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The calm, murky waters, long wooded trails and the variety of wildlife are what draws University of Florida students and faculty into the environment of Lake Alice.

These characteristics are what make Lake Alice a hidden campus gem to many community members. Brenna Gregory, a second-year at the University of Florida, explained how Lake Alice is a great place to reflect after a long day and hang out in nature.

Gregory was a student in attendance at the first in-person Lake Alice watershed management workshop on Oct. 4. There have been two previous workshops that have happened since the beginning of September, but the past workshops have taken place on Zoom.

The Lake Alice Watershed Management Plan project is a part of a larger plan called the Conservation Area Land Management Plan (CALM). CALM covers 600 acres on campus that are in conservation, including Lake Alice. The CALM plan is currently in the process of getting updated, which is where the Lake Alice Watershed Management Plan project comes in.

Linda Dixon, the project team manager, explained how there are many improvements that need to be made on Lake Alice, which is the reason why CALM is being updated and why the Lake Alice Watershed Management Plan project started.

“We find ourselves dealing with more issues of erosion and sedimentation,” Dixon stated. “As the sediments flow toward the lake, they may accumulate in ponds or in culverts that need to be cleaned out.”

The excess sediment is a result of stormwater drainage into Lake Alice through pipes or creek systems or a combination of both, said Dixon.

Sixty percent of UF's stormwater drains into the Lake Alice Watershed, which is a drainage basin for all flowing water to come to a stop in the Lake.

Stormwater is not the only problem Lake Alice faces. Invasive plants have been an ongoing issue for Lake Alice. To fix these problems, UF hired an environment consulting firm, Wetland Solutions Inc., to help assist in fixing these problems.

"We're hoping to have a comprehensive watershed management plan that will feed into the vegetation management plan," said Amy Goodden, a project engineer with Wetland Solutions.

In addition to this, there is a project management team that includes UF faculty who work in the planning, design and construction division, as well as faculty who work in the Office of Sustainability, explained Dixon.

There is also a 29-member steering committee of appointed members who work with the project management team and Wetland Solutions.

Gail Hansen, chair of the Lakes of Vegetation Landscaping Committee and a member of the steering committee, explained how invasive plants cover three-quarters of Lake Alice.

Members of the project management team, as well as the steering committee, are working with Wetland Solutions to find a solution to this issue.

There are two main ways to remove these invasive plants, said Hansen. There is manual removal, where people go and manually pull the plants out of the ground, or there is chemical removal, which is the use of chemicals to kill the plants.

"Wetland Solutions is going to come up with some ideas and thoughts about what their approach is going to be," said Hansen. "They have more knowledge and specifically about managing lakes like this, so they'll guide us in the facilities and how to go about doing that."

Wetland Solutions is not the only advice needed for this project. The project calls for UF student and faculty recommendations.

At the Lake Alice visionary workshop, students and attendees were able to write what they wanted to see happen at Lake Alice in the next three years and the next 10 years. Many of these responses included ideas regarding more walking trails and boardwalks, outdoor classrooms, more recreational activities and increased wildlife presence.

“I think it would be great for the biodiversity to keep growing,” said Gregory.

Hansen explained how they are using the input from workshop attendees and folding it into the bigger plan for Lake Alice that focuses on the issues of stormwater drainage and invasive plants.

“I would like to see more of some boardwalk-type structures and kind of dock-like structures that overlook out into the water,” said Hansen. “I would also like to see expanding the trail system on the south side of the lake.”

These visionary workshops are just the start of a year-long series. There will be two more rounds of public workshops where students are able to attend and express their ideas while learning more about the Lake Alice watershed.

By winter break, Dixon said, they are looking to start sharing initial observations and recommendations. By the end of the spring semester, the project is scheduled to wrap up.

Wetland Solutions is hoping to have a comprehensive watershed management plan that will correlate directly with the vegetation management plan, explained Gooden.

When asked about how this project will directly affect UF students, Gooden said, “Based on the feedback we are getting, students really want to use the lake more, and they want to have more interaction with the lake.”

Gregory hopes that this project will continue going in a great direction and help her to continue learning about the watershed and the care for it.

“Preserving Lake Alice is super important as well as continuing to make it better,” said Gregory.

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