



Chain of Lakes Natural Area

Site Description: The Chain of Lakes consists of five interconnected shallow lake systems beginning with Pine Lake on the north end of the chain, progressing southward to Lake Clarke, Lake Osborne, Lake Eden, and Lake Ida. The lakes are spread over 30 linear miles and cover 639 surface acres of water which are connected via canals. The Chain of Lakes are natural or once natural freshwater lakes that are located along the western slope of the second coastal ridge both east and west of Interstate 95. The Chain of Lakes starts just south of Belvedere Road on the west side of I-95 in West Palm Beach and terminates just north of Atlantic Avenue, on the east side of I-95, in Delray Beach.

Animals: The Chain of Lakes contain numerous species of birds including herons, egrets, osprey, moorhens, ducks, kingfishers, and wood storks. Many turtles can be seen on logs and along the shoreline. Fish include channel catfish, bluegill, and large mouth bass.

Plants: Shoreline restorations projects are replacing barren shoreline and exotic plants with native plants to enhance fisheries and improve water quality. Commonly seen plants on the lakes include spatterdock, bulrush, fire flag, pickerel weed, spike rush, pond apples, cypress, and numerous other species.

History and Public Use: The lakes have been altered extensively from their original character as a result of 1) channelization of the flowing waters that fed and drained the lakes and elimination of natural surface water fluctuation regimes; 2) encroachment of the urban and residential growth onto associated riparian areas, wetlands, and floodplains; 3) establishment of exotic vegetation, fish, and molluscan species that have disrupted ecosystem function; and 4) degradation of water quality due to nutrient enrichment and bacterial contamination as discharges of domestic and agricultural wastes have increased.

In 1996, Palm Beach County's Department of Environmental Resources Management completed a study of the freshwater lakes and developed the State of the Lakes management and enhancement plan. The plan focused on ways to enhance and improve the lakes by the following methods: restoring and protecting wetland habitats, protecting and improving water quality, controlling nuisance plants, maintaining and enhancing fisheries, and enhancing public participation and environmental awareness.

Public use of these lakes include fishing, boating, and other water related activities. Pine Lake, Lake Ida, and Lake Osborne are all accessible by public boat ramps. Lakes Clarke and Eden are entirely surrounded by single family homes and are only accessible from these other lakes.