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FLORIDA EVERGLADES

from *The World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia*

Everglades, in southern Florida, are one of the most interesting and unusual swamp areas in the world. Everglades National Park, which makes up about one fifth of the Everglades' original area, covers 1,506,499 acres (609,658 hectares). The Everglades extend from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

The northern part of the Everglades consists of a prairie covered by shallow water and by saw grass, a grasslike plant with sharp, jagged edges that grows as high as 12 feet (3.7 meters) in some places. Busic, gumbo limbo, live oak, mastic, and royal palm trees grow on

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Focus Your Reading

This encyclopedia article gives more information on the history of the Everglades. As you read, think about how this information compares with the storyteller's version.

mounds of higher land called *tree islands*. Near the southern coast, the Everglades become salt marshes and mangrove swamps, where the spreading roots of mangrove trees catch and hold soil. Many animals live in the Everglades. They include alligators, deer, fish, herons, pelicans, snakes, and the rare Florida panther.

Development of the Everglades. The Everglades were created about 10,000 years ago, after the last major ice sheet of the Pleistocene Ice Age melted. The melting ice raised the level of the sea, which flooded the outlets of Everglades streams and turned the area into a swamp. Various peoples have lived in

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Florida Everglades

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the Everglades through the centuries.

The Seminole Indians fled to the area in the early 1800s during a period of wars against United States troops.

In 1906, the state of Florida began draining parts of the Everglades to make the land suitable for farming. After World War I ended in 1918, farmers moved in and began growing vegetables and sugar cane. Canals were built from Lake Okeechobee southeastward to supply drinking water to the growing communities in and around Miami. By the 1940s, however, the United States government had decided to try to preserve a section of the Everglades. Thus, the southwestern region of the Everglades became the Everglades National Park in 1947.

Environmental problems. In spite of the efforts to protect the Everglades, conditions within the wetlands worsened. The Kissimmee River is the main source of fresh water for Lake Okeechobee and the southern wetlands. During the 1960s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers forced the waters of the winding Kissimmee into a straight, concrete canal. These measures sharply reduced the flow of water into the Everglades, with disastrous results for plants and wildlife.

The massive development of southern Florida since 1970 has also damaged the Everglades' water supply. Cities surrounding the Everglades have grown

rapidly. These cities reduce the water supply by using huge amounts for drinking, sewage treatment, and other purposes. The growth of agriculture has also contributed to the water problem. Sugar plantations and vegetable farms consume much water, and harmful chemicals used in agriculture run off into the water supply.

Plant species that are not native to the Everglades also pose problems for the area. Seeds from plants, including paperbark trees and Brazilian pepper trees, have been dispersed to the Everglades by high winds. When such seeds take root and develop into plants, they can overpower and replace native Everglades species.

Saving the Everglades. Many groups have joined the fight to save the Everglades. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has begun work on a plan to restore the Kissimmee to its original course. In 1989, the U.S. government approved the expansion of the Everglades National Park to gain control of more of the park's water sources. In 1991, the state of Florida agreed to follow a cleanup plan and remove the harmful chemicals that have entered the water supply.

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See also LAKE OKEECHOBEE.

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Florida Everglades

1. Explain how the Everglades formed.

2. Why did the state of Florida begin draining parts of the Everglades?

List four environmental problems in the Everglades.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

List three groups and the methods they are using to help save the Everglades.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____
