

## Award Winner Se7en Wetlands Article Submission

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Short Bio: Julie Vogel earned her Masters of Science degree from the University of South Florida in Environmental Science and Policy. Recently, Julie joined the City of Lakeland team where she enthusiastically supports all things Se7en Wetlands. Her work includes developing programs for public education, species monitoring, habitat management, and more. Right now, iNaturalist is her favorite app.

Article Title: City of Lakeland's Se7en Wetlands

### One Page Project Summary

Project Name: City of Lakeland's Se7en Wetlands

There is no other place quite like Se7en Wetlands. This large, 1,640-acre, constructed treatment wetland serves as final polishing for all of the City of Lakeland's treated wastewater. The name is derived from the seven different wetland treatment 'cells'. Water leaving the site connects to the Alafia River, which is part of the Tampa Bay Estuary, or becomes reuse water for the Tampa Electric Company. Our Mission is to preserve water resources, protect public health and safety, provide ecosystem benefits, engage the community, and offer recreational opportunities in nature.

Se7en Wetlands is located in central Florida, south of Lakeland. In the 1920s, the site was part of an active phosphate mine. Mining and all associated operations ceased by the 1980s and in 1985 the City of Lakeland purchased the property to be used as a constructed wetland treatment system. By 1987, all upgrades had been completed, and it has been operating ever since as a successful wastewater utility.

In April 2018, Se7en Wetlands opened to the public as the newest City of Lakeland park. It currently offers 8.5 miles of pedestrian hiking trail with more than 22 miles planned for the future. A Master Plan was completed for Se7en Wetlands and it includes an Education Center, Observation Tower, boardwalks over wetlands, and other amenities to encourage environmental learning and outdoor recreation. There are many threatened species living on site. It is common for visitors to see 12-foot alligators, bobcat, nesting woodstorks, gopher tortoises, and bald eagles during a hike.

The Community support for this project has been tremendous. Partnerships range from environmental groups like the Audubon Society and Florida Trail Associations to public organizations like the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to private entities like Mosaic Company and Tampa Electric Company, plus many more.

Many residents of the region are unaware of what happens to their wastewater and reclaimed water after use. Se7en Wetlands educates citizens and visitors on the urban water cycle, the importance of wetlands, and the beneficial water quality impacts to the region including Tampa Bay, while exposing visitors to diverse habitats and encouraging environmental stewardship. Se7en Wetlands staff led more than 1,200 individuals from varied backgrounds on personalized tours and reached more than 10,000 people through dynamic community presentations in its first year and has no plans of slowing down.

Se7en Wetlands is an asset to the state of Florida for its contribution to regional water quality, recreation and positive environmental education.



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