

HARRIS CHAIN OF LAKES RESTORATION COUNCIL 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (Council) was established by the Florida Legislature in 2001 with the powers and duties to (a) review audits and all data specifically related to lake restoration techniques and sport fish population recovery strategies, including data and strategies for shoreline restoration, sediment control and removal, exotic species management, floating tussock management or removal, navigation, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat improvement, particularly as they may apply to the Harris Chain of Lakes; (b) evaluate whether additional studies are needed; (c) explore all possible sources of funding to conduct the restoration activities; and (d) report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives each year on the progress of the Harris Chain of Lakes restoration program, and any recommendations for the next fiscal year.

The mission of the Council is to maximize successful restoration of the Harris Chain of Lakes, by ensuring sensible efforts to restore clean water quality, sound environmental policy, ecological diversity, and economic stability, now and into the future. The Council met regularly during the reporting period of November 2016 through October 2017. The Council received technical presentations throughout this period on studies and initiatives to restore and manage the Harris Chain of Lakes. This report represents the recommendations of the Council to the Legislature.

To maximize successful restoration of the Harris Chain of Lakes in 2017, the Council specifically supports and recommends the following:

- **Lake Apopka Restoration:**
 - 1) Dredging in Lake Apopka to create areas for vegetation.
 - 2) Against aeration projects intended for lake-wide restoration
 - 3) Initiation of an Office of Policy Analysis & Government Accountability (OPPGA) Review of restoration activities by SJRWMD, FWC and LCWA for Lake Apopka and other lakes within the Harris Chain of Lakes.
- **Lake Level Management and Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs):**
 - 1) Maintaining the highest water levels possible during the dry period of the year as fisheries benefit by higher water levels during the spawning season.
 - 2) Closely maintaining the Harris Chain of Lakes regulation schedule during hurricane season.
 - 3) SJRWMD and pertinent Council technical advisory group agencies (FWC, FDEP, LCWA) to provide current scientific data in a presentation to the Council that allows the North Shore Restoration Area (NSRA) to either be connected or not connected to Lake Apopka. If reconnection is an option, the presentation should include required steps, cost and timeline.
- **Aquatic Vegetation:**
 - 1) Establishing additional aquatic vegetation in Lake Apopka and the Harris Chain of Lakes.
 - 2) Expanding funding for invasive aquatic plant management.
- **Fish Attractors:**
 - 1) Installing additional artificial fish attracting structures in the Harris Chain of Lakes.
- **Fishery Research**
 - Collecting game fish samples (n = 7 or more) from the NSRA to provide fillets for pesticide analysis by FDOH, to develop a human health risk assessment for consumption of those fish in the NSRA.
- **Water Quality:**
 - 1) Expanding studies of septic tank influences on water quality in the Harris Chain of Lakes.
 - 2) Providing legislative funding for unfunded proposed projects that will help to restore the water quality in the Harris Chain of Lakes.