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SPORTS, 1B

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025 | TALLAHASSEE.COM PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

‘It always comes back’



A drone’s eye view of Lake Jackson from Millers Landing Dec. 8 reveals the receding waters that have exposed much of the lake bed after draining into Porter Sink. The photos were taken after days of rain filled in portions of the lakebed but failed to make a dent in an exceptional drought gripping the region. PROVIDED BY VAUGHN WILSON/MEGA ACE

Near record 36-hour rainy spell refills crater at Lake Jackson but drought still evident from above

Martha Gruender
Tallahassee Democrat
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

It took just 36 hours of rain over the Dec. 5-7 weekend to fill in the gaping canyon at Lake Jackson where Porter Sink drained down around Thanksgiving. Drone photos taken from various boat landings and over the lake on Dec. 8 showed rainfall had filled in much of the sink basin, extending into the surrounding lake bed, but much of the lake is still exposed. The National Weather Service Tallahassee reported Dec. 8 that the rainy weather from Dec. 4-Dec. 7 brought rain totals of 2-3 inches in the Tallahassee area. Media producer Vaughn Wilson, who captured drone photos of the lake after the rains, estimated that about 75 per-

cent of the lakebed is still exposed: “It always comes back,” he wrote on Facebook. “It’s just dramatic to see so much water disappearing.” The weekend’s steady but gentle precipitation nearly set a record, according to NWS, “the 36 consecutive hours of rain (>=Trace) at TLH ending 7 p.m. Sunday was the 2nd longest such stretch on record!” The NWS noted that the longest rainy period on record was associated with 2012 Tropical Storm Debby, so Tallahassee’s wet weekend “amounted to the most consecutive hours of rain on record outside of a tropical system.” Lake Jackson’s dry-out in November came amid an ongoing extraordinary drought in the state capital.

Where is Lake Jackson?

Lake Jackson is in north-central Le-

on County, Florida, just northwest of Tallahassee, stretching along U.S. Highway 27.

How often has the lake dried up? Lake Jackson has drained down, or dried up, at least a dozen times since 1837. Native Americans called it Okeeh-heapkee, or “disappearing waters.” Hernando DeSoto’s scribes made no mention of it when the conquistadors wintered in present-day Tallahassee in 1539. They did describe a savannah and big plain where Lake Jackson sits today. And a British trader who worked north Florida in the 1740s, also made no mention of the lake. But early settlers made note of the lake. Especially when it disappeared in 1836. And it repeated the feat in 1886, 1909, 1932, 1956, 1982,1999, 2006, 2012 and in 2021. Lake Jackson is a rain-fed lake. Its beds are dotted with sinkholes which

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Consultant will study creation of county fire department

Arianna Otero
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County government is moving ahead at looking into the creation of their own fire department after voting unanimously to hire a consultant for nearly \$110,000 to craft a report on what this new venture would entail. Leon County Commissioners voted on the item as part of their meeting on Dec. 9, which featured a number of other hot topics, a public hearing on the comprehensive plan and an in-depth look at government consolidation.

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Leon blocks development expansion for St. Joe land

Jeff Burlew
Tallahassee Democrat
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Leon County commissioners opted not to expand the urban services area and change the future land use designation for 1,100 acres of land near Southwood owned by the St. Joe Company after hearing objections from concerned residents. A number of people who reside in the Grassroots community spoke out during the commission’s Dec. 9 meeting, saying the expansion would pave

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Ben Crump helps deliver \$779M verdict in internet cafe shooting

TaMaryn Waters
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A Gadsden County jury has awarded \$779 million to the survivors of a security guard shot and killed at a Havana internet gambling cafe in 2023. Lewis Butler was shot eight times while protecting a cashier, according to civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who

said the verdict, believed to be the largest in county history, “means so much for different reasons.” “Obviously, we want to compensate the family for this monumental loss that they suffered, this monumental wrong that this jury verdict helped to have a monumental right,” Crump told a reporter with the USA TODAY NETWORK –Florida. He filed a wrongful death case on behalf of Butler’s family.

“The second thing is Mrs. Kimberly Butler testified, since her husband was murdered, she’s doing everything she can to try (and) get these internet gambling cafes shut down, because she thinks that they are an invitation for criminal activity,” he added. It’s been more than a decade since lawmakers passed a law cracking down on them, but internet gambling cafes – also known as strip mall casinos – con-

tinue to vex state gambling regulators and local law enforcement. **Civil case followed criminal prosecution** In a previous criminal trial, prosecutors said Kevontae Washington fatally shot Butler and wounded store clerk **See VERDICT, Page 8A**



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