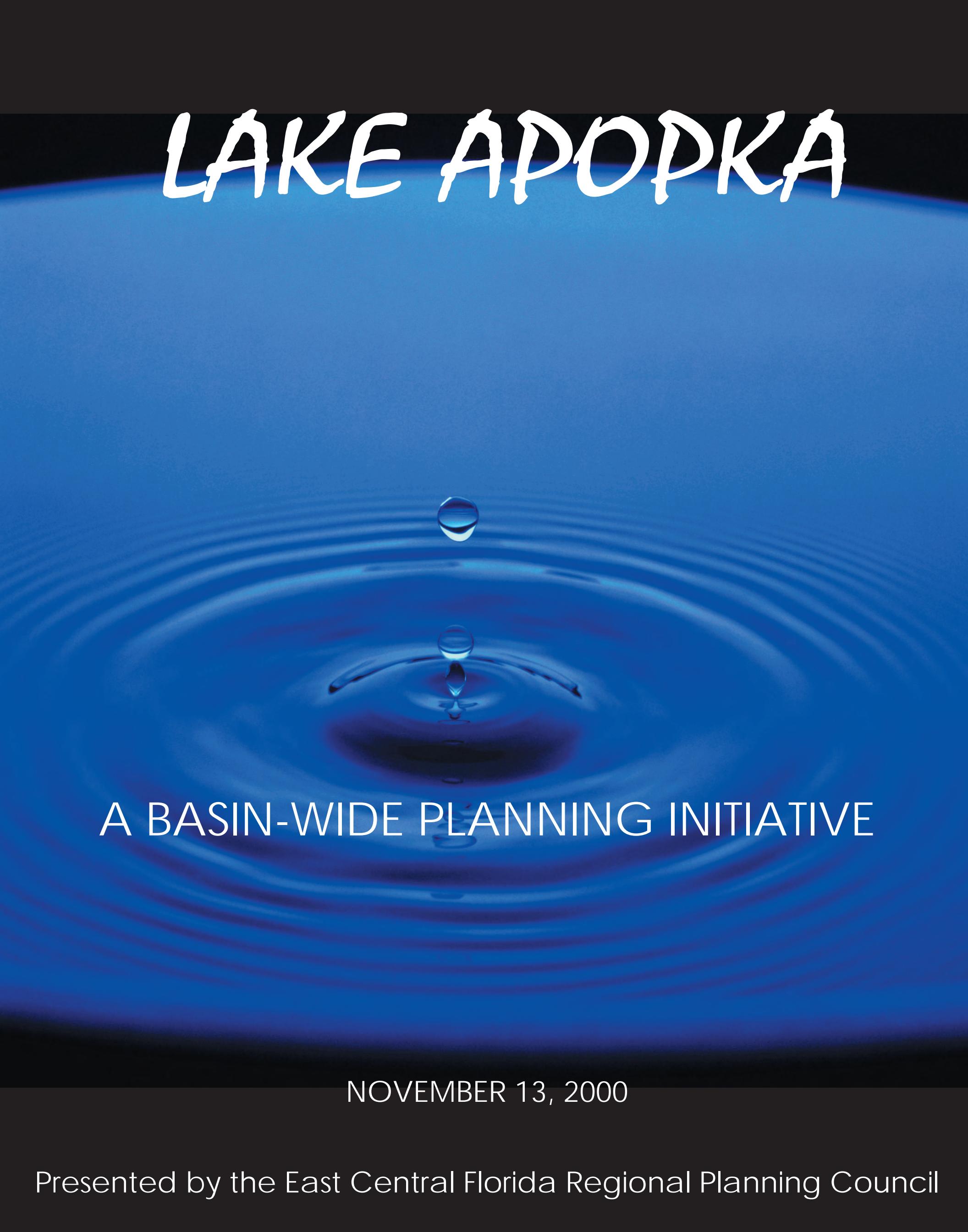


LAKE APOPKA



A BASIN-WIDE PLANNING INITIATIVE

NOVEMBER 13, 2000

Presented by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council

Lake Apopka Basin Steering Committee

Commissioner Robert Pool ~ Chairman
Lake County

Commissioner Bob Freeman ~ Vice-Chair
Orange County

Commissioner Robert Sindler ~ Orange County

Commissioner Bill Arrowsmith ~ City of Apopka

Mayor Scott Vandergrift ~ City of Ocoee

Commissioner Theo Graham ~ City of Winter Garden

Mayor Jon VanderLey ~ Town of Oakland

Mayor Helen Pearce ~ Town of Montverde

Mayor Harold Turville ~ City of Clermont



Report Prepared by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council
with assistance from:

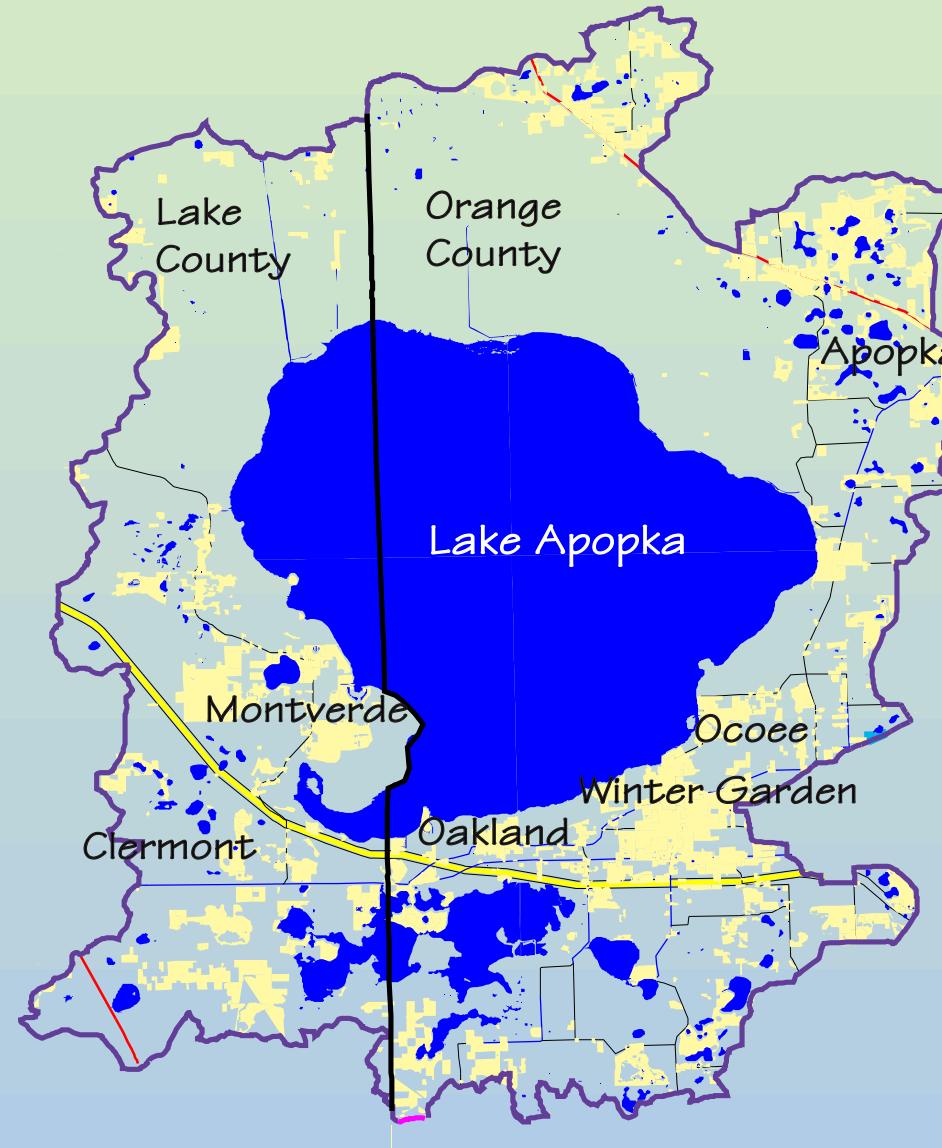
Florida Department of Community Affairs, Friends of Lake Apopka, St. Johns River Water Management District, Orange County Planning Department, Lake County Planning Department, City of Apopka Planning Department, City of Ocoee Planning Department, City of Winter Garden Planning Department, Town of Oakland Town Planner, Town of Montverde Town Planner, City of Clermont Planning Department

The Lake Apopka Basin Planning Initiative was launched in 1999 by the Friends of Lake Apopka to promote regional cooperation. From the start, the Initiative set out to be a catalyst for uniting six cities and two counties into a more cohesive unit capable of addressing growth and development issues in the Lake Apopka basin.

Why do this? Because of the growing conviction that as the Orlando Metropolitan area expands, development in any one of the eight basin jurisdictions has the ability to undermine state, regional and local efforts to restore Lake Apopka. Poorly planned growth, growth that it does not incorporate - as a principal development goal - conservation of the basin's natural resources, can directly affect everyone's use and enjoyment of this truly wonderful regional resource, and the economic benefits it can bring if managed wisely.

In February 2000, each of the basin's jurisdictions appointed elected officials to sit as members of the Lake Apopka Basin Steering Committee, which was established to formalize the Initiative's work and move forward on regional scale initiatives. The willingness of each jurisdiction to participate on the committee reflects their understanding of the lake's importance to their communities' future and a commitment to work collectively towards its long-term health. Two regional agencies, the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and the St. Johns River Water Management District were asked to provide technical and administrative support.

The Steering Committee's work has focused on examining those natural resources and features in the basin that are important to sustaining the lake's ecological integrity. It also has looked at how these resources and features may be enhanced to capitalize on them socially and economically. The Lake Apopka Basin is unique in having what will be, in the not too distant future, the second largest lake in the state. Although significant urbanization has occurred, much of the basin remains undeveloped, and the communities that developed historically in response to the lake's presence still retain a distinctive character reflective of their past relationships with the lake. Opportunities opened up by the restoration, and by the enlightened recognition on the part of the basin's jurisdictions that taking advantage of those opportunities requires regional collaboration, have the potential to make the Lake Apopka Basin one of the most livable areas in the country. Unlike so many other areas, the best of the past can still be salvaged and melded with a future that has not yet been decided.



Five areas were examined as part of the Initiative. These

areas were considered strategically important to the basin in that each is a key piece for achieving an ecologically and economically sustainable future. The areas examined and reported on in this resource b

- ● Shoreline Protection
- ● Greenways and Trails
- ● Viewsheds
- ● Public Access
- ● Natural Setting

What follows is not a vision for the future. It is not a blueprint or comprehensive plan for the basin. It does not prescribe specific actions for basin jurisdictions to undertake. But it does contain information, in the form of Needs and Opportunities, that identifies where the basin jurisdictions should direct their collective energies and resources. It is intended to set a basin agenda and, in keeping with the Initiative's intent, foster a sense of regionalism that allows for the pursuit of a sustainable future that is beneficial to all the basin's jurisdictions.



Pictured Above:
Steering Committee Members
(from left to right), Mayor Helen Pearce, Town of Montverde; Mayor Jon VanderLey, Town of Oakland;
Mayor Harold Turville, City of Clermont; Commissioner Bob Pool,
Lake County; Commissioner Theo Graham, City of Winter Garden;
Commissioner Bob Freeman, Orange County; (not pictured:
Commissioner Robert Sindler, Orange County, Commissioner Bill Arrowsmith, City of Apopka; Mayor Scott Vandergift, City of Ocoee).

Introduction

New Basin Framework

Effectively planning for the basin's future requires looking at it in a new way, approaching problems in a new way, and operating within a new conceptual framework.

A new conceptual framework creates a way to view the Lake Apopka basin as a living, breathing organism where the whole benefits from each of the parts and each of the parts benefit from the whole. It is a way of looking at the basin's needs and opportunities based upon the realities of how the basin functions and the relationship between ecological integrity, economic well-being and the basin communities' quality of life.

The framework is built on the basin's natural resources. These resources come before all other functional systems and form the context within which the basin operates. They existed long before the basin was settled, and they shaped the original settlement that took place. It is the historical basis upon which the area's economy was built and from which the area has benefited for the last hundred years. Even after experiencing substantial development over the years, the expanse of resources in the basin continues to endow it with a rich natural heritage. In addition to Lake Apopka, there are many lakes, tributaries, and springs, varying landforms and drainage basins, wetlands and uplands and plants and animals that inhabit these areas.

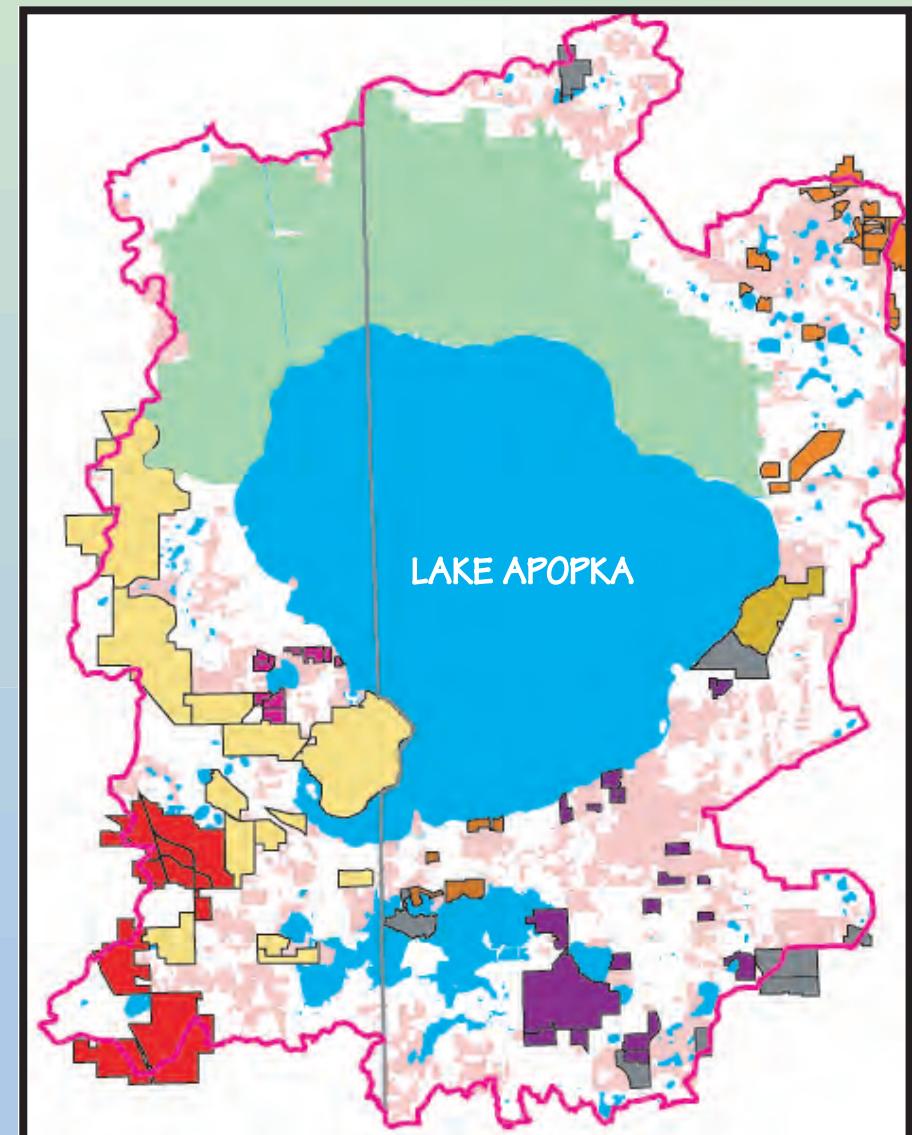
Recognizing the role of natural resources within the new framework is critical because of their uncertain future. Historically, the future most communities have faced is the systematic conversion of every acre of buildable land into a developed use. As the Orlando metropolitan area grows and continues its expansion into west Orange County and Lake County, the threat that conventional development poses to the basin's natural resources is magnified. The pace and momentum of metropolitan growth is such that it will, in a very short time, leave little of the basin's natural resources intact. While \$100 million is being invested to restore Lake



Apopka's natural functions, natural resources in the basin's uplands, which help support the lake's continued health, will likely undergo a reverse transformation - from natural to developed.

Conserving the natural resources in the basin's uplands is the highest priority. Using these systems to enhance the basin position as a major international, national and state center for eco-tourism is the second priority. Eco-tourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry. While currently the use level is low, it is in the growth stage of the business cycle and growing rapidly. Eco-tourism will benefit most from the demographic change occurring in the country in which the population's increasing age will result in a greater demand for less active and more educational and appreciative outdoor recreational activities. Increasing participation, more market supply, more private development, and higher media profile are expected by the industry.

The Lake Apopka basin is positioned to capture a major share of this emerging market by capitalizing on its proximity to the number one tourist destination in the

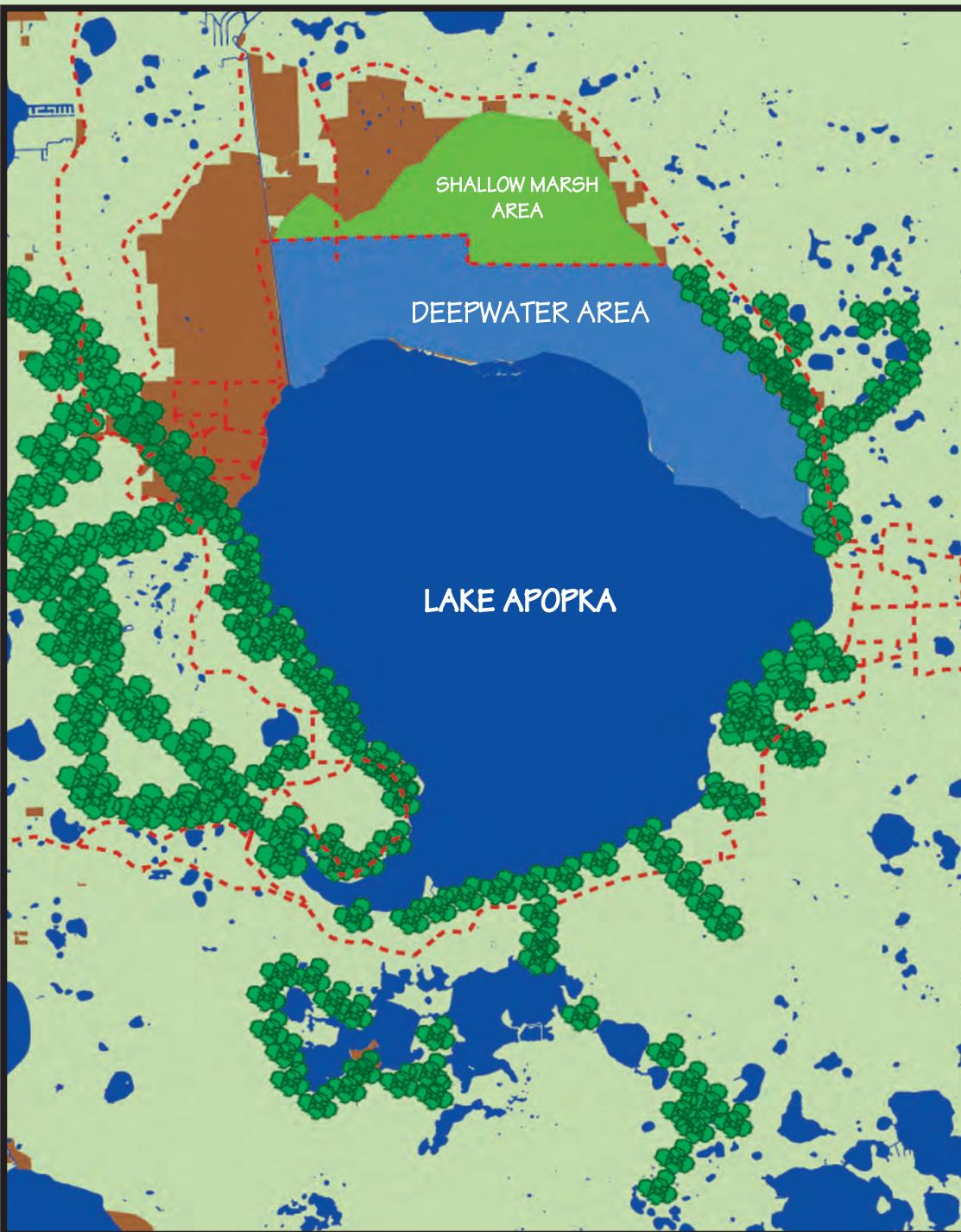


world as well as the natural setting and activities lake restoration will support. A glimpse of what this area has to offer was seen in the national 1998 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) that encompassed the entire north shore restoration area. Bird watchers identified 174 species of birds; the highest species total for an inland count in the history of the annual CBC.



lakes
Tributaries
SPRINGS, WETLANDS

New Basin Framework



Bird diversity is extraordinary in this area, and the bird list, which continues to grow, now includes more than 270 species.

The advantage of eco-tourism to communities within the Lake Apopka basin is that it is both a successful community development tool, with the commensurate economic benefits, and an effective conservation tool. One supports the other. The new conceptual framework for the Lake Apopka Basin embraces these realities. It elevates the importance of the basin's natural resources by suggesting that they set the direction for future development. In this framework, the structural and functional needs of key natural resources play the role traditionally played by roads and other types of engineered infrastructure in

establishing an area's development pattern. When combined with resource-based facilities that can contribute to establishing a strong eco-tourism industry in the basin, they form the basin's Green Infrastructure. It is this infrastructure, as opposed to traditional development infrastructure, that offers the best opportunity to guide the basin toward a sustainable future.



Viewsheds

parks, trails

WOODLANDS

Shoreline Protection

Phosphorous has been identified as the key pollutant of concern for Lake Apopka. If controlled from all sources, phosphorous can limit the effects of other lake nutrients. It is also a key component of stormwater runoff from urbanized land uses. Therefore, making every effort to limit or reduce phosphorous loading becomes an important concern for all shoreline uses, as well as uses throughout the basin.

The St. Johns River Water Management District has documented that, once introduced, pollutants tend to stay in the lake, resulting in accumulation of silts and sediments. Knowing this, the importance of keeping runoff from shoreline and upper basin activities as clean as possible becomes clear. How this is done varies by situation, but all portions of the basin have opportunities to address this issue. And, as a healthy lake has economic as well as ecological benefits throughout the basin, all residents have an interest in helping to protect it.

Using the basin's natural systems for controlling the quality of runoff into the lake is a highly efficient and cost-effective measure. Shorelines are an important part of this approach as they offer the last line of defense against water pollution originating on land. Their level of protection depends upon how dense and uninterrupted an expanse of natural vegetation can be maintained. This includes vegetation back from the shoreline as well as along the shore. As such, it also includes wetland and upland plants, both of which are capable of assimilating nutrients that otherwise would end up in the lake.

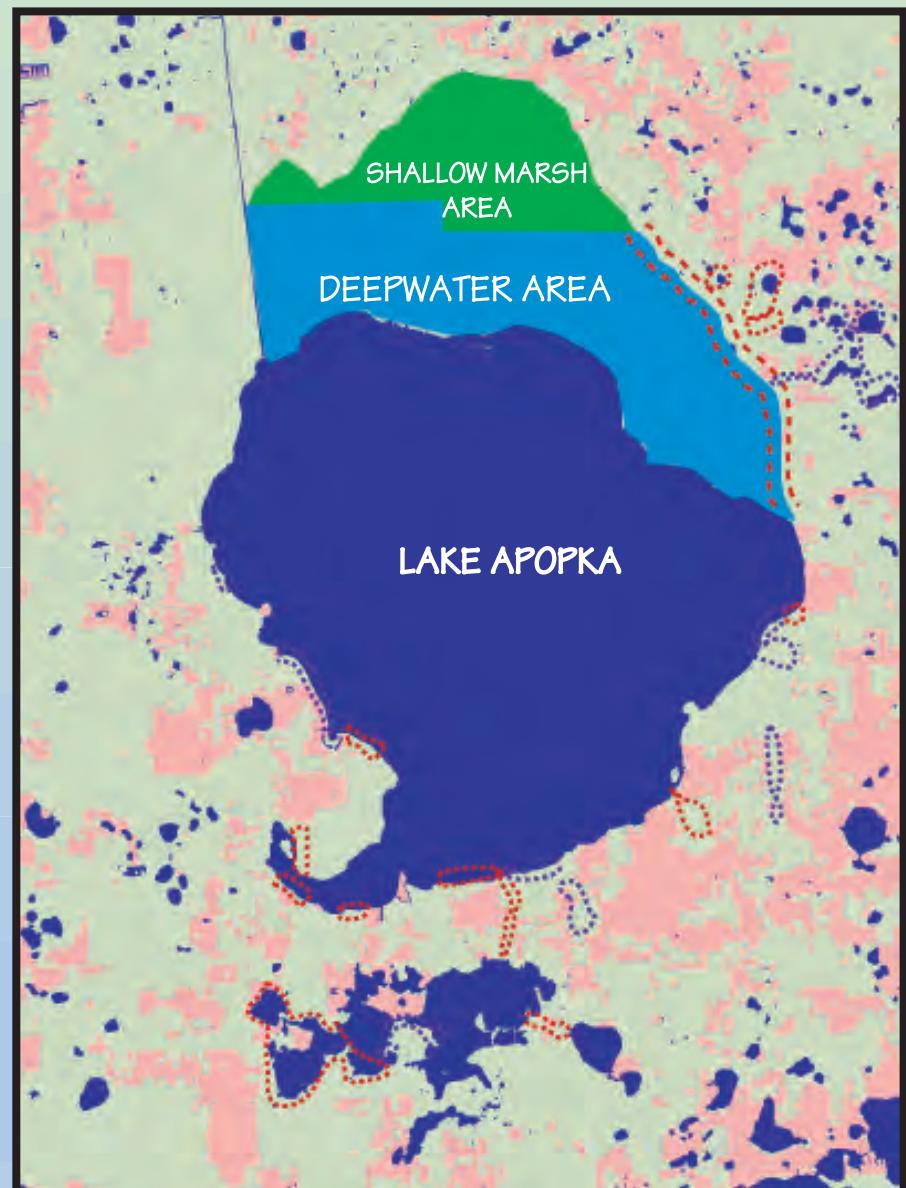
While much of the shoreline along Lake Apopka, its tributaries and connected lakes already is committed to some level of urban development, significant stretches remain undeveloped, particularly along the west and northeast shore of the lake. Some of these areas contain substantial wetlands, and by virtue of the protection afforded the, through existing statutory

and permitting requirements, provide a secure protective filter for upland runoff. Other shoreline areas have only small fringe wetlands or consist entirely of uplands that are likely to be developed.

Needs and Opportunities relating to water quality protection are based upon FDEP's recommendation of having 100 feet (in depth) of natural vegetation -wetlands or uplands or both - separating a water body from upland development. (Upland development includes residential lawns and other landscaped areas maintained as part of a home or larger development.) Described below are those stretches of undeveloped shoreline most threatened by development, which, if protected, offer the greatest opportunity - due to their length - for contributing toward protection of Lake Apopka's water quality. Shorelines were prioritized as either high or medium according to the following criteria:

1. High priority areas consist of continuous undeveloped shoreline of a sizable length having little or no protection from development (i.e., no wetlands).
2. Medium priority areas consist of continuous undeveloped shoreline of a sizable length having some protected land (i.e., wetlands but not 100 feet in depth).

The purpose of prioritizing is to recommend where shoreline protection efforts can best be focused to realize maximum water quality benefits. It is not meant to suggest that other shoreline sections need not or should not be buffered from development. Lake Apopka, as well as other water bodies in the basin, can benefit from maintaining as much of its shoreline in natural vegetation as possible, particularly in combination with removal of exotic plants and their replacement with native species.



lulu creek

St. Johns Lake Outfall

HERMIT LAKE & TRIBUTARY

Shoreline Protection

NORTHEAST SHORE

High Priority

1. Hermit Lake and Tributary
2. Holts Lake and Tributary
3. Unnamed Spring and Tributary
4. New Lake Apopka Shoreline adjacent to SJRWMD's Proposed Deepwater Area

Medium Priority

1. Marshall Lake and Tributary
2. Lake Fuller, Connected Smaller Lakes and Tributary

SOUTHEAST SHORE

High Priority

1. Canal (adjacent to Paradise Development)
2. Lulu Creek
3. Connection between Johns Lake and Black Lake
4. Johns Lake Outfall
5. Lake Apopka Shoreline between Oakland and Winter Garden

Medium Priority

1. Tributary running Southeast from Lake Apopka Shoreline, crossing Ocoee-Apopka Road, to North of Fuller Cross Road.
2. Lake Apopka Shoreline
3. Tributary South of Log Landing Road down to Palm Drive (flows to Crown Point Swamp).
4. Tributary West of Lakeview Middle School, from West Plant Street to Brandy Lake.

SOUTHWEST SHORE

High Priority

1. Shoreline of the Western Portion of Johns Lake
2. Lake Apopka Shoreline North of Turnpike
3. Lake Apopka Shoreline South of Gourd Neck Spring
4. Lake Apopka Shoreline on Southwest side of Pine Island
5. Lake Apopka Shoreline on North side of Pine Island

Medium Priority

1. Southern Portion of Johns Lake Shoreline across from Deer Island
2. Lake Apopka Shoreline North of Montverde
3. Lake Apopka Shoreline South of SJRWMD Lands



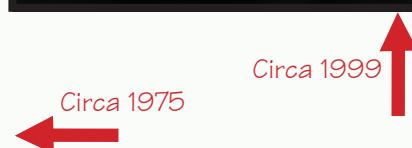
NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES SHORELINE CONDITIONS

Wetlands

This map represents shoreline with protected wetlands. A significant portion of the Lake's shoreline is upland and is either developed or developable. Without proper management and adequate buffers with native vegetation, the developable lands could add significant amounts of stormwater (phosphorous) to the Lake.



The quality of recreational experience will be greatly enhanced by minimizing shoreline construction that can detract from the presentation of the lake as a mostly undeveloped resource. The shoreline of the Butler Chain of Lakes (pictured below & right), before and after development, offers a dramatic picture of the type of changes that could occur, but should be avoided.



Apopka Loop Trail

The vision for the Lake Apopka Loop Trail is a 57-mile facility encircling Lake Apopka and linking parks, open space and communities with a paved multi-use trail. The trail will provide visual access to the lake in some places and physical access in others. It will serve communities within the basin and will help meet regional demand for outdoor recreation. It also will be a critical component for pursuing an eco-tourism strategy for the Lake Apopka Basin. Trails are tourist draws in their own right, and also function as important support facilities for other eco-tourism activities.

For attracting outside visitors, the most successful trails are those that are perceived to go somewhere. Whether individuals take advantage of this feature is less important than the feeling that they could. For basin residents, the longer the trail, the greater the number of people who would have access to it. A loop trail for Lake Apopka would offer all of these advantages and also would forge a link between basin communities.

In Orange County, a significant portion of the loop trail already exists by virtue of the West Orange Trail. To identify possible routes in Lake County that could link the West Orange Trail with Water Management District lands to the north, a series of public workshops was held around the basin. Workshop participants identified the old Tavares and Gulf (T&G) railroad corridor running parallel to CR 455 as the preferred route for the loop trail's western leg. This rail corridor extends from Tavares south to the Minneola/Clermont trail, with the segment needed for the western leg running south from the Water Management District lands north of Ferndale to the Clermont/Minneola trail.

As part of their management planning effort, the Water Management District has conceptually identified a series of trails on their lands, one of which could be used to connect the T&G railroad corridor to corridors in Orange County. This is the perimeter trail along the outer

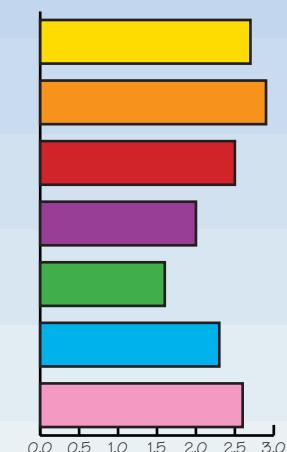


edge of the proposed shallow marsh area and deepwater area. The perimeter trail could then be connected, through one of several alternative trail corridors, over to Magnolia Park and then on to the West Orange Trail.

Needs and Opportunities relating to the loop trail focus on those portions for which alternative corridors are severely limited. For the Apopka Loop Trail to be built, the greatest need is to ensure that sufficient land is available for the trail to continue from Magnolia Park in Orange County to the T & G rail corridor in Lake County. While the Water Management District continues to support the concept of a perimeter trail along the lake, they have noted that the configuration of the District's land ownership would make

such a trail on District lands impossible. Lands at the outer boundary of District ownership do not comprise a continuous upland buffer surrounding the property, because the District purchased lands up to a specific elevation based on projected water levels after restoration. Some of the District's land may be only in the form of flowage easements over private property. Therefore, any continuous linear trail on the perimeter of District-owned property would not be physically possible. Additionally, purchasing land along the edge of the entire length of District lands would be financially impractical.

Using the levee located next to the McDonald Canal - when forms what will be the boundary of the shallow water marsh restoration area and the deepwater



west orange trail

McDonald Canal Levee Trail

T & G RAILROAD TRAIL

section can solve part of this problem. Kept intact, the levee will provide a means for crossing District lands and eliminate the need to purchase property along the northern perimeter of the restoration area. The trail surface for this section will likely be limestone instead of asphalt.

An alternative corridor for connecting the McDonald Canal Levee trail with Magnolia Park does not exist. Consequently, it is critical to establishing a loop trail that sufficient land be secured adjacent to the District-owned property on the northeastern shore. For that reason, directing resources toward this segment is of the highest priority.

In Orange County, several alternative routes are available to link the West Orange Trail to Magnolia Park on the eastern shore of Lake Apopka, but currently there are no preferred routes for establishing this link. Given that there are several options open for trail connections, this trail link is not as critical as others for trail development, but building the link will be important to the overall loop.

In Lake County, the T&G rail corridor makes an ideal route for the western leg. However, Lake County needs to be opportunistic. While other routes might be found, the T&G corridor is the best route for the trail due to the relatively low number of owners. Once fragmented by development, it will be much harder and considerably more expensive to secure this trail link.



A magnifying glass is positioned over the word 'Magnolia' in the title, highlighting it. The background of the slide is black, and the title is written in a large, white, cursive font.

Viewsheds

Long term care and preservation of a natural resource depends largely upon people having an interest in it. The more that people can connect with a resource and begin to feel a sense of ownership, the greater the likelihood they will take responsibility for its conservation and protection. Viewsheds - vantage points from which people can visually interact with a resource - are an effective way to give people this sense of ownership. Developing viewsheds for public use can add substantially to the number of people able to experience a resource, which would otherwise be restricted to a relatively small number of people who have physical access to it. Without viewsheds, interest in the future of a resource such as a lake might be limited only to those who reside along its shoreline or have use of a boat.

Viewsheds also are a positive experience for the viewer. Whether the experience is from a public roadway, trail or park, views add to the enjoyment of an area. They also increase the value of surrounding property, and enhance an area's livability by helping to protect its scenic quality and character. Viewsheds also play a significant role in establishing and promoting eco-tourism for an area.

A number of visual access points were identified as part of the research effort. These points consist of both public and private sites located throughout the basin. A few offer direct visual access from the shoreline while others offer larger vistas from sites having higher elevations than the surrounding landscape. A limited number are in public ownership, although currently most are on private land.

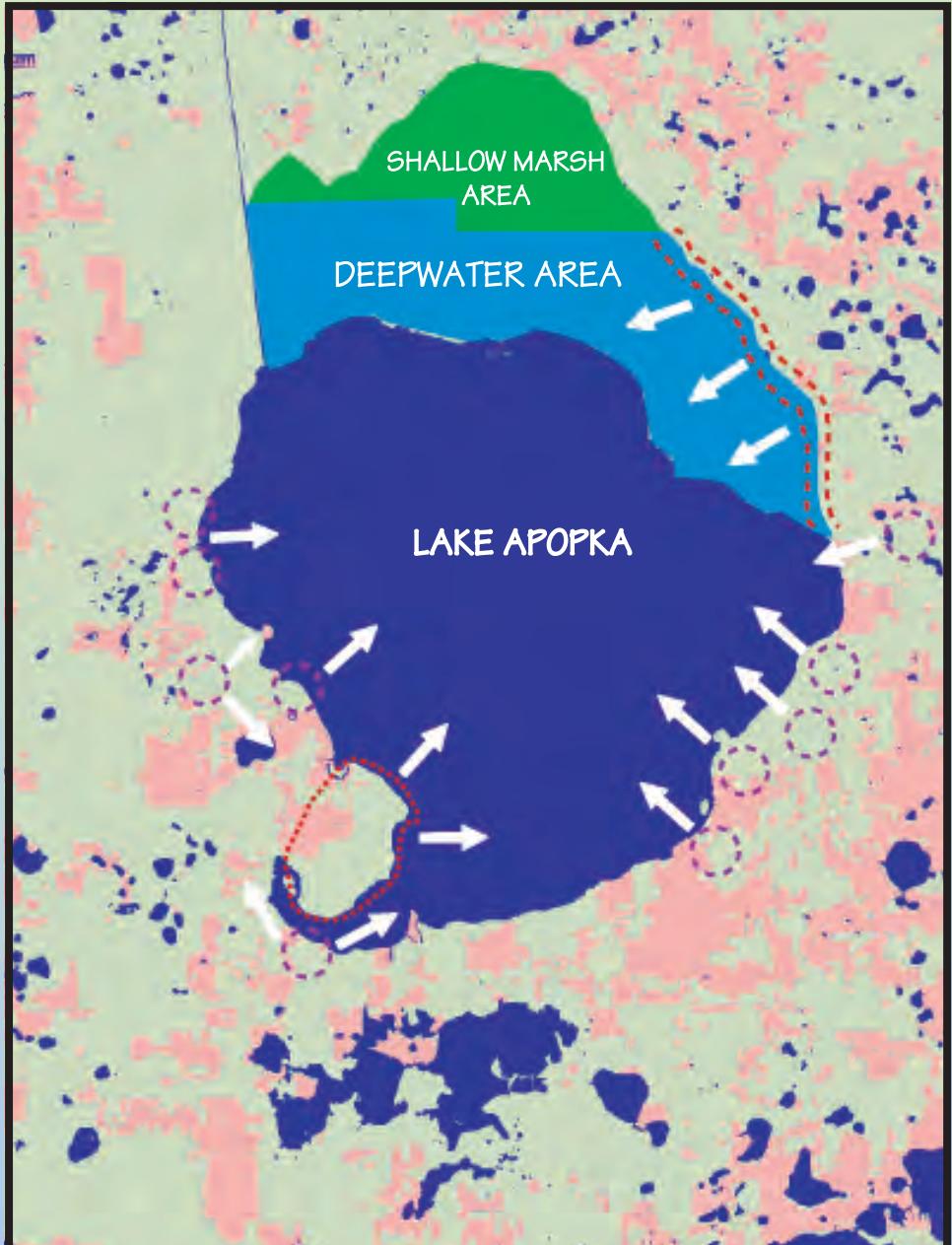
Needs and Opportunities relating to viewsheds center on two sites. They offer significant opportunity to accommodate large numbers of people and provide exceptional views of the lake. As they are both in private ownership and face intense development pressure, the need to secure them for public use is immediate.



Below: The Northwest shore topography map shows the areas of higher elevation that offer generous views of Lake Apopka with circles, while the red arrows represent the views to the lake.



Viewshed



NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES LAKE APOPKA VIEWSHEDS



- Undeveloped Land
- Water
- Urban/Suburban
- Deepwater Area
- Shallow Marsh Area
- High Priority Needs/Opprtunity
- Medium Priority Needs/Opportunity
- Viewsheds

Pine Island

Pine Island is a 1,475-acre site located on Lake Apopka's southwestern shore. The viewshed opportunities benefit from its elevations - parts of which are 100 feet higher than the lake - its projection into the lake and its proximity to major urban transportation corridors. It has the potential to offer visual access for the greatest number of people, provided it is developed as a public amenity.

Future Shoreline of Lake Apopka adjacent to the SJRWMD's Deepwater Area.

Restoration of Lake Apopka anticipates a new shoreline along the northeast section of the lake. This shoreline will be approximately 7 miles in length and can offer substantial opportunity for viewing the lake if public access is available. As proposed, it would include part of the Loop Trail around Lake Apopka, and public access would be available through that trail. This section is the only paved part of the loop trail that would front directly on the lake and consequently would offer extended lake viewing. Such a trail also would allow connection to proposed District trails internal to the restoration area. Once the restoration effort is complete, however, and the District lands flooded, there will not be sufficient uplands under District ownership to accommodate a trail. Substantial effort on the part of the basin's communities will be required if this area is to be made available for public use.



Public Access

Access is important to ensure that sufficient opportunity exists for the public to enjoy this natural resource that is being restored at considerable public expense. It is also important for developing an eco-tourism industry centered upon enjoyment and use of the lake.

A number of public access points currently exist around the lake. Given the lack of use of the lake, they seem more than sufficient to satisfy current demand. To assess future demand, a series of five public involvement workshops were held at different locations around the basin. The majority of workshops participants thought greater access to the lake would be needed as the restoration process began to show demonstrable results. They noted that future access would be most desirable through development of an integrated park system. Suggested activities at these parks included fishing docks, boat docks, campgrounds, picnic areas, swimming areas, and foot trails/walkways that enable visual access to the lake.

The following were listed by the workshop participants as desirable future sites:

LAKE COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY

Located on the western shore of Lake Apopka, the Lake County Water Authority has been given mitigation funding for purchase of 1096 acres of wetland and upland that adjoins the Water Management District property to the north. Part of this property has producing groves. The upland portions of the property require restoration and could include a park system of nature trails and possibly an access point to the lake.

PINE ISLAND

Located on the southwestern shore of Lake Apopka, Pine Island has significant opportunities for access on the property. The site is a 1,475-acre parcel and contains mostly uplands and wooded wetlands with direct access to the lake.

COCA-COLA PROPERTY

Located on the eastern shore of the Lake, the Coca-Cola property offers 300 acres of wetland and upland property with direct access to the lake and adjoins the Crown Point property to the north. The City of Ocoee plans to purchase this site,

restore and preserve the existing wetland system, and develop passive and active recreation areas, including a spur to the West Orange Trail and possibly a public school.

CROWN POINT

Located on the Lake's eastern shore Crown Point is a future opportunity with approximately 200 vacant acres of a pristine mixture of wetland and uplands along the shore. The site has direct access to Lake Apopka. The City of Ocoee has plans to purchase the parcel for preservation, restoration and passive recreation through the use of mitigation funding dollars from the Western Beltway.

MAGNOLIA PARK EXTENSION

Magnolia Park is located on the Lake's northeastern shore. Orange County is working to acquire woods adjacent to the north and south of the park. This would add 26 acres to the park, some of which will have direct access to the lake.

LAUGHLIN ROAD

Located on the basin's north section in Zellwood, Laughlin Road is a 10-acre parcel at the end of Laughlin Road that is zoned for industrial park district use. This site would not have direct access to Lake Apopka but would be connected to the shallow water zone that may be used as bird habitat. Passive recreation would be ideal for this site.

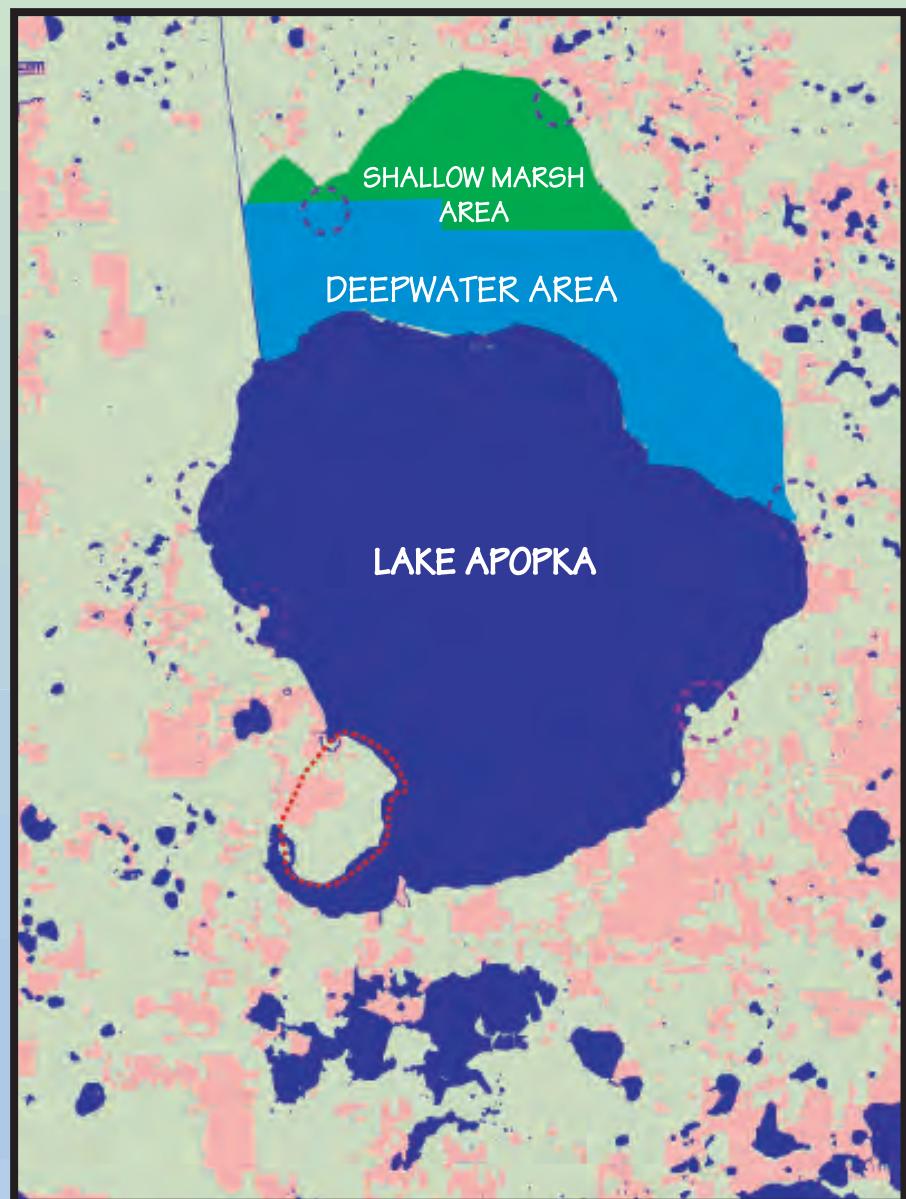
HOOPER FARMS

Located on what will become Lake Apopka's new northeastern shore, the Hooper Farms area is approximately 19 acres and is currently being used as a burrow pit. This site abuts the St Johns River Water Management District property that is to be flooded and will have direct access.

RESTORATION AREA

The Water Management District's lands offer substantial opportunity for public access to the lake. The District shows a boat launching facility as part of their plans for the restoration area, although that plan is subject to change as the management plan is developed.

All of these areas have the potential to help meet future access needs and offer



NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES LAKE APOPKA VIEWSHEDS



	Undeveloped Land		Shallow Marsh Area
	Water		High Priority Needs/Opportunity
	Urban/Suburban		Medium Priority Needs/Opportunity
	Deepwater Area		

opportunities for dispersing sites around the basin. Of all these sites, however, Pine Island offers the greatest opportunity for providing public access that could be developed in conjunction with many other outdoor recreational activities, as identified at the public workshops.

hooper farms

Laughlin Road

PINE ISLAND

Renewing natural settings:

A basic principle of eco-tourism is to preserve and maintain as much of a natural setting as possible. That is, the more natural looking the area is, the higher the quality of a visitor's experience. Although a large portion of the Lake Apopka basin is already developed, significant opportunities exist for retaining a sizable part of the natural landscape. Needs and Opportunities relating to maintaining a natural setting are found both along the shore of Lake Apopka and within a large part of the southwestern portion of the basin around the Town of Montverde. As rural and undeveloped areas, however, they are extremely sensitive to the growth of Orlando metropolitan area, and the type, pattern and pace of development that is occurring in the basin.

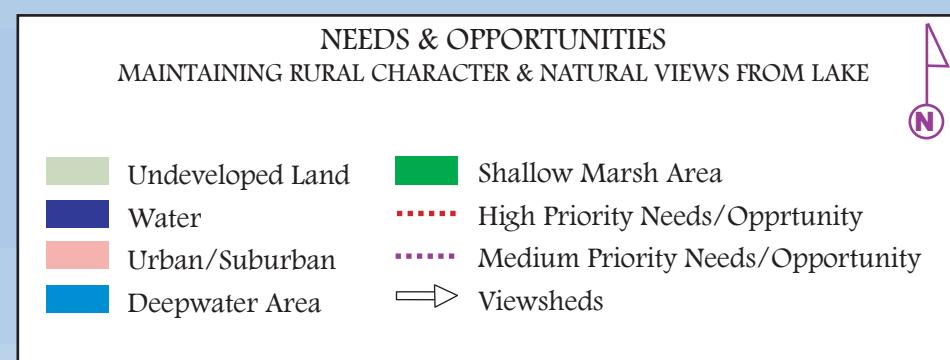
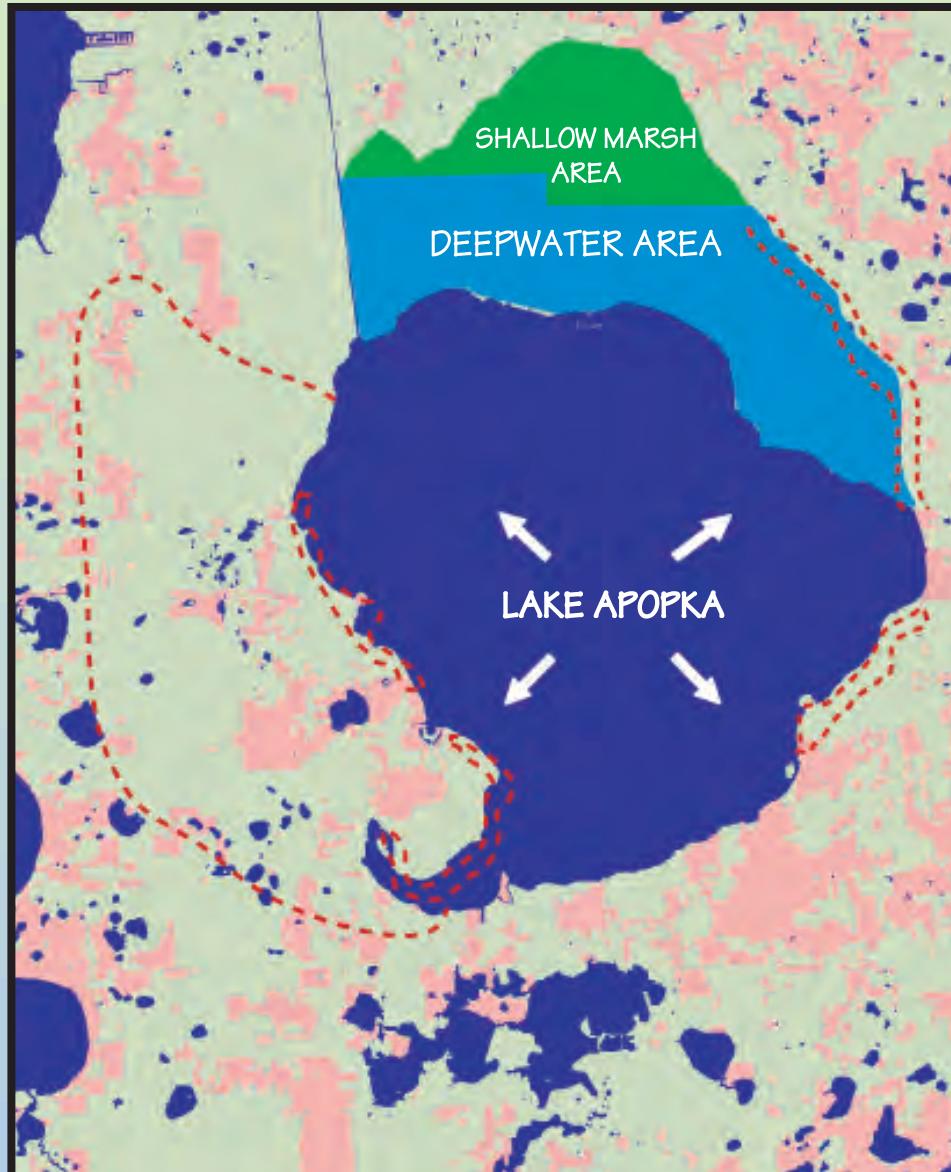
UNDEVELOPED SHORELINE

As water quality in Lake Apopka continues to improve, recreational use of the lake ~ for fishing, skiing and boating ~ will increase. The quality of this experience will be greatly enhanced by minimizing shoreline construction that can detract from the presentation of the lake as a mostly undeveloped resource. In particular, individual boat docks and boathouses, and poorly sited homes can change the perceived character of the lake significantly. The shoreline of the Butler Chain of Lakes, before and after development, offers a dramatic picture of the type of changes that could occur, but should be avoided.

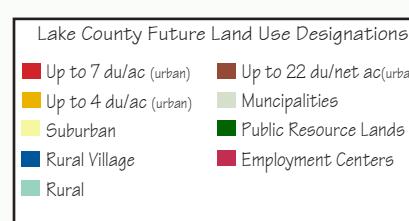
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Lake County's Comprehensive Plan currently assigns a series of low-density land uses to their portion of the basin north of the Turnpike. This portion of Lake County is the only part of the basin designated in a comprehensive plan as rural, or that can reasonably be expected to remain rural. The majority of the area is assigned densities of 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres, with an opportunity for increased densities of up to 4 dwelling units per acre within specified areas and under certain development conditions. The intent of these land use classifications is to maintain a rural character in that portion of the county, and allow low intensity agricultural uses by individual owners. The County's planning documents note, however, that the development pattern has not been on a five-acre tract basis. Rather, a large amount of land is held in large tracts and often under single ownership. The implication is that as this area develops, it will be at something much denser than 1 home on 5 acres. Past and current development proposals for this area appear to support this.

Lake County development policies encourage clustering and rural design of residential uses. This approach to development should be vigorously pursued. It will allow, within a framework of accommodating new



development, for a more natural and rural looking appearance than could be achieved simply by relying on low density zoning. Designing a rural landscape involves strategically siting development in a way that maximizes open space ~ woodlands, small lakes, pasture, ridges and hilltops, and wetlands. Open space areas should include the most sensitive resource areas of a property. In addition, they should include locally significant features on the property such as viewsheds. Open space lands function best when not divided into individual back yard areas. Each development, working within the existing densities allowed, would provide a "building block" in the area's overall rural strategy, resulting in an interconnected network of permanent open space. Such an approach is akin to master planning an entire area with the overriding goal of minimizing the visual intrusion of new development into the landscape.



Pine Island

Pine Island is the most significant piece of undeveloped land on the Lake Apopka shoreline and so is worthy of a separate discussion. Though accessible by road at its north and southwest ends, this land is otherwise an island, bordered by the lake on all but its western side and by the Hyponex lake on that side. Pine Island's uniqueness is magnified by the fact that in one location it can address many of the needs and opportunities identified in the earlier Trails, Viewsheds, Access, Shoreline Protection and Natural Setting sections of this report. This potential will not be realized, however, without community-based action in the very near term.

Elevations on Pine Island range from the USGS reported 66 foot level of Lake Apopka to a prominent hill on the island's south end of 155 feet. From this vantage point one can see the entire Lake Apopka system, as well as the downtown Orlando skyline. Having access to visual perspectives such as this is critical for Central Floridians to understand Lake Apopka in its regional context.

The island's size gives it an undeveloped shoreline of about 4 miles along Lake Apopka. The Hyponex lake, isolated from Lake Apopka, provides nearly 2 more miles of shoreline. Its proximity to the Gourd Neck places it in the most natural portion of Lake Apopka, and its isolated configuration makes Pine Island a unique natural feature within the lake system.

This value is magnified when Pine Island's regional context is understood. Being on the "far side" of Lake Apopka, Pine Island has so far been sheltered from the waves of urban expansion engulfing the lake on the south and north and so exists as a major upland component of the vast "wild" area that Lake Apopka represents. Nonetheless, it is within five miles of access to Florida's Turnpike and within half an hour of downtown Orlando and Walt Disney World.

As has been the case with so many of the unique natural features of Florida, Pine Island is desired for its development potential, and presently is under

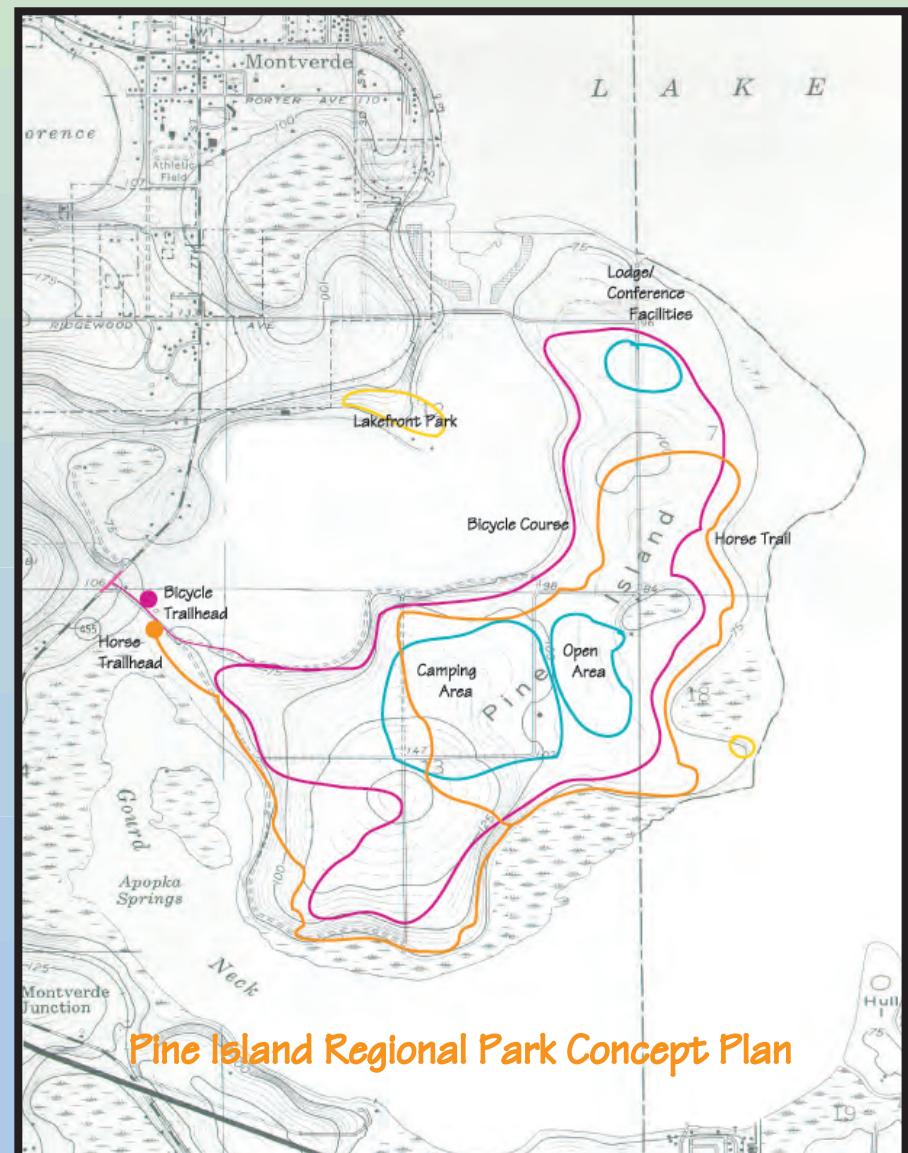
consideration for developed residential use. Though the current development proposal is controversial, this is the option more likely to be implemented. However, the island also has the potential to be developed for public purposes that would support the area's desire to maintain its rural character and develop a nature-based local economy. It also would be an important part of the total Lake Apopka picture and would greatly support objectives for basin linkages, lake access and shoreline protection.

Given the citrus and forestry uses in place, simply converting Pine Island to an ecological preserve with public access and passive use may not be responsive to the site's regional potential. More developed recreational uses would support the type of economy the area is nurturing and also conserve the lake basin's natural systems. One example would be a training facility as described below.

Clermont is becoming an international center for cycling enthusiasts, with world class competitions and informal rides occurring regularly. Cyclists are attracted to Clermont for its mild winters and the challenging hills west of Lake Apopka. Pine Island has the mild winters and hills, as well as the potential for constructing a closed training course five or more miles long. Such a course, free of conflicts with highway traffic, would be a one-of-a-kind facility for the eastern United States. Cycling safely through pines and citrus groves would be a unique experience for both serious and family cyclists.

The site also could accommodate miles of equestrian trails to complement the rural character of this portion of Lake County. Routes could take advantage of elevated and lakeside views through the pines and citrus and include a stable, corral or other staging area for riders.

A campground with developed, group and/or wilderness type-sites also could be included. Creating an open "meadow" would provide space for group camping-related events, hot air balloon launches or community festivals. The Hyponex lake



has clean water and is deep enough to support small boat sailing, wildlife viewing, education and other water activities.

Pine Island's natural character and tranquility and its proximity to area population centers would support the location of a small eco-oriented inn and conference center. A small commercial operation like this could add to the local economy without detracting from the greater public interest in this resource.

Due to the site's size and the number of opportunities for public use, acquisition, development and management of Pine Island will require a coordinated approach among all jurisdictions and interests - public and private - having a stake in the basin's future.

lakefront park

Horse Trail, Bicycle Course
CAMPING GROUNDS

The St. Johns River Water Management District plans for the northern muck land restoration have not been finalized, but conceptually call for flooding the land to varying levels. Whether the land is flooded to allow expanses of open water or to promote the establishment of new marsh areas, or both, the certain result will be that Lake Apopka's shoreline will be greatly expanded. This shoreline presents the second substantial opportunity to implement many of the trail, access, viewshed, shoreline protection and natural setting objectives discussed earlier in this report. It therefore warrants a separate discussion.

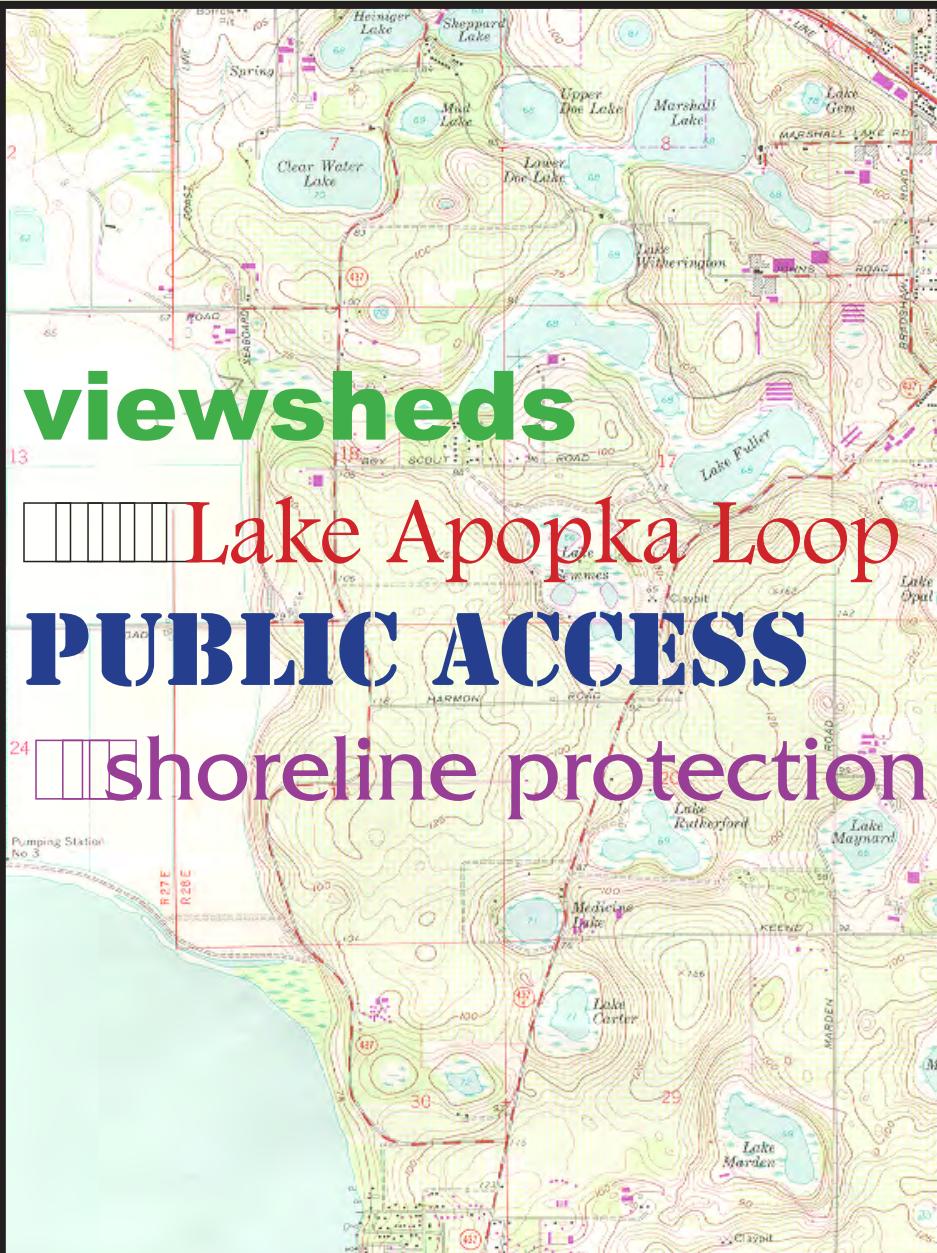
Using preliminary plans for creating "deepwater" areas on the muck land, a new shoreline of about five miles in length will be established in the area west of Apopka and south of Plymouth. Beginning a short distance north of the intersection of Binion Road and Ocoee-Apopka Road, this new shoreline will continue northwestward along the boundary of the District's land almost to the North Orlando County Airport. The new shoreline will be marked by a bluff rising 25 feet in many areas over the elevation of the existing muck lands. Nearly the entire length of this new shore is presently open upland, interrupted only by occasional nurseries and other agricultural centers.

It is rare that new undeveloped shoreline is created for a lake this size. Such a change creates many opportunities for use, but also creates challenges to ensure that those uses are sensitive to the adjacent lake resource. The Northeast Shore is therefore a critical area for promoting sound land use management.

The new shore has every opportunity to provide, and presents a critical need to provide:

Improved visual and physical access - the proposed Apopka Bypass could be a scenic highway offering motorists expansive views of Lake Apopka, the District's restoration area and the undeveloped shoreline. Development along the new shore should provide for linear parks and trails - including the Loop Trail - as well as entry points to the lake and restoration area. Lake Apopka also could be the terminal view for new residential and community streets.

Recreation opportunities - Including the Lake Apopka Loop Trail along the shoreline provides not only local connections among parks, community focal points and residential and commercial areas, but also direct linkage to the other communities that share the lake.



Shoreline Protection - Though portions of this new shoreline have the potential for more urban uses, the need to maintain habitat and protect water quality still is going to be a critical factor in all new Lake Apopka shoreline development.

Natural Character - Along with sound shoreline protection, maintaining and enhancing the new lakeshore's natural character is important for lake quality and the lake's image. This includes removing existing exotic vegetation as well as using native plant species in land and aquascaping for new development.

The District's restored lands are going to provide tremendous eco-tourism opportunities for the Apopka, Plymouth and Zellwood communities. Capitalizing on the unique attraction that this will create can go a long way toward replacing the economic base lost when the area farms closed. Creative commercial and residential development plans that take advantage of this can result in community development that makes the most of the unique resources that are present.



Northeast
Shoreline
Management
Strategies



East Central Florida

**REGIONAL
PLANNING
COUNCIL**

In Partnership With

Florida Department of Community Affairs

Friends of Lake Apopka

St. Johns River Water Management District

Lake County

Orange County

City of Apopka

City of Clermont

City of Ocoee

City of Winter Garden

Town of Montverde

Town of Oakland