

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

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Northeast Shoreline

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.

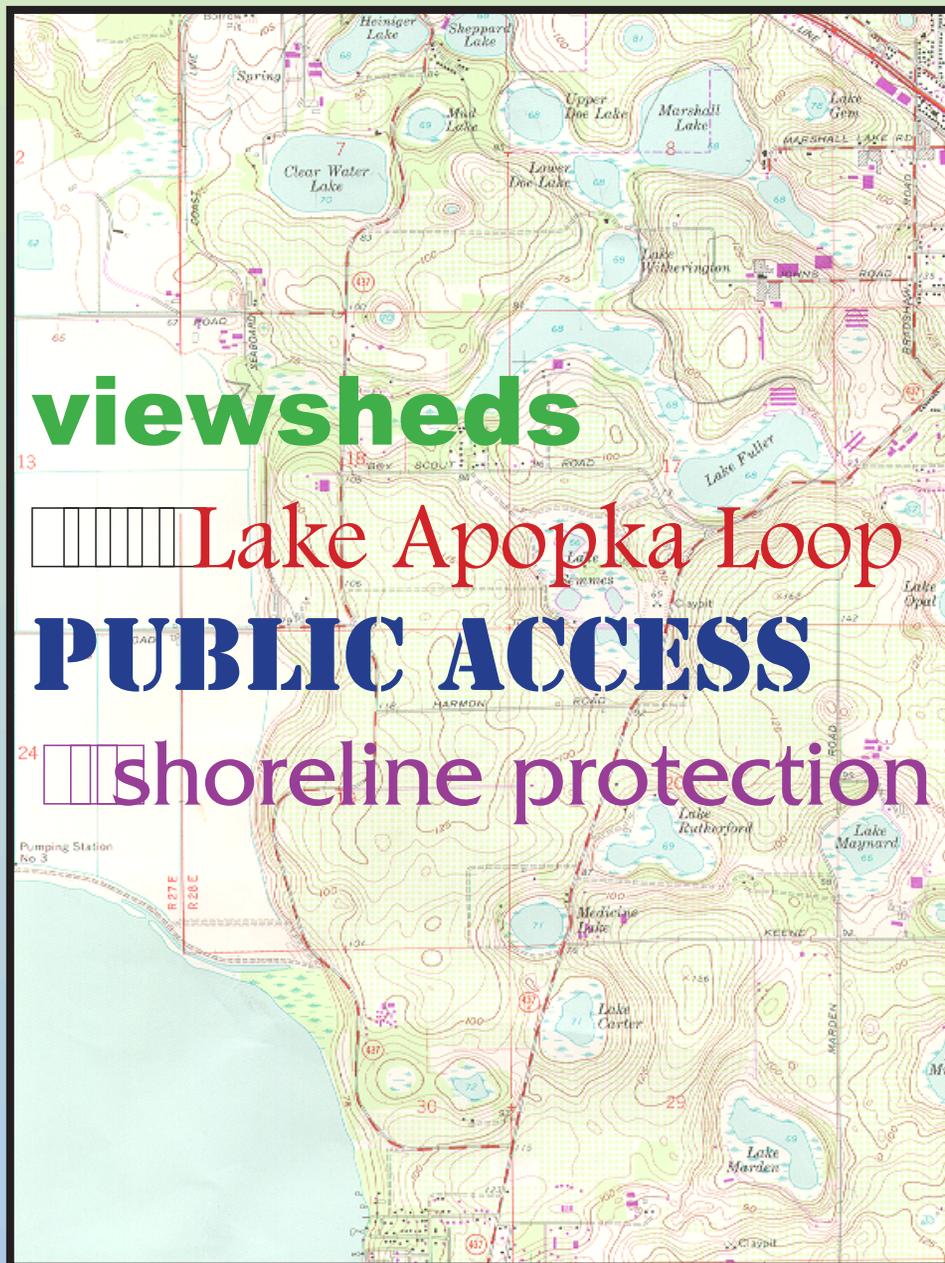
Using preliminary plans for creating "deepwater" areas on the muck land, a new shoreline of about five miles in length will be established in the area west of Apopka and south of Plymouth. Beginning a short distance north of the intersection of Binion Road and Ocoee-Apopka Road, this new shoreline will 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.



viewsheds

Lake Apopka Loop

PUBLIC ACCESS

shoreline protection

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.

