

US27/Lake Jackson Aquatic Preserve Roadkill Fact Sheet

Background

- Lake Jackson is a shallow, 4,000 acre waterbody that experiences annual fluctuations in water level and partial or almost complete drydowns during periods of drought.
- Lake Jackson is designated as a State Aquatic Preserve and an Outstanding Water Body, and is considered one of Leon County's most precious natural resources that is enjoyed annually by thousands of wildlife watchers, fishermen, and boaters. An estimated \$12 million, including \$2.3 million in wages and 100 full time jobs, is generated annually through recreational economic activity associated with Lake Jackson.

Problem

- A ¾ mile stretch of U.S. Highway 27, a busy 4 four-lane, divided highway with 22,500 vehicles traveling on it per day, was constructed on the shoreline and directly through the northwest arm of Lake Jackson, isolating part of the lake to the west (now known as Little Lake Jackson). This project would be illegal under present-day environmental laws.
- Normal annual fluctuations in water level and periodic drydowns (every 12.5 years on average) cause wildlife to attempt to migrate continually across U.S. Highway 27.
- From 2000 – 2005, 11,178 individuals of 45 species of reptiles and amphibians and 17 species of mammals were documented attempting to cross or were found dead on U.S. Highway 27.
- Annual attempted crossing rate of turtles of 2,710 turtles per mile per year is the highest ever recorded.
- Turtle populations cannot compensate for the combined effects of annual road mortality and periodic mass mortality (95-99% of the total population) on U.S. Highway 27 during lake drydown migrations.
- Wildlife on the highway represents a major threat to motorist safety. Many adult turtles weigh 5 to 20 pounds and are essentially "rocks in the roadway". Alligators 7-8 feet in length often attempt to cross the highway.

Solution

- Wildlife passages (4 large box culverts) constructed beneath U.S. 27 to allow animals to travel safely under the highway.
- Wildlife guidewalls constructed along U.S. 27 to divert animals away from the highway

Benefits

- Wildlife mortality would be greatly reduced.
- Motorist safety would be improved.
- Wildlife population levels, movements, and ecosystem functioning within the Aquatic Preserve would be returned to a more natural state.
- The reduced animal mortality would improve the aesthetic character and public enjoyment of the Lake Jackson area and, hence, the economic returns to the area.
- The two sections of the lake that were divided by the highway would be reconnected to right the wrong that was committed by our predecessors over 50 years ago.