

LAKE GWYN SURFACE WATER & RECREATIONAL PROJECT

The Lake Gwyn Surface Water & Recreational project has been in development from conception to completion for over a decade to service the Wahnetta community in Polk County. Wahnetta is a community under 5000 residents and is classified as an underserved community. The project objectives were designed into three phases. The initial phase began in 2010. The entire project was completed in 2020.

Lake Gwyn had been severely altered and impacted by the construction of a drainage canal excavated through the center of the lake approximately 80 years ago. Historically the lake was a shallow, marshy, depressional wetland system, less than six feet deep. After project completion the lake was restored with deep pools and littoral zone habitat areas.

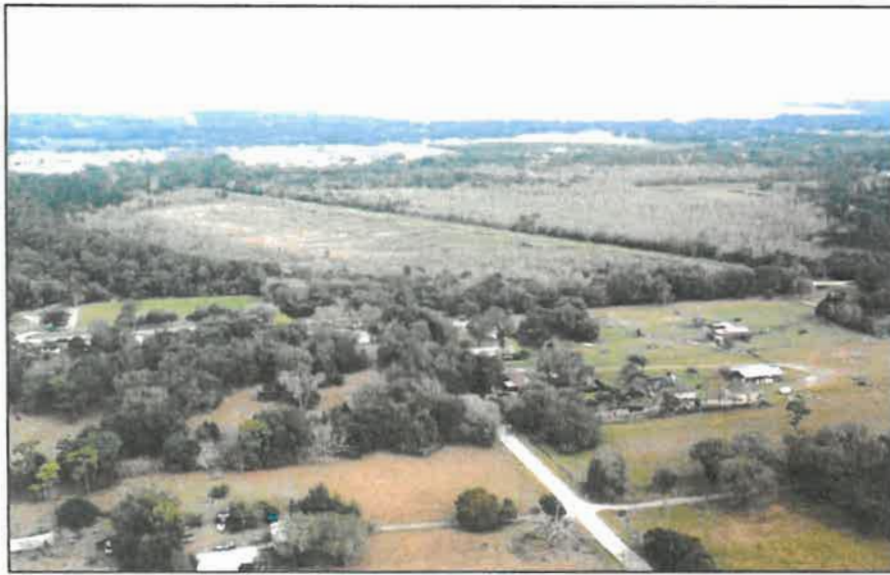
After the canal was constructed the eastern and western halves of the lake were used as a fish hatchery. After decades of use as a hatchery, the hatchery was abandoned and the lake reverted to a poor-quality wetland. Changes in the hydrologic regime of Lake Gwyn as a result of the canal construction had allowed weedy and exotic shrub species to overtake the historic lakebed. The exotics overtook the entire 147-acre lake bottom. Polk County prioritized the restoration of Lake Gwyn's hydrology, wetland habitat and water quality treatment functions. Polk County acquired cooperative funding agreements to restore the lake and provide recreational space for the community. The restoration will continue to improve wildlife and bird habitat while providing wetland treatment which aids in the overall water quality and flood protection to the Peace Creek watershed.

The entire project was cooperatively funded by Polk County, SWFWMD, FWC and a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Over five million dollars were spent on this project to improve this underserved community by providing a vast array of recreational opportunities. The project consisted of three phases to develop the entire 177-acre parcel. Phase I restored the west side of the lake. This phase was completed in 2016. Phase II was the development of a 30-acre recreational area. This was completed in 2019. This area includes ball fields, walking trails, basketball courts, picnic facilities, play ground and other amenities. Phase III was the restoration of the east side of the lake. All three phases have been complete as of December 2020. The completed project provides the residents of Wahnetta acres of green space for fishing, birding, walking, and sporting events.

Educational programs are also a part of the overall project. Wahnetta Elementary school borders the project site. Annual environmental education programs are provided to the children regarding environmental protection and benefits to their community. Their classroom is the entire restored wetland treatment system. Educational kiosks have been installed to explain the components of stormwater runoff and the impacts it has on our surface waters.

The entire project has been a tremendous success for the Wahneta community. Hundreds of residents enjoy the park each week. The project has also improved water quality to the Peace Creek watershed area.

Lake Gwyn Aerial Photos – Prior to Construction



Lake Gwyn Project Area Looking Northeast



Lake Gwyn Project Area Looking Northwest



Lake Gwyn Project Area Looking West



Lake Gwyn Project Area Looking Southwest

Lake Gwyn Aerial Photos – During Construction



Lake Gwyn West



Lake Gwyn East



Lake Gwyn Park Amenities



Fishing Pier



Walking Trails



Walking Bridge



Sports Fields

Lake Gwyn Park



Stocking Large Mouth Bass



Installing Duck Boxes



Educational Kiosks

