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Lakefront View

USF St. Petersburg graduate students complete fieldwork while helping restore Crescent Lake.

IN A PILOT PARTNERSHIP to offer local fieldwork for environmental science and policy students, the 12 graduate students in Deby Cassill's Environmental Science class dug, measured and surveyed their way in and around St. Petersburg's Crescent Lake.

The USF St. Petersburg students tested water quality, tracked bat populations, analyzed bird life, determined nutrient sources, took core soil samples

2007 by residents near the lake.

Located between 12th and 22nd Avenues North and Fifth Street North and Crescent Lake Drive, the 21-acre freshwater lake also serves as a stormwater retention pond. The lake's park, with its benches, sidewalks and playground, is popular with joggers, walkers and families. Water flows from the lake into Coffee Pot Bayou, a popular drinking water source for manatees.

More than 80 years of development changed the hydrology of the lake, Bays says. Its watershed expanded, habitat-supporting marshes were depleted and nutrient levels changed. He sees the work of the students helping to correct years of diminishing lake health.

"If you have a functioning ecosystem in the heart of your community, residents know it helps them and helps their view of the neighborhood,"

Bays says.

For one of the projects, students Lauren Bates and Julie Vogel conducted a survey of park visitors. They asked 120 people at the park during different days of the week and at different times how they use the park.

"We wanted to see trends among age groups and whether visitors are



PHOTOS: JOSEPH GAMBLE

and surveyed the park's visitors to find ways to better educate the community about lake restoration.

In partnership with Jim Bays, an environmental biologist who lives near the lake, and with grant funding from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, the students worked in tandem with restoration efforts under way since

aware of the lake restoration," Bates says. "We also asked if they would want to volunteer. We want the information we gather to help the outreach be more effective."

The students will publish their findings in a newsletter distributed to the neighborhood around Crescent Lake.

Another student, Lee Snyder, tracked avian presence and plant use



Biology professor Deby Cassill's student volunteers remove invasive plant species from Crescent Lake. The students will replant and protect native species to improve the health of the lake and its wildlife.

in the urban lake park. He compared the use of two plant habitats, one at the north end and another at the south end of the lake. Snyder found that the birds preferred a habitat with diverse

plant species in close proximity.

"A healthy lake enriches the community and its experience with nature," says Cassill. "And the partnership is an opportunity to engage the graduate students in field work."

Graduate students in future classes will continue to research and restore Crescent Lake.

"The students create a useful baseline to compare future lake conditions," Bays says. "We will get to compare a year from now with other student projects to see if there is progress in lake quality. The information also supports future grant applications."

—Melanie Marquez