

Rosemont

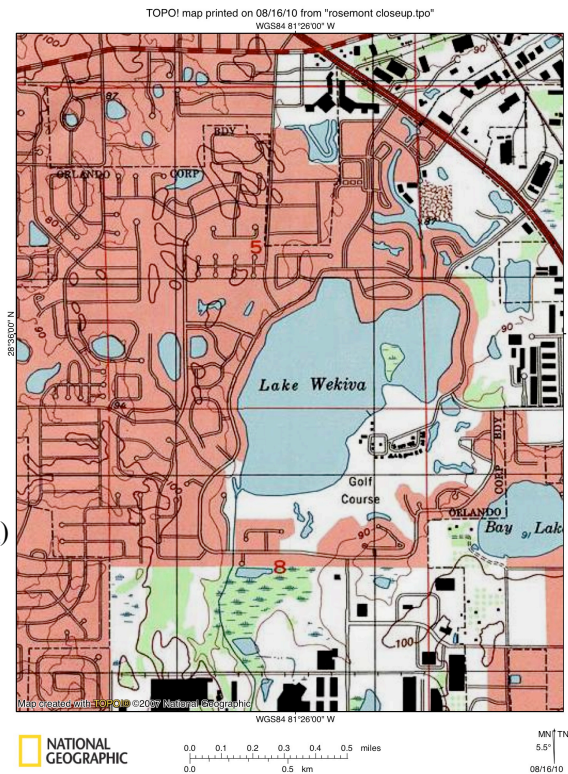
A large amount of the Little Wekiva's surface water can be seen in the golf course architecture of the Rosemont community, a gracious array of 700 homes, better than 3000 condominiums or apartments, and an active Homeowners Association. I have played a few rounds of golf there and contributed many a goose-egg to the gator pond which lines almost every hole. In an aerial view, the eighteen holes look like a giant emerald anaconda wrapped around the swampy neck of a 176-acre lake.

Old maps show it was at first named Lake Wekiva, but now it traces its pedigree to the city and is named Lake Orlando. What would the maps of America look like if all our cities did this, gave their names to all their waters in this

way? At least it would teach us that all the water bodies belong to one grand river family, and that the city has a parental responsibility to ensure that no one abuse its water children.

Rosemont surrounds Lake Wekiva, but you can see the river entering the lake from the south side. It's a case of suburban river capture.

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From the 1970's on, Rosemont was the pattern of metrogrowth that was poised to fill the entire Wekiva basin with the poetry of place: Forest City, Spring Oaks, Apple Valley, River Run, River Bend, Wekiva Woods, Weathersfield, Ceday Bay, Spring Valley, Sanlando Estates. Farther north then, past the Springs to Markham Woods Road and Springs Landing, we hear more of the song of the suburb: Manchester Oaks, Whispering Winds, Magnolia Plantation, Markham Meadows, Wingfield, Chestnut Hill, Heathrow, Cedar Cove, Mandarin, Robinwood, and Ravensbrook. Not all of these fine neighborhoods have golf courses and many are built on generous uplands, but some like Rivercrest, Foxspur, and Alaqua snuggle right up to the eastern shore of the river itself.

Don't get me wrong. I love golf and especially the community of golfers around a club. For retirees like my father, the Riviera Country Club north of Daytona Beach was the greatest of

blessings, especially when he lost my mother after thirty-seven years of marriage. The tournaments, banquets, dinners, pro-shop banter, and especially the comedy of the game make a golf course a marvelous way to have fun and support one another through hard times.

For ten years, in the Rolling Hills area of Longwood, Jean and I lived on the tenth hole of the old course amid stately longleaf pines that sported families of red-headed woodpeckers and flying squirrels. It was a world of swooping up to a patchwork of brown and orange bark. We were not more than a quarter of a mile from the three major springs of the Little Wekiva. Most of the residents would bop around to each other's homes in golf carts, and you could tell someone was having a party when a house had fifteen carts overflowing the driveway onto the front lawn. The quality of neighborhood was extremely high, especially since most of the people had time for each other, if no place else, waiting on the tees and fairways.

Unfortunately, we all drank water from our own wells and the ground was saturated with EDB, a cancer-causing chemical that the golf club sprayed in the dawn hours to eradicate nematodes. When the state first found out about the deadly pesticide and counties started testing well water everywhere, Rolling Hills recorded the highest level in the entire state. That reading was registered just three doors down on our street, at the home of a man dying of cancer. That was twenty years ago. We know a little better now.

Most of the ecology of the Little Wekiva can recover easily from the reconstruction of basin sandhills and wetlands. However, the serious problem with a golf course has to do with the long-term effects of the daily use of fertilizers and pesticides, an old story every homeowner needs to face—being the greenskeeper as it were of his or her own acreage. Another major problem for the river is evaporation from the incredible number of gallons per day it takes to irrigate nineteen holes of fairway and green.

In both these issues, the state's Department of Environmental Protection has recently issued viable best management practices which would make the net effect of the golf-course, or the homeowners lots surrounding it, a matter of little consequence for the health of the aquifer and the river's inhabitants. If we can combine this know-how with the high quality of community that golfing can foster, we should eventually reach beyond the issues of course etiquette and clubhouse fare to the essentials of water quality and river care.

In 1998 I offered my first course entirely devoted to the idea of river community. Nathan was one of my brightest students and produced an outstanding study of three developments close to Wekiwa Springs. He wanted to measure the continuity between nature and culture in each of these places, holding the residents up to the standard of the ancient native mound dwellers. With careful photo-journalism and interviews, he documented physical landscape, the loss of wildlife, and the state of wildness in the minds of the human inhabitants of Sweetwater Oaks, Wekiva Glen, and Fox Borough Farms. Only one of the three, Wekiva Glen, in his judgment had risen to achieve continuity and integration with the river community.

The promise of every Rosemont is this: each new development has the chance to become attuned to the river, to build a small democratic unit of social and ecological caring. Communities can often retrofit what landscape architects may have ruined; and if they keep abreast of the news on environmental, as on other vital issues, they can often provide better solutions for the future. As Whitman and Leopold fully understood, the ideal of community is always at odds with the realities of self-interest, simple ignorance, and indifference.

Unfortunately, in 1980 thousands of residents in the apartment complexes and homes of Altamonte Springs did not much see the effects on the river of all the trash and erosion deposited downstream (up north). Even now, no sign sits at each development's back yard fence or apartment parking lot abutting the river announcing this is the Wild and Scenic Wekiva River.

But it wasn't the erosion, residential pollution, or even the storm water runoff of the Little Wekiva basin that was the initial stimulus in 1982 for the eelgrass people to rise up and become The Friends of Wekiva River, Inc. It was the decision of the city of Altamonte Springs to start using the Little Wekiva for wastewater disposal. Thousands of citizens sat on their commodes that year without a clue that in some mitigated sense they were perched right over the ditch in their back yard, over the pond at the dogleg on 17, or over craters for bass eggs in the wildest of streambeds. Something had to be done.



Giant Cypress Stump near Blackwater Springs