

## Waterbody: Lake Miccosukee



## Basin: Lake Miccosukee

Lake Miccosukee is a 6,257 acre, phosphorus-limited lake that forms the northeastern border of Leon County. Lake Miccosukee is considered a shallow, prairie lake and historically drained via sinkholes becoming nearly dry in the process. The result of the natural drawdowns was a large reduction in the amount of organic matter content found in the bottom sediments.

In 1954, a control structure was constructed around the northern sinkhole and a wooden weir constructed at the southern end of the lake to stabilize water levels. Water level stabilization led to increased emergent vegetation in the lake, so that vegetation covered as much as 80% of the lake's surface. By taking up space and decreasing oxygen levels, the increased vegetation also contributed to the diminishment of the fish population and increased the amount of organic material in the sediment.

Because of rising concerns about the health of the lake, the control structure gate was opened during the 1999 drought, allowing part of the lake to drain into the aquifer via the sinkhole. Several areas of the lake were excavated and part of the lake bottom was burned during the drawdown. The burning and excavation led to increased lake volume and removed a portion of the organic rich sediment. After tropical

storms Allison and Barry passed through the area in 2001, Lake Miccosukee quickly refilled. A second drawdown was done in 2012. Prescribed burning was performed on a portion of the woody tussocks that float on the lake. The drawdown affected field operations with staff being unable to collect water samples for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2012.

In 2010, an additional sinkhole developed on the southeast side of the lake. While it's thought that this sinkhole won't completely drain the lake, it may keep the lake levels lower during dry periods.

### Background

Healthy, well-balanced lake communities may be maintained with some level of human activity, but excessive human disturbance may result in waterbody degradation. Human stressors may include increased inputs of nutrients, sediments, and/or other contaminants from watershed runoff, adverse hydrologic alterations, undesirable removal of habitat or riparian buffer vegetation, and introduction of exotic plants and animals. Water quality standards are designed to protect designated uses of the waters of the state (e.g., recreation, aquatic life, fish consumption), and exceedances of these standards are associated with interference of the designated use.

### Methods

Surface water and sediment sampling were conducted and met the collection and analysis requirements of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

### Results

#### *Nutrients*

The nutrient thresholds and results are found in Table 1. According to FDEP requirements, Numeric Nutrient Criteria (expressed as an annual geometric mean) cannot be exceeded more than once in a three year period.

**Table 1.** FDEP’s chlorophyll-*a*, total nitrogen and phosphorus criteria for lakes applied to Lake Miccosukee.

Colored Lake	Chlorophyll- <i>a</i> 20.0 µg/L	Total Nitrogen Threshold 1.27-2.23 mg/L	Total Phosphorus Threshold 0.05-0.16 mg/L
2004	4.6	0.28	0.02
2005	6.1	0.40	0.03
2006	2.9	0.52	0.02
2007	2.3	0.69	0.02
2008	3.3	0.61	0.01
2009	3.5	0.42	0.02
2010	8.8	0.70	0.03
2011	5.8	0.82	0.04
2012	-	-	-
2013	11.7	1.05	0.04
2014	9.5	0.86	0.03
2015	11.6	0.78	0.06

No exceedances were noted, but chlorophyll-*a* values and total nitrogen values were elevated in 2013, possibly as a result of nutrient fluxes associated with the most recent lake refilling. Values in 2014 were slightly lower, but chlorophyll-*a* and total phosphorus values increased in 2015. Changes in the area around the station may have contributed to the change. Previously, the area in the vicinity of station MI2 was dominated by *Nymphaea odorata*, the fragrant water lily. Florida Fish and Wildlife contractors recently enlarged an open water area adjacent to the station that has now encompassed the station area (Figure 1). In this case, open water has allowed the algal population to increase causing higher

concentrations of chlorophyll-*a* and total phosphorus. Orthophosphate levels remain low.

*Dissolved Oxygen (DO)*

As Figure 2 shows, the Lake Miccosukee stations showed percent DO saturation values that did not meet Class III water quality criteria. Staff considers the low DO normal for this lake because the stations are shallow and normally covered with vegetation, preventing rapid water exchange with the larger area of the lake. Plant respiration (samples were often taken in the morning hours) and organic sediments also contributed to the low DO saturation values.

**Fish Consumption Advisory**

The Florida Department of Health has issued consumption limits for certain fish in Lake Miccosukee due to elevated levels of mercury.

[Click here for more information about fish consumption advisories in Leon County.](#)

*Other Parameters*

Other water quality parameters appear to be normal for the area and no other impairments were noted.

**Conclusions**

Based on ongoing sampling, Lake Miccosukee met the nutrient thresholds for the East Panhandle Region. Changes in the plant community may be influencing nutrient and chlorophyll-*a* levels at station MI2. Percent DO saturation values did not always meet Class III water quality criteria. This was not unexpected and staff considers this normal for this lake. Other water quality parameters appear to be normal for the area and no other impairments were noted.

Thank you for your interest in maintaining the quality of Leon County’s water resources. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

**Contact and resources for more information**

[www.LeonCountyFL.gov/WaterResources](http://www.LeonCountyFL.gov/WaterResources)

[Click here to access the results for all water quality stations sampled in 2015.](#)

[Click here for map of watershed – Sample site MI2.](#)

Johnny Richardson, Water Resource Scientist  
(850) 606-1500  
[Richardsonjo@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:Richardsonjo@leoncountyfl.gov)



**Figure 1.** Station MI2. Note the open water that now surrounds the station.

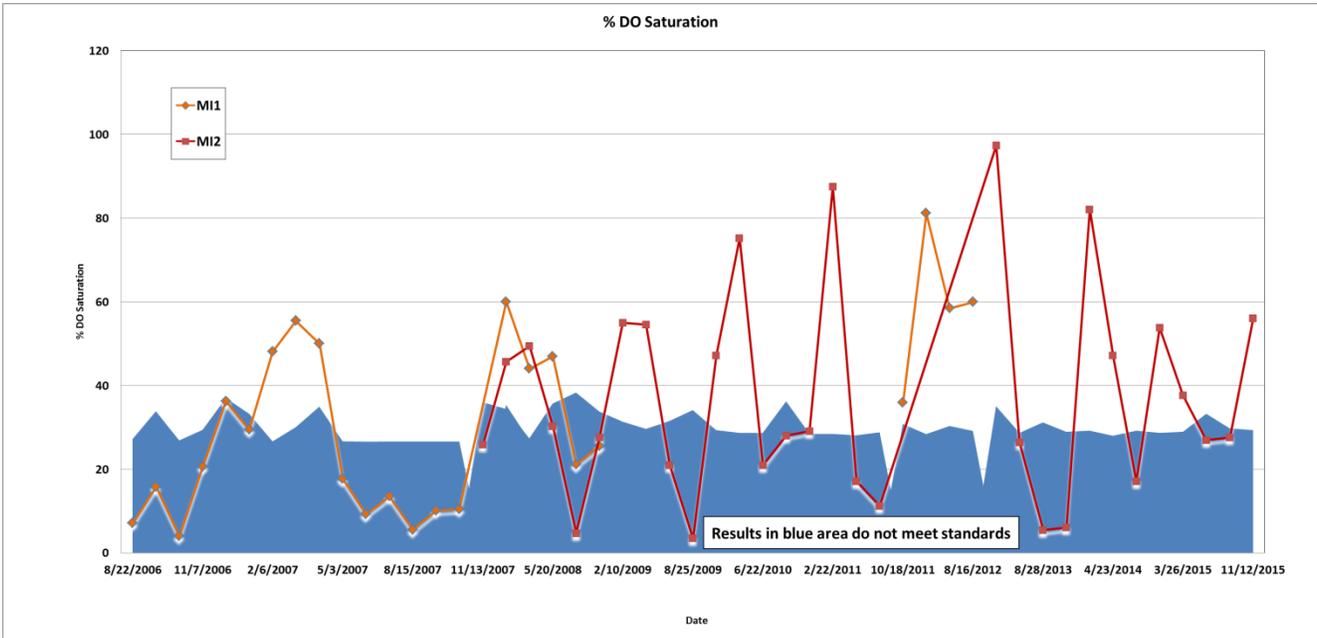


Figure 2. Dissolved Oxygen Percent Saturation results for Lake Miccosukee.