

Lesson 3.9

Trouble in Paradise: The Florida Everglades

ecosystem: an environment, the plants and animals that live in it, and the way these parts interact with one another

habitat: the natural environment of a plant or animal

endangered: in danger, especially meaning animals in danger of extinction

manatees: large mammals with paddle-like arms and rounded tails that live in the water

The Everglades are the only place in the world where both alligators and crocodiles can be found.

The largest alligator ever spotted in Florida measured 17 feet 5 inches long.

Baby alligators stay near their mothers for up to two years, often riding on their mothers' heads or backs. This is because many animals will try to eat the babies—often the same animals that an adult alligator will eat.

6 ↑

How are changes in the Everglades affecting the animal community?

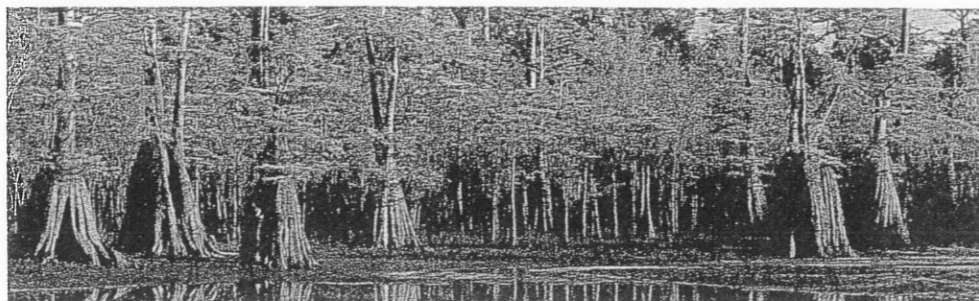
1 The Florida Everglades cover about 5,000 square miles of southern Florida. It's a unique **ecosystem** of water, tropical plants, and rare animals. Several different kinds of environments are found in the Everglades, such as wild forests, swamplands, and tidal pools. However, most of the Everglades consists of an extremely wide, shallow river that flows slowly from Lake Okeechobee all the way to Florida's south and west coasts. This river is only three feet deep in most places, and at one time, it was nearly 40 miles wide. It's nicknamed "the River of Grass" because grasses up to 10 feet high grow throughout the waterway. A network of open water trails crisscrosses the grassy river.

2 This area is the **habitat** for many creatures, including fish, frogs, turtles, snakes, storks, pelicans, bald eagles, deer, bobcats, butterflies, and, of course, mosquitoes. In the dry winter, the marsh changes into grassland dotted with pools of trapped fish. Alligators make "gator holes" in the pools by digging out plants with their snouts and feet. Then, they can feed on birds, raccoons, and deer that come to feed on the fish.

3 The marsh has changed a lot in the last hundred years. Cities on the coast grew much bigger, and highways were built across the Everglades. In 1900, new canals started carrying some of the water to these cities. A large part of the wetland was drained so the land could be farmed. Pesticides from the farms and mercury from fossil fuels have polluted the water.

4 The plants and animals in an ecosystem are deeply connected to the land. Because of the shrinking habitats, pollution, and hunting, many animals in the Everglades are now **endangered**. Biologists estimate that less than 50 Florida panthers still roam the area. The population of crocodiles is only a few hundred. Motorboats are another threat. Their blades slice open the backs of West Indian **manatees** that float just below the water's surface.

5 A federal law made hunting endangered animals illegal in 1969, and today, people are working hard to restore the land, too. Everglades National Park was expanded in 1989 to preserve almost 30 percent of the land. More laws passed recently have begun to reduce pollution and to change farmland back into natural habitat. Alligators, which were once endangered, are now a common sight. With a little more effort from human beings, more endangered species are sure to become plentiful once again.



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NAME _____

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question below.

1. Which of the following environments can be found in the Florida Everglades? P# _____
- a. swamp
 - b. river
 - c. marshland
 - d. All of the above
2. Almost all the damage done to the Florida Everglades ecosystem was caused by P# _____
- a. hurricanes.
 - b. alligators and crocodiles.
 - c. human beings.
 - d. flooding.

Write your answers on the lines below.

3. Name two sources for the pollution that has ended up in the Everglades. P# _____
- _____
4. Almost half of the original Everglades has been drained. What was the main reason for this? P# _____
- _____
5. A major interstate highway runs across the Everglades. In the late 1980s, this freeway was redesigned so that it had many more bridges, allowing water to flow more freely underneath it. How do you think this benefited wildlife in the Everglades? P# _____
- _____
- _____
6. Florida is one of the fastest growing states in America. What do you think would happen to the Everglades if laws weren't passed to protect it? What effect would this have on human beings? P# _____
- _____
- _____
- _____