

GOURD NECK SPRINGS
Lake Apopka
Lake County, Florida

A Report by:

Gary I. Sharp
Post Office Box 341
Winter Park, Florida 32789

Telephone: 305 295-5877

June 20, 1975

This report has been prepared to consolidate information pertaining to Gourd Neck Springs, to acquaint interested persons with the facts and the potential for public ownership of this property.

Not to be reproduced without the written consent of Gary I. Sharp.

GOURD NECK SPRINGS

The objective of this report is to show the following:

1. The land surrounding and protecting Gourd Neck Springs, in the southwest corner of Lake Apopka, consists of 350 acres, approximately 18 miles from Orlando, Florida.
2. Crystal clear water flows at a rate of 50 to 70 million gallons per day.
3. The land is undisturbed hammock land of great natural beauty.
4. The area has a population nearing 1,000,000, with 12,000,000 tourists visiting annually.
5. The property is subject to residential or commercial development.
6. The property is for sale at a price currently averaging in the vicinity of \$2,800 per acre (excluding the 60 acres lake bottom from the average). An appraisal done in 1973 indicated a value of \$3,750 per acre for usable land, without consideration given to the fresh water springs on the property. The actual value cannot possibly be determined; there are no current comparables and no other springs of this size in the area.
7. The State of Florida considers it a possible park site, but has taken no action. It has been rejected as insignificant under the current Environmentally Endangered Lands program.
8. Orange County has expressed an interest in it as a park but cannot pursue it since the property lies in Lake County.
9. Many environmentalists and public officials are in favor of public ownership.
10. The property has possibilities as a profitable commercial park and campground. No other campground in the area has a fresh water spring.
11. Finally, if the property is to remain intact, action must be taken immediately.

GOURD NECK SPRINGS

Location:

Gourd Neck Springs (also called Apopka Springs) is an artesian spring flowing into Lake Apopka at the southwest corner. The Gourd Neck Run is located in Lake County, Florida. Lake Apopka, which is Florida's second largest natural lake at 30,671 acres, lies mainly within Orange County. The Gourd Neck Springs Run property is within 2 miles of the Orange County line, within 18 miles of Orlando, and 15 miles from Walt Disney World.

The property consists of the land surrounding the Gourd Neck Springs Run. It is on State Road 455 (a paved two-lane highway) 2 miles north of State Highway 50, and runs east to the shore line of Lake Apopka. The land adjacent at the tip and running along the opposite side of the Run is also considered part of the property and is included for total protection of the Springs. The total acreage is approximately 350 acres.

The Florida Turnpike crosses State Road 455 within a mile of Gourd Neck Springs, however there is no exit there at present. The nearest exit is Interchange No. 80 at Ocoee, 8 miles away.

Up until the 1930's, Gourd Neck Springs was a popular recreational area with picnicking, swimming and fishing the main attractions. Lake Apopka at that time was famous as the "best bass fishing lake in the world" and many celebrities visited regularly.

Description of the Property:

The 350 acres consists of approximately:

60 acres under water (including the main Gourd Neck Spring),

90 acres swamp with several smaller artesian springs and sand boils,

200 acres land, of which approximately 10 acres are cleared, and 190 acres uplands (hammock).

The property at present is basically undisturbed, and has an abundance of semi-tropical foliage, with many large magnolias, live oaks, hickory, sweet bay, maple and tupelo, and various types of palm. Ferns of many types are also abundant, adding much to the indescribable natural beauty of the area.

No comprehensive botanical study has ever been made, nor is there any record of it ever being searched for archaeological sites.

The terrain is somewhat uneven in spots and there is one large sinkhole filled with foliage. The land slopes from State Road 455 at an elevation of 80' to the shore line of Lake Apopka, which is currently at 66' above sea level. The water level has ranged from the highest recorded level of 68.4' in 1960, to the lowest recorded level of 64.3' in May, 1971. The lowest recorded flow from the main spring was also recorded in May, 1971, at 17.95 million gallons per day (an unusually dry season).

Description of the Springs:

The fresh water flow from the main Gourd Neck Spring and the numerous smaller artesian springs and sand boils on the Run is 50 to 70 million gallons per day. Of the 116 springs listed in the Florida Almanac, only 19 have a flow as great or greater than Gourd Neck. Water quality in the springs is very good and crystal clear. As a comparison, water from the springs contains 108 mg. per liter of dissolved solids, while the water furnished by Orlando Public Utilities contains 155 mg. per liter. Orlando Public Utilities serves Orlando and surrounding communities, an area of 88 square miles; their average daily pumping rate is 40.8 million gallons per day.

Gourd Neck Springs is the southernmost spring in the inland portion of Florida and the first natural outlet of any significance from the Green Swamp water recharge area. The U.S. Geological Survey classifies it a Second Magnitude Spring (10 to 100 cubic feet per second), from statistics taken in June, 1971, a very dry season when Lake Apopka was at its lowest recorded water level. The only other springs of this Magnitude south of Gourd Neck are located near the coast in the Tampa area.

The main boil of the spring is approximately 200 feet in diameter. Approximately 20 feet below the surface is a "chimney" approximately 5 feet in diameter. This goes an additional 20 feet where it veers to the north and runs approximately 20 feet to an extremely large cave.

All of the water, of course, enters Lake Apopka, which is currently polluted; therefore this source of fresh water is lost. Lake Apopka restoration is under study, and restoration is scheduled to begin in 1977.

Property Value:

An appraisal of the major portion of the property (which includes the main Gourd Neck Spring) in 1973 determined the potential price at \$3,750 per acre for usable land, which includes swamp, but not land under water (lake bottom). This was based on comparables of property on Lake Apopka itself, and on shorelines of other lakes in the surrounding area. No consideration whatsoever was given to the value of the uniqueness of Gourd Neck Springs situated on the property.

Prices paid for other properties with fresh water springs that have been commercially developed, within the Central Florida area, range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per acre.

There are several owners of this property. The majority of it is under an exclusive right of sale to a real estate broker. All of the owners are willing to sell, however, some of the owners of smaller parcels prefer to sell under the condition that the property comes under public ownership. The owner of the largest tract, which includes the main spring, is currently working on a plan to divide his land into smaller parcels for sale as residential sites, due to a lack of public action.

The price for the property, excluding the 60 acres of lake bottom, is currently an average of \$2,800 per acre. However, with the current inflation rate and the present concern and inevitable revitalization of Lake Apopka, it is a fair assumption that speculation will very possibly withdraw this property from within the realm of public ownership.

Surrounding Area:

The area surrounding this natural hammock land is dominated by orange groves. There is only one residence on the east side of S.R. 455, and that property (which consists of approximately 5 acres) is at the present excluded from the Gourd Neck property. On the west side of S.R. 455 there are a few rural residences in the middle and low-middle class on sites of 5 to 20 acres, and a church camping recreational area is also located there.

The City of Monteverde is 2 miles to the north, Clermont is 5 miles away on Highway 50 to the west, and Winter Garden and Ocoee are within 6 to 8 miles to the east on Highway 50, with Orlando a total of 18 miles from the property. The population of the entire Metropolitan Orlando Area is nearing 1,000,000 people. Walt Disney World, 15 miles away, which is one of the major factors affecting this area, brings in over 12,000,000 tourists annually.

Lake County, in which the property is located, has a population in the vicinity of 85,000.

Zoning:

Approximately half of the property, the portion bordering Gourd Neck Springs Run, has been zoned R-1-7 by Lake County. This is Single Family Residential, dwellings of 1200 square feet minimum, 300 of which can be carport or screened porch, etc., on 7,000 square feet sites (minimum). The portion of the property fronting on State Road 455 is zoned A-agriculture. It has been indicated that R-1-7 zoning could be obtained on the entire property.

No guidelines have been set for future use of this property, but Lake County's projected zoning map indicates high density residential in the area on the west side of S.R. 455, which in turn could not be anything but environmentally detrimental to the lower lying area on the east, i.e., Gourd Neck Springs Run.

Feasibility of Public Ownership:

This property has been submitted to the Department of Natural Resources, Environmentally Endangered Lands Committee, as Proposal Inventory #68. A field investigation was done in May, 1974. The on-site inspection report consists of two brief pages. It states, "The ecological value of this proposal is restricted because of its small size and the degraded environmental conditions around it." The "OVERVIEW" report of the area considers only the population of Lake County, with an estimated growth rate of 4.3% per year. No consideration was given to the general area, the proximity to Orlando, or the Metropolitan Orlando Area.

The Environmentally Endangered Lands guidelines state that "100 acres of virgin hammock land" would be considered a large tract, yet the Gourd Neck Springs property was rejected in July, 1974, by the Interagency Planning Committee because it was insignificant to the surrounding area.

State officials and environmentalists consider Gourd Neck Springs to be a "park and recreation area" possibility; however, they state there are no funds available at present. This property has outstanding potential as a recreation area for hiking, camping, nature study, and with the restoration of Lake Apopka, swimming, diving, and boating. Attendance figures at other parks of comparable size and especially those with fresh water springs, indicate that they remain at capacity during holidays and summer months, and in fact, are overcrowded and have turned people away.

Kelly Park Hours Change In Morning 6/24/75

Kelly Park, Orange County's picnic and swimming facility at Rock Springs near Apopka, will change its opening hour to 11 a.m. daily beginning Saturday, Jay L. Blanchard, county parks director, announced Monday. Blanchard said overcrowding at the park and the difficulty of getting necessary maintenance accomplished in time necessitated moving back the opening hour from 8 a.m. to 11. The park is open until sunset.

Summary:

This report was prepared to urge prompt action and expediency by officials involved if public ownership is to be accomplished, or for presentation to commercial enterprises in an effort to stress the need and desire to keep the Gourd Neck Springs Run property from suffering indiscriminate development and to preserve this priceless part of Florida.

Information presented in this report was gathered from public sources such as the U.S. Geological Survey, the Orange County Division of Parks, the State of Florida Department of Natural Resources and the Environmentally Endangered Lands Committee, the Orlando Area Chamber of Commerce, the Winter Garden Times, and the Lake County Zoning Department. Danny L. Dulgar, Appraiser, gave his consent to use information from his appraisal of part of the property.