Agenda and registration details will be available by early November. To receive details as soon as they are available or to add your name to the tentative registration list, contact L.Berlin@flahum.org or 727-873-2006.

The Everglades: Life at the Edge

February 12–14 and March 12–14, 2010

Florida has only one National Park, and it is the most exotic of all the fabled River of Grass. Enjoy the beauty of this fascinating American landscape—and learn about its controversial history—at our upcoming cultural heritage tours of the Everglades.

Join us as we explore the area’s diverse ecosystem and the history of intriguing railroad kings, developers, and dredgers. Learn how the Seminole and Miccosukee people have endured in this unusual environment for hundreds of years. Hear the stories of fisher folk who persevere against challenges of government regulation and pressures of development. We’ll ride the waters and walk the land with artists, writers, scholars, and also the folks who call the Everglades home.

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Meet outlaws, poets, and old men of the sea

Why a mosquito-bitten photographer hopes to capture the soul of the swamp.

Meet outlaws, poets, and old men of the sea on Florida’s last frontier.

Voice of the Everglades

Lyrical, beautiful, and haunted by a sense of a place unique to all the world, the music and stories collected on this very special CD celebrate the people, the animals, and the places collectively known as the Florida Everglades.

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For many years, my image of the Everglades was a tidied-up sheet of water as I raced along the Tamiami Trail from Naples to Miami. My perception changed radically when I accompanied a group of Floridians to the Everglades for FHC’s first cultural tourism “Gathering” in 1994. These scholars, led under the banner of off-the-beaten-path destinations are still offered by FHC today.

Everglades City served as our home base for the weekend. Clinging to the edge of the Florida peninsula, this frontier town belted everything that stood in its way. The Everglades of my childhood when fish were so plentiful they would jump into my canoes. Anthropologist Panyi Worr showed a historic photograph of the Seminole Indians wading in shallow water and creating patchwork for the tourists who stopped at their roadside attraction on the Tamiami Trail. We mowed on the porch of the Smallwood Storehouse, overlooking a panoramic view of the Ten Thousand Islands and had no trouble imagining the world brought to life vividly in Alligator Hill. From Peter Matthiessen.

Much like Everglades Gatherings, this issue of FORUM puts a human face on the unique ecosystem that writer Michael Grunwald life so vividly in Killing Mr. Watson. I wonder how prehistoric people survived on alligators and creating patchwork for the tourists who stopped at their roadside attraction on the Tamiami Trail. As Pete Gallagher describes it in his article about Florida’s resident gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of good honest people…
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An Everglades Saga:
a labyrinthine tale of engineers trying to manage poetry

By Michael Grunwald
THE FIRST U.S. GOVERNMENT REPORT on the Everglades was written in 1848 by a remarkable St. Augustine resident named Buckingham Smith—a lawyer, politician, citrus grower, diplomat, and historian who somehow found time to explore the mysterious swamp for the Polk Administration. At the time, the Everglades was still mostly terra incognita to white men, still swirling with rumors of monkeys, emerald deposits, and gigantic spiders, frequently compared to unexplored lands like Africa, Antarctica, and Timbuktu. Smith provided one of the first detailed descriptions of the River of Grass, with a lyricism not found in many Treasury Department documents:

Imagine a vast lake of fresh water, extending in every direction, from shore to shore, beyond the reach of human vision; ordinarily unruffled by a ripple on its surface, studded with thousands of islands...Lilies and other aquatic flowers of every variety and hue are seen on every side, in pleasant contrast to the sawgrass; and as you draw near an island, the beauty of the scene is increased by the rich foliage and blooming flowers of the wild myrtle and honeysuckle...The profound and wild solitude of the place, the solemn silence that pervades it...add to awakened and excited curiosity feelings, bordering on awe."

But curiosity and awe were not Smith's first reactions to the wildness of the Everglades. "The first and most abiding impression," he wrote, "is the utter worthlessness to civilized man, in its present condition, of the entire region." Smith didn't want to preserve the Everglades; he thought it was "suitable only for the haunt of noxious vermin, or the resort of pestilential reptiles."
Smith’s recommendation was to eliminate it, to get rid of all that unruffled water and profound solitude, to convert a wasteland “as useless as the deserts of Africa” into something useful for mankind. Smith was a product of his times, the age of Manifest Destiny, when Americans believed God wanted us to overspread the continent, conquer the wilderness, and fulfill instructions in Genesis to “replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Especially mosquitoes.

Smith’s report inspired more than a century’s worth of efforts to “improve” the Everglades with ditches and dikes, to transform an impenetrable and inhospitable swamp blessed with rich soil and sunny weather into bountiful farms and booming communities. Eventually, those efforts converted much of the morass into a megalopolis. But we’ve gradually realized that the Everglades is a one-of-a-kind national treasure, and that its devastation has been a disaster not only for sawgrass and lilies and noxious vermin and pestilential reptiles, but also for us. So now we’re spending billions of dollars to revive some semblance of the natural Everglades ecosystem, to replumb the replumbing of a vast region stretching from Orlando down to Florida Bay. It’s the largest environmental restoration project in history, an unprecedented effort to repair our abusive relationship with nature. It’s a model for efforts to resurrect the Great Lakes, the Chesapeake Bay, even the Garden of Eden marshes in Iraq. “The Everglades is a test,” environmentalists like to say. “If we pass, we may get to keep the planet.”

We’ve been flunking that test for generations. And we’re off to a lousy start on the make-up exam. But we can still learn from our mistakes.

Draining the Swamp

It’s hard to believe now that Florida’s southern thumb has six million residents, 60 million annual tourists, and what feels like 600 million golf courses, strip malls, Jiffy Lubes, and Burger Kings; but in 1880 Dade County—which back then included just about everything south of Lake Okeechobee—had a grand total of 257 residents. That was because most of the region was still a virtually impenetrable marsh, not quite land, not quite water, more of a soggy confusion of the two. Smith had proclaimed that the man who drained the worthless wetlands of the Everglades would be a hero to posterity, providing benefits to the nation “so clearly manifest as to render comment wholly superfluous,” but three decades later no one had yet taken up his challenge.

That would change in 1881, when a Philadelphia industrialist named Hamilton Disston launched the first major assault on the Everglades, an effort to drain 12 million acres of swampland by dredging ditches through the muck. His basic plan was to move excess water from the Kissimmee Valley down to Lake Okeechobee, and then move excess water from the lake out to sea so that it would no longer overflow into the Everglades. His goal was to attack “the source of all the evil,” by which he meant the source of all the water; once wetlands became dry land, they could support agriculture and development. He did manage to lower water levels and reclaim marshes around Kissimmee and Fort Myers, but he ran out of cash before he could drain the lake and cut off the Everglades at its source.

In 1905, a colorful governor with the colorful name of Napoleon Bonaparte Broward picked up where Disston left off, declaring water “the common enemy of the people of Florida,” pledging to dig a few more canals to the sea and create an instant Empire of the Everglades, a middle-class paradise that would be America’s winter garden and winter playground. “Water,” he assured his audiences, “will run downhill!” But there isn’t much downhill in the Everglades; it declines less than two inches per mile. In the dry season, Broward’s canals sucked desperately needed water out of the Everglades, which led to harsh droughts, spectacular fires, saltwater intrusion that ruined local drinking wells, and rapid subsidence of the organic soil that was beginning to attract settlers to the Everglades. But the canals weren’t big enough to prevent rampant flooding in...
wetter-than-usual rainy seasons, which is why Florida real estate became a national punchline, with jokes about buying land by the gallon and suckers buying swampland. The jokes got a lot less funny in 1928, when a Category 4 hurricane blasted Lake Okeechobee through its flimsy dike, killing 2,500 people who had migrated to the Everglades, the second-worst natural disaster in American history.

Eighty years after Smith's report, it was clear that the Everglades would not drain itself; canals that relied on gravity were just intensifying its natural cycle of drought and flood. For South Florida to thrive, man would have to control its water, not just drain it.

Waters of Destiny

Enter the Army Corps of Engineers, the shock troops in America's war on nature. They built a massive dike around the lake to prevent another 1928 disaster. Then they designed an even more massive project to grab hold of just about every drop of rain that landed on the ecosystem. “We had to control the water—make it do our bidding!” the Corps bragged in a propaganda film called “Waters of Destiny.” With 2,000 miles of levees and canals, plus pumps so powerful their engines were cannibalized from nuclear subs, the army engineers aimed to defeat “the vicious scourge of mankind.” Water.

And they did. The Corps manhandled the serpentine Kissimmee River into an arrow-straight ditch, converting its valley into a cattle empire. The engineers walled off the northern Everglades with dikes to create an Everglades Agricultural Area with 400,000 acres of sugar fields. The eastern Glades became red-roof suburbs like Sunrise, Miramar, Wellington, and Weston, while the western Everglades was gradually overrun by Naples and Fort Myers sprawl. People talk about air conditioning and bug spray, but it was water control that made the region safe for one of the most spectacular development booms ever. “Now it just waits there, calm, peaceful, ready to do the bidding of man and machines,” the Corps boasted. “Central and southern Florida is no longer nature’s fool.”

Except that it is.

Today, half the Everglades has been drained or paved for farms or suburbs. The other half is an ecological mess, usually too dry, sometimes too wet, sometimes too dry in one section while too wet in another section, always polluted by nutrients from sugar fields and subdivisions. The free-flowing River of Grass has been dammed and diverted by levees, highways, and canals; exploited as a reservoir and a sewer; cut off from its wellspring; invaded by Old World climbing ferns, Brazilian peppers, Burmese pythons, and other nuisance species that spread like wildfire and hate to die. There are now 69 endangered species in the ecosystem, including charismatic megafauna like panthers and manatees; more than 90 percent of its wading birds have disappeared. And the wettest swath of America is now staring at a future of structural droughts.

The basic problem is water management. South Florida used to have a terrific water management system; it was called the Everglades. Its wetlands held water all year long, recharging aquifers, absorbing storm water, purifying drinking water, and providing food and nurseries for wildlife. But now the Corps has to protect seven million people who live where the water used to go, and the dike that keeps Lake Okeechobee from another 1928-style rampage is leaking badly. Rather than risk another catastrophe now that millions of people are living in harm’s way, the Corps blasts billions of gallons of rain out to sea, which destroys the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries—once the most biodiverse in North America. And that water is no longer available where it’s needed in the dry season. Now the Everglades is burning out of control just about every winter, temporary restrictions on water use are becoming permanent, and the region’s aquifers are once again battling salt.

It has become increasingly clear that the health of Florida depends on the health of the Everglades—not only because of the millions of birdwatchers, fishermen, hunters, divers,
and beachgoers who visit the ecosystem every year, not only because of the aquifers that sit underneath it, but because our quality of life depends on it. The same runaway sprawl that has ravaged the Everglades has left us with unbearable traffic, overcrowded schools, and a vanishing sense of place, where paradise starts to feel like the Jersey Turnpike with better weather. The far-flung exurban subdivisions that invaded cheap Everglades swampland have become Ground Zero of the foreclosure crisis. The bill for more than a century of treating the Everglades as a commodity is coming due.

Saving the Everglades

Florida’s conservationists had their first major victory around the turn of the last century, when they stopped plume hunters from massacring Everglades wading birds so that fashionable ladies could wear feathers in their hats. But those same conservationists led the fight to drain the Everglades; they saw wetlands as wastelands, and conservation as the opposite of waste. Eventually, they realized that habitat loss could be as deadly as bullets to the birds, and that the unique biodiversity of the Everglades was worth trying to conserve, which led to the creation of Everglades National Park in 1947. But they also thought the Army Corps plan, heralded as “Conservation in Action,” would solve the problems of the Everglades; the great activist Marjory Stoneman Douglas actually called it “the first scientific, well-thought-out-plan the Everglades has ever known.” They thought putting a fence around a national park could protect it from the outside world.

By the 1990s, the status quo was clearly failing people as well as the Everglades; a 42-member governor’s commission—including bankers, developers, and farmers—reached the unanimous conclusion that South Florida’s course was “unsustainable.” The commission eventually proposed the blueprint for a comprehensive $7.8 billion state and federal effort to get the water right in the Everglades, empowering the Corps to undo its mistakes of the past. It’s a complex plan, but the basic goal is to store water that was once held naturally in wetlands, then redistribute it to farms, cities, and the Everglades as needed. The lobbyists for Big Sugar and the Audubon Society walked the halls of Congress arm in arm to push for it, and in 2000, it passed with near-unanimous support.

But the scientists at Everglades National Park didn’t push for it. They said it wasn’t restoration at all; it looked more like a water-supply boondoggle. They saw swift and sure benefits for sugar farmers, water utilities, and rock miners, but very few benefits for the Everglades, and those benefits were highly uncertain and delayed for decades. They saw a plan that was legally required to provide enough water to double South Florida’s population, and maintain every current resident or farmer’s level of flood control, but with no requirements for smart growth or water conservation. Instead of a scientific plan that stored water at the top of the ecosystem and let it flow to the bottom, they saw a Rube Goldberg engineering plan that squirted water this way and that way at the convenience of powerful interest groups. And they warned that in a decade, Congress would wonder why there hadn’t been any progress towards restoring the Everglades.

Almost a decade has passed, and the National Academies of Sciences recently confirmed the fears of the park scientists: there has been almost no progress towards restoring the Everglades. The Bush administration provided almost no funding for the project, and the Corps failed to complete even one of the plan’s 68 components. This is a big deal, because South Florida is where we’re going to figure out whether man can live in harmony with nature. A successful project could usher in a new era of ecosystem restoration and sustainable development. It could show the world how to avoid 21st century water wars. But if Broward and Miami-Dade Counties can’t figure out how to share water and leave a bit for the gators and otters, how are Israel and Syria going to do it? South Florida has an abundance of rain and money; the Everglades has an abundance of science and public support; if we can’t save the Everglades, what can we save? And as the low-lying region braces for global warming,
it turns out that the best way for South Florida to cope with rising seas over the next century would be to restore the natural flow of the Everglades, to rebuild the muck that can help hold back the sea.

But all is not lost. A separate project to restore the Kissimmee River is off to a great start; it’s going to cost 10 times what it cost to channelize the river in the first place, but fish and birds and gators are already coming back. A separate park restoration project that is now 600 percent over budget and old enough to vote is also moving forward, although its environmental benefits have been scaled back dramatically. Meanwhile, the Obama Administration has renewed the federal commitment to Everglades restoration. And last year, Governor Charlie Crist unveiled a bold $1.3 billion plan to buy out the U.S. Sugar Corp. and use its land for storage and water treatment—in essence, to store water at the top of the system and let it flow down to the bottom. The lousy economy has cut the plan in half, but it’s still an impressive effort to steer restoration back towards science.

Over the next decade, the Everglades really will be a test. It will be a test of our scientific ability, our engineering prowess, our ability to learn from our mistakes and replace dumb growth with smart growth. But most of all, it will be a moral test. It will be a test of our willingness to restrain ourselves, to share the earth’s resources with those other living things that moveth upon it, and finally start living in harmony with nature. If we pass, we may deserve to keep the planet.

MICHAEL GRUNWALD, a senior correspondent for Time Magazine, is the author of The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida and the Politics of Paradise. He lives in Miami Beach.
HERE ARE NO SURVEYED geographic boundaries for the cracker psyche known as Florida’s Last Frontier. It’s an extreme Southwest Florida mangrove mentality, in a land where more endangered people, plants, and animals exist than any other region of the state. You have hermits, outlaws, old men of the sea, good honest people who want to be left alone, gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of ne’er-do-wells, scofflaws, and mentals mixed in with millionaires, CEOs, and MIAs—and you can’t tell any of them apart. You don’t mess with Red the Bartender, Miss Wild Hog, or the Swamp Buggy Queen. You don’t stare at short people wearing Harley jackets. And most of all you don’t forget that anything less than freedom to survive on the sacred lands and waters down here is called “government intervention.”

Like in the 1980s when the Everglades Loop Road was paved. It was 26 wild and muddy one-lane miles of ungraded limerock, swamp washouts, and sunning gators through the heart of the glades, beginning at Joe Lord’s gas station, a wayfaring oasis on the Tamiami Trail. For years Joe cursed the government for laying the asphalt “so folks from Michigan can see the swamp without getting wet.” He repeatedly warned: “Next thing you know they’ll put a Grand Canyon in here like they did in Colorado.” The government later shut his station down for code violations.

On a recent afternoon in Everglades City, just inside the flapping screen front of Leebo’s Rock Bottom Bar, ancient mariner Floyd Brown, his bony hand protecting a cup of whiskey on the counter, talks about these precious hardscrabble badlands as a paradise. But he allows that living down here is not for everyone. “Life is purty rough,” he says in the local accent. “Gov’ment’s always aft’rus, but we been livin’ a free way a life. Hit’s really a type a paradise. Just t’hell ain’t for ev’ryone.”

Floyd Brown, in Leebo’s Rock Bottom Bar

"Life is purty rough... Gov’ment’s always aft’rus, but we been livin’ a free way a life. Hit’s really a type a paradise. Just t’hell ain’t for ev’ryone."
by the stars on a cloudy night and thinking like a snook when the tide's going out. But after a split second he changes his mind: "No, wait! That's right, I'm off t'list now. Hell, go 'head."

Soon Floyd and the others at the bar turn their attention to the weather brewing outside of Leebo's. The late afternoon Everglades City sun is boiling well above the 91-degree summer average, and an afternoon squall is about to hit. The crowd at Leebo's assesses the horizon. From due west, a deep purple sky approaches from the Gulf of Mexico, fat green greyclouds spraying straight-down sheets of laser rain that can dent the roof of a car or drown a yawning cat. Just ahead of the squall, Gulf winds blow in millions and millions of dreaded *Aedes taeniorhynchus* (black salt-marsh mosquitoes) from their mangrove breeding grounds. They descend onto civilization.

"This is one part a' the country where you don't dare go in the bushes to take a leak," says Leebo Noble, the proprieter behind the bar. "Good ole boys gone bad. All of them served time on various federal charges, and those still alive are back on the mangroves, still trying to make a living in the area.

That chapter in local history explains why the folks drinking in Leebo's bar explode in coughs and laughter when Floyd Brown abruptly sticks up his hand to block someone from taking his photograph. "No! I'm a wannit man by the FBI!" he says. His reaction is pure instinct, just like sailing and gatherers, struggling to make a subsistence living, lured into crime by the promise of wealth, intent on harming no one but the government that had regulated their historic livelihoods obsolete. Good ole boys gone bad. All of them served time on various federal charges, and those still alive are back on the mangroves, still trying to make a living in the area.

"A boy might come back out a girl." Two of the mosquitoes are smashed dead on his forehead. "A boy might come back out a girl."
covering every living being with a hydro-chaotic acid sting that taser right through the eyelids, the bottom of the feet, and the nostrils of those who dare to breathe. Every human being in sight runs inside.

Some years ago, a no-seeum ambush chased everyone inside except an elderly woman who continued calmly sitting in front of the charming Everglades Rod & Gun Club just west of Leebro’s. She seemed oblivious to the infinitesimal beasts. Someone shouted out to her: “Ma’am, what are you doing?”

“I’m waiting for Sam to bring the truck up. Why?”

“The no seeums!”

She looked down at her arm. It was covered by a couple hundred thousand teeny black dots the size of the period at the end of this sentence. She looked up, “We don’t have no seeums down here, son. Our no seeums are so big you can seeum.” She jungle-laughed like a hyena, then spat. The arm covered by no seeums was the only arm she had. She was Mama Hokie, known as the Ochopee Beerworm Lady because of the landmark cypress-board sign, “BEER WORMS,” by the bait-and-tackle camp she ran for more than 40 years with her husband until he died, and then by herself. When she was 81, a 7-foot alligator bit off most of her right arm.

The “free way a life” is why Mama Hokie, Floyd Brown, Joe Lord, and others who have sparsely populated Florida’s Last Frontier, stay here despite the hardships. They value their personal freedom above all else. That’s why government and its intervention in this frontier is so despised.

The Last Frontier is the drainspout for the huge Big Cypress National Fresh Water Preserve, where hundreds of angry weekend squatters saw their elaborate hunting camps dismantled by the government in the 1980s. It skirts the Seminole and Miccosukee Indian lands, and encompasses several other rustic Independent Seminole camps. Most residents with IDs live within the city limits of Everglades City (pop: 619), Chokoloskee (pop: 497) and Plantation Island (pop: 252). Others survive around the ghost towns, swamp neighborhoods, scattered homesites, ruins of yesteryear, or just plain road signs that mark unincorporated Copeland, Carnestown, Lee Cypress, Monroe Station, Pinecrest, Ochopee, Port of the Islands, and Seaboard Village—enclaves that somehow escaped the huge eminent domain that acquired most of this world for public parks and wildlife refuges over the past 50 years.

This is the southern terminus of the American mainland, an incredibly beautiful and desolate area of sea, sky, rare forests, mangroves, and shell islands. There isn’t much else out here but an abounding history and tons of attitude.

Two legendary photographers, Clyde Butcher and Lucky Cole (known as Mr. Lucky), maintain stunning headquarters. Clyde’s in a subtropical orchid-filled fantasyland previously owned by an angry hermit who rode through his plants naked in a golf cart to the sounds of loud classical music. Lucky’s is a swamp ranch of bucolic photo sets, including a real beach and a coffin, where women pay good money to pose nude on tractors, in alligator-infested canals, with live pythons, and in swamp scenes. There’s also the Skunk Ape Research Center, where Big Foot scholars, Yeti aficionados, and Sasquatch freaks regularly convene. The world’s smallest U.S. post office (a former tool shed slightly smaller than 8-foot square) is down here, too, as are Joanie’s Blue Crab Café (featuring She-crab soup and Mr. Lucky’s photos all over the walls), Wootten’s Airboat and Alligator tourist complex, and the still-standing wooden stilt Smallwood Store (which, since 1917, has miraculously survived direct hits from Hurricanes Donna, Isabel, Betsy, Dennis, Andrew, Harvey, Irene, and Wilma).

Most notably, the Last Frontier is all about fishing. The saltwater landscape contains one of the most extensive mangrove estuaries in the world, an uncommon collection of freshwater rivers and nameless creeks that support a massive brackish jambalaya that is home to a collection of fish unmatched anywhere. All types of commercial fishing from stone crabbing to mullet netting take place here. Cafes in this area offer some of the finest fresh local seafood anywhere in the world.

Big Gary McMillin, whose family moved from farming Minnesota to fishing Chokoloskee when he was a boy, tears
apart a towel and ties it around his sweaty forehead. One of the frontier’s top charter fishing guides, McMillin and his boat Viking Corey have just returned from a trip to the open Gulf. He sits in the shade of a massive round palmetto thatch chieftain, which unofficially marks the end of the line in Southwest Florida. It was built just last year by former Seminole Chief Jim Billie, who has maintained a hideaway fishing retreat out here for years. “Every time you turn around the government has another fish we can’t catch,” gripes McMillin, who is referring today to the protected goliath groupers which he claims is plentiful down here and gobbling up the catches as his fishermen reel them in.

He tells a story of the fish, which can grow to 800 pounds. One such goliath came upon a group of divers and actually swallowed one man “up to his armpits,” Gary says. The other divers had to kill the fish and literally cut it off the diver. “He had a full wet suit on, but he still had third degree burns on his legs from the stomach acid of that fish,” he says.

Mystery is everywhere in these parts, fueled by Shakespearian ironies of poor fishermen living alongside poor-looking locals rumored to be among the richest people in Florida. The skeletons in the closets of these tiny Southwest Florida mangrove fishing communities don’t rattle. They stare, then skulk the other way. There are certain subjects you just don’t pry into while cruising around this frontier, especially the past few decades. Money, for example. It’s nobody’s business but the IRS, and those agents have been here, raked through the area with souped-up calculators, grabbed millions in ill-gotten gains, and gone.

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THE OUTLAW MR. WATSON

O ONE EPITOMIZES the lawless Florida mangrove frontier more than Edgar Jack Watson. The violent life and death of the inscrutable Mr. Watson is the stuff of legend now. Folks swear his ghost is regularly seen lurking around his old haunts in Southwest Florida. Tall, his auburn hair visible under a broad black hat, his long overcoat flowing behind, Watson is seen pacing in the shadows of his old homestead/sugar cane farm 15 miles up the Chatham River.

Watson was born in about 1855 in Columbia County, Florida, but left town as a young adult under suspicion of murder. He went to Oregon, but left, again accused of murder, and landed in Oklahoma as a sharecropper for legendary female outlaw cowgirl Belle Starr. They argued over land he was renting from her. Someone killed her, shooting her in the back, neck, shoulder, and face. Accused, Watson skedaddled back to Florida and allegedly killed a man in Arcadia. Self defense.

He then moved to his last refuge: the Ten Thousand Islands, where he apparently bought a claim to raise vegetables and retire from murder. But a man named Tucker, who had unfortunately squatted a claim for the same land (and sent a rude letter to Watson) was found—you guessed it—murdered. His nephew, too. Later, on a trip to Key West in his 72-foot “Dutchy” Melville (Watson’s workers), as well as several unknown drifter/laborers. Seems they kept dying right through the water (didn’t want to get blood in the boat) and buried on Rabbit Key, where it was later exhumed by his family and put beneath a proper headstone in Fort Myers Cemetery. No charges were ever brought for the frontier justice.

—Peter B. Gallagher

To read Peter Matthiessen’s comments about writing Killing Mr. Watson, go to the new FORUM EXTRA! at www.flahum.org.
Legend says there are strongboxes of cash buried in overgrown backyards in these parts. They say there are sacks of 1980s drug money hidden on landless mangrove islands, thousands of hundred-dollar bills stuffed inside the steel belts of old tires roasting in the sun next to rusted hulls of once-proud shrimp and mullet boats. There are fortunes mixed within the flotsam, hidden by the jetsam, covered by barnacles and rumor. It’s all done under the “radar,” they say, secretly slipped from the sunken treasures of the sea’s last pirates. That’s what they say.

The operative factor, as anyone will tell you, is the Ten Thousand Islands—2,000 square miles of treacherous shallow waterland covering the coastline from Cape Romano (off Marco Island) to just north of Cape Sable on Florida’s tip. These are near-identical mangrove islands, arranged in a mirrored hologram of green-blue reflections, carefully manicured by God to confound mortal maritime men. By boat, every turn looks the same. And, where the coast seems somehow clear, treacherous Gulf passes, full of shallow flats and collapsed limestone ridges, await.

It is not hard to get lost, dehydrated, shipwrecked, dead, picked apart by vultures, and added to the skeleton collection out here. Compass, binoculars, sextant, map—none of that will really help you get from point A (land) to point B (the open water). You got to have a guide. Someone who understands what the tiny piece of red fabric tied to the black mangrove means. Someone who knows when the other locals have turned the channel markers or switched the canoe trail signs. Someone who can feel his way out of lost by instinct.

“I could run through there at night by feel. I don’t need lights... I don’t need anything. I can do it tonight. But why? We can’t make a living anymore.”

The local proliferation of such skills is what lured the trouble here in the first place—starting with Prohibition. Bringing booze through the island maze to the mainland, then along the back roads in the dark of night, kept a good part of Florida supplied with Cuban rum and homemade ‘shine in the 1920s and ‘30s. The revenuers simply couldn’t follow or find anything in the unforgiving landscape. Nobody was hurt, the money was good, and everyone went to church on Sunday. From then on, illicit activity became a tolerated part of the social fabric of the Last Frontier.

In the late ’70s, when the new Endangered Species Act flexed muscles and began declaring fishing and netting bans in local waters, the navigational skills of the locals were
suddenly in demand to another industry. Not long after gold chains and 'Vettes began showing up in town, the government’s multi-jurisdictional Operation Everglades was born to “disrupt the marijuana smuggling routes from South America and the Caribbean to the U.S.,” said a post-Operation Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) press release.

The first bust came at 5:17 a.m. on Thursday, July 8, 1983, when a massive convoy of police cars stealth-rolled into E-City. The second bust was staged a year later, almost to the day. When the dust cleared, nearly the entire Southwest Florida stone crab fleet was seized, as well as 580,000 pounds of pot ($252 million) and more than $5 million in property and personal assets. Most of the 256 good ole boys sent away on federal charges shook hands with their captors; several invited law officers to farewell pig roasts on the eve of their departures for federal prison camp.

Two decades later, the big busts are largely forgotten. Locals who served time are back on the mangroves, now, minding their own business. Not long before his death, confessed smuggler Totch Brown rode through town as the grand marshal of the annual Seafood Festival parade.

Back at Leebo’s Bar in Everglades City, tall tales swirl through the sultry stale air. It’s late now, and the best view of the Milky Way in Florida is a fabulous lightshow in the sky. By this time, a beer-and-whiskey afternoon spent on a barstool in paradise is likely to storm up waves of antagonism and nostalgia.

Ancient mariner Floyd Brown clutches his cup, straightens his cap, and holds court with another colorful frontier history yarn. This one is about one of the local drug runners back in the day. The guy had a pet monkey that he brought on his trips through the mangroves hauling contraband. That monkey watched that gold ole boy’s every move until the monkey learned how to drive the boat.

Hot-chased by federal drug-enforcement agents one day, the old smuggler ditched his boat on a mangrove island, jumped out, and disappeared. When the federal agents approached the boat, “hat monkey grabbed the wheel and took off with a boatload a pot,” Floyd says. The agents took off after it. The monkey led the agents on a wild ride around and around and around the island. They chased the monkey “a good ‘our…’till he damn run outa gas! You won’t fine that bust in t’ files!” Floyd says. Coughing and laughing shake the rafters of Leebo’s Bar. Just another crazy lazy evening in the life of the Last Frontier.

PETER B. GALLAGHER is a Florida folk musician and lyricist, public-radio host, and writer who lives in St. Petersburg.
Your Everglades Library

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Imagining a lost world

TO STUDY Theodore Morris’s art is to be transported in time and space. Long before the Spanish came in their white-winged caravels, before runaway tribes trickled down the peninsula and became known as Seminoles, other people lived and hunted and laughed and dreamed in Florida’s swamps. In his oil-on-canvas paintings, Morris captures the essence of these ancient folk and the world in which they lived.

“I decided when I paint these people, I was going to make them human and not some idealized, romantic image,” said the St. Augustine artist, who earned a bachelor of fine arts degree at Sarasota’s Ringling School of Art and Design in 1972.

After 15 years as a successful commercial illustrator and graphic design artist, Morris sought something more personally engaging. He began studying Florida’s history, reading everything he could about Florida’s lost tribes. In 1992, he created his first Native American portrait, which depicted an Apalachee man performing a ritual bird dance. His paintings portray tribal members from all parts of Florida, including natives hunting in the Everglades.

Morris’s work requires intense study, and sometimes leaps of imagination. Scholars don’t know for sure what the people looked like, how they dressed, or even what they called themselves.

Said Morris: “As far as what they wore, we only know the women wore a skirt of woven Spanish moss and the men wore a breechcloth. There also are descriptions of royalty wearing many deerskins as a sign of status. This description doesn’t lend itself to interesting visuals so I have to assume things like they probably wore feathers and various kinds of animal skin, which they hunted, and some kind of body paint.”

Europeans gave the native groups such names as Apalachee, Timucua, Ocale, Tocobaga, Calusa, Mayaimi, and Tequesta. At the time of European contact in the 16th century, the number of Indians populating Florida is estimated to have ranged from 100,000 to perhaps a million. They had built dynamic cultures in Florida for perhaps 13,000 years. But after only 200 years of contact with the Europeans, Florida’s Indians had vanished. They were decimated by disease and Spanish steel, and later by white and Indian slave raids from the North.

To envision the appearance of these early Florida Indians, Morris relies on mostly Spanish descriptions and artifacts found in various regions of the state. He immerses himself in archaeology, history, and photographs. He spends hours researching and painting each individual person.

“I have hundreds of photos of all parts of Florida...For inspiration, I use old black-and-white Indian photos for the faces,” Morris said.

Something more is required to recreate the life force evident in the people who gaze from his paintings. To capture such fire, the artist visits the areas they inhabited in Florida. He tries to absorb the spirit of a people who believed the soul resided in shadow, in reflection, and in the light within the human eye. Here a leap of imagination can help interpret an ancient world.

“Sometimes,” declares a narrator in a video featuring Morris’s work, “when you listen to the stone you can hear the heart beat.”

—Jon Wilson

To read about Florida’s Calusa Indians, go to the new FORUM EXTRA! at www.flahum.org.
Running for their lives, they hid in the swamp

In the mid-19th century, after three bloody wars with the U.S. army, a few hundred surviving Indians faded away into the fastness of the Everglades. This was a place so inhospitable and treacherous that the soldiers couldn’t follow. The Indians, descendants of migrants from the Creek Nation in Georgia and Alabama, found security in this secluded wetland enclave.

They were called Seminoles, a name meaning “wild people” or “runaway,” because they’d split from the more dominant part of their tribe in the 1700s and sought fertile lands in the Spanish Territory of what is now North Florida. There, they became farmers and hunters.

In the early 1800s, white settlers moved south and wanted the lands inhabited by the Seminoles. The Indians were also resented for harboring runaway slaves. Conflicts ensued—pushing the Indians farther and farther down the Florida peninsula. They had to learn how to live in the wild, on the run. In battles with U.S. soldiers during the first half of the 19th century, several thousand of their number were killed, captured, or deported to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

The Seminoles made dramatic adaptations for survival in the Everglades, living on tree islands called hammocks, building open-sided structures called chickees, learning to cultivate crops on hammock soil, and devising ways to traverse the swamp in dugout canoes. They lived in widely dispersed extended-family camps, conducting subsistence farming on the rich hammocks, and roamed freely while hunting and trapping in the region between Lake Okeechobee and the Ten Thousand Islands.

The tribe was divided into two linguistic groups: The camps located north of Lake Okeechobee spoke the Muskogee or Creek language, while those in the Everglades—Big Cypress region and along the lower east coast retained a Hitchiti language called Mikasuki. Although divided by language, all Seminoles shared a common cultural core.

At the turn of the 20th century, they began trading with white settlers in South Florida, developing symbiotic economic and social relations with them. As time went on, they had to further adapt as railroads brought more and more white settlers to South Florida, as the government carried out plans to drain and dredge the glades, and as development moved in.
RESPECTING THIS LAND
Buffalo Tiger, first chief of the Miccosukee Tribe, reflects on the Everglades. His words below are excerpted from Buffalo Tiger: A Life in the Everglades, which he coauthored in 2002 with historian Harry Kersey.

Traditional Miccosukee people [called Eelaponke] always had great respect for this land, this earth, and life itself. They believed the Breathmaker [Feshabkee-ommeechee] created the land and all living things. Miccosukee people cherished the earth they live on. They honored it because they knew without it they would not be alive. Without this earth and its elements—air, water, land—nothing would be here. They recognized the beauty of this earth, that from it would grow food for them to survive. They called it yaknee—“this land.” They appreciated deeply how the land provided delicious crops like corn, pumpkins, bananas, potatoes, beans, tomatoes, and sugarcane. They appreciated how the water provided drink and many species of fish. The land did not only provide plants; it provided birds and other wildlife...Our ancestors taught us to remember we are part of this earth and we must protect it. We must not destroy or sell it.

We had no boundaries on this land, no fences. We were always free. All wildlife and human life could freely wander. Since Breathmaker put this land for us to live on and care for, money cannot buy the land. We are not supposed to buy or sell even a cup of muck. Many of our people have fought and died for us to keep our land...

As for Everglades’ water, everything has changed. The water was very clean years ago. Miccosukees would swim in the Glades water and drink it. Today people are saying that the water is not clean. You can tell that is true because it is yellow-looking and does not look like water you would want to drink. You would probably get sick from drinking it. That means that fish or alligators in the water are not healthy; white men did that, not Indians. Miccosukees were told that was what was going to happen many years ago, and now it has. We cannot just say that the water is no good or the land is no good and turn our back on that.

Buffalo Tiger

To read more and listen to Buffalo Tiger, go to the new FORUM EXTRA! at www.flahum.org.

To read more and listen to Buffalo Tiger, go to the new FORUM EXTRA! at www.flahum.org.
The Saint of the Everglades

Harriet Bedell became a familiar figure in the Everglades in the mid-20th century as she paddled her canoe from place to place, her robe billowing behind her. Bedell was a deaconess in the Episcopal Church, and from 1933 to 1960 she worked among the Miccosukee Indians, tending the sick, starting schools, and raising funds. She was “more a social worker than a crusading evangelist,” wrote historian Charlton Tebeau.

The Episcopal Church recently conferred sainthood upon Bedell in recognition of her tireless work with the Miccosukees and, from 1907 to 1931, with Native Americans in Oklahoma and Alaska.

At her Everglades mission, Bedell forged projects to help the Miccosukees earn money through crafts and arts such as sewing, carving, doll-making, basketry, and patchwork. Anthropologist Patsy West wrote that Bedell influenced much of the tribal craftwork found today.

Bedell was beloved for her eccentricities as well as for her mission work. She never owned even a radio or went to a movie. She earned her driver’s license at age 65 and soon became a formidable presence on Southwest Florida roads. An Everglades City electrician claimed that “meeting the deaconess in her Model A can be more dangerous” than working with electricity.

Bedell presided over her Everglades mission until Hurricane Donna destroyed it in 1960. Then she moved to an Episcopal retirement center in Lake Worth, where she died in 1969, just before her 94th birthday, after starting a Sunday School and becoming a popular lecturer. The State of Florida has named her an Outstanding Floridian, and her plaque is at the entrance to the Museum of the Everglades in Everglades City.

Information for this article came in part from Angel of the Swamp: Deaconess Harriet Bedell in the Everglades, by Marya Repko.
New and Notable

**Kick Ass**  
*Selected Columns of Carl Hiaasen*  
Carl Hiaasen  
Edited by Diane Stevenson

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*Selected Columns of Carl Hiaasen*  
Carl Hiaasen  
Edited by Diane Stevenson

“Along with Kick Ass, this is one of the best collections of occasional journalism published in recent years.”—Booklist (starred review)

“Pulls no punches. Hiaasen keeps his sense of humor and outrage firmly intact.”—Publishers Weekly

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*Images from the St. Johns Region*  
By Mallory M. O’Connor  
and Gary Monroe  
Introduction by Bill Belleville

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Satisfy the art and nature lovers on your list this holiday season with this luxuriously illustrated book. Featuring a stunning collection of paintings, sketches, sculptures, photographs, and material culture, *Florida’s American Heritage River* captures and celebrates the beauty, power, and impact of the St. Johns region.

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*Second Edition*  
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“There is something for almost everyone who fishes the Florida coast.”—Richard A. Davidson

Paperback $24.95
FORUM receives seven awards for excellence

FORUM, the magazine for thinking Florida, won top awards for excellence in the 2009 Florida Magazine Association (FMA) competition. The honors, in the category for magazines of associations, are:

First Place “Charlie” Awards: General Excellence/Special Theme Issue, “Florida’s Caribbean Connection” (Fall 2008); Writing Excellence/Best Commentary, “Do What’s Right for our Children,” by David Lawrence Jr.; and Writing Excellence/In-Depth Reporting, “Florida’s Earliest Caribbean Contact,” by Bob Carr.

Second Place Silver Awards: General Excellence for Overall Best Written Magazine; and Writing Excellence/Best Commentary, “So Many Residents, So Few Floridians,” by Gary Mormino.

Third Place Bronze Awards: General Excellence for Best Overall Magazine; and Design Excellence/Best Cover, “Florida in a New Era,” by David Meek.

FMA is the largest state magazine association in the country, with more than 200 member publications.

FHC initiative to explore Florida’s 500-year Spanish legacy

With a $225,570 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, FHC is launching a new three-year initiative, “La Florida: 500 Years of Spanish Legacy.” FHC will work with scholars and experts around the state to develop resources that provide Floridians with a deeper understanding of the historical context and the cultural significance of Florida’s five-century relationship with Spain.

Several public programs, teacher workshops, a specially created website, and an issue of FORUM devoted to the topic are planned—culminating in the 2013 commemoration of Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León’s landfall on Florida’s shore. Scholars and representatives of cultural institutions will discuss potential themes and programs for this initiative at a meeting this October. For more information, contact Monica Kile at mk@flahum.org or (727) 873-2005.

Tell us what you think

FHC wants to know your thoughts about FORUM—and how we can serve you better on our website. Would you take a few minutes to fill out our survey? Go to www.flahum.org and click on “Reader Survey.” Participants can enter our drawing for a special prize.

Governor to Honor Authors for Lifetime Literary Achievement

In March of 2010 Gov. Charlie Crist will present the first Florida Lifetime Literary Achievement Award. This award program will annually recognize a living, nationally and internationally known Florida author for a distinguished and influential body of work that has had a major influence on the lives and thinking of the residents of Florida. The author’s contributions can be in the categories of academic, nonfiction, or fictional work—or any combination of the three.

FHC will oversee the nomination process and convene a panel of judges who will recommend the award winner to the Governor.

“This award will honor authors who have dedicated their lives to telling Florida’s stories and inspiring readers throughout our world,” Crist said. “Florida’s beautiful landscape and diverse cultural influences create a rich environment that has inspired a wide variety of writers, as well as artists and musicians.”

The deadline for submitting nominations is January 4, 2010. Nominations may be made by publishers, agents, book sellers, or colleagues knowledgeable about the writer’s accomplishments and influence. For details, visit the FHC website, www.flahum.org.

National teacher workshops on Hurston funded for next year

For the seventh consecutive year, FHC has received a major competitive grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to host teachers from Florida and around the nation at workshops exploring Florida history and culture. With the latest grant of $159,430, FHC will bring 80 teachers next summer to Central Florida to learn about the life and work of Florida literary great Zora Neale Hurston.

“Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston and her Eatonville Roots,” will be based in Hurston’s hometown of Eatonville, the nation’s oldest African-American municipality, which is 10 miles from Orlando. This will be the third summer for the Hurston workshops. Teachers (K–12) are selected through a competitive application process. Information is available on the FHC website, www.flahum.org.
Lincoln and Douglass meet again (on stage)
The historic meetings between President Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass will be reenacted around the state in October by scholar/actors George Frein and Charles Pace. Sponsored by FHC, the Chautauqua presentations will use excerpts from speeches by the two men to depict what they may have said to each other when they met in the White House three times between 1863 and 1865, during the Civil War.

The Lincoln-Douglass schedule is as follows:
- October 11, Beverly Hills, 4 p.m. at the Shepherd of the Hills Episcopal Church; October 13, St. Petersburg, 7 p.m. at the at the USF St. Petersburg Campus Activities Center; October 14, Ocala, 7 p.m. at the Central Florida Community College Ewers Century Center; October 15, Jacksonville, 7 p.m. at the Ritz Theatre and La Villa Museum; October 18, Vero Beach, 7 p.m. at the Emerson Center; October 19, Arcadia, 7 p.m. at DeSoto Middle School; and October 22, Coral Gables, 7 p.m. at the Coral Gables Congregational Church.

FHC sponsors hundreds of free public events each year around the state. For complete, continually updated listings, go to www.flahum.org: “Events Calendar.”
W E SAT on the shady stone patio of her mushroomy house in Coconut Grove. It was the cool area of a house that lacked air-conditioning all 74 years she lived there. Our wicker chairs creaked and several cats kept alert and their distance. It was spring 1992; Marjory Stoneman Douglas was 101 years old.

I asked the Grande Dame of the Everglades a personal question, which was always great fun because private Marjory never responded in any way that jibed with public Marjory’s familiar iconic persona. I asked her to list three wishes she wanted to make before passing on. Most would expect her to wax on about Everglades preservation and about finishing her book on naturalist W.H. Auden.

The rebel thought beneath her signature straw hat. I imagined her conjuring up a zinger like when she credited her life’s accomplishments to her celibacy since 1934. Or when she declared that she rarely visited the Everglades because “it’s too muddy and inhospitable.”

She squinted behind thick spectacles and began to speak. The cats and I listened intently, as all did when she talked. Her tiny voice always came on just a little deeper than one would expect, graced with a perfect, almost British, enunciation. “You know, I’ve always wanted a Seminole Indian dress.”

A brief pause. “And I would love to meet Chief James Billie. He’s one of my heroes.”

A longer pause as the wheels turned under the straw hat. Then: “The old medicine woman. Suzie. She’s as old as I am. I want to meet her.” Suzie Billie was the ancient matriarch of the Seminole Panther clan.

Three last wishes, all Seminole-related? Marjory knew I worked for the Seminole Indians in those days.
Marjory always was pragmatic. I contacted Chief Billie by phone from her living room. “Let’s make it happen,” he said.

The dress was designed to Marjory’s measurements by one of the Jimmie women from a Tamiami Trail Indian camp. Gray, with red, black, and white trim, it sported a cape and a ring of yellow medicine diamonds.

In two weeks, I brought her the dress and she proudly slipped it on. She stared all over herself with a handheld mirror, and that Everglades scowl softened. I lifted her into the passenger seat of my car, and we headed west. Quiet, unable to see the passing landscape, she listened to my narration. Our first stop, 100 miles later: the Everglades Rod and Gun Club, where breathless patrons stared in awe at the famous lady as we sipped Manhattans in the dark wood-paneled lobby bar. “I’ve played pool here,” she said. “I was pretty good in my day!”

Next stop: nearby Chokoloskee, where the Smallwood Store Seminole celebration had begun. Chief Billie was waiting with a golf cart.

“Che han tamo!” he greeted Marjory, clasping her hands. She paused. The whole world went freeze frame.

Then she replied in proud English: “Ah-HO!”

Laughing heartily, Chief Billie whisked her away in the golf cart for a two-hour tour. He showed her where his ancestors had camped and where Ed Watson was shot, finally introducing Marjory to the festival crowd. Shocked to see this Everglades icon, the crowd cheered.

Suzie Billie never showed. “Why? I don’t know,” said her granddaughter. “When the medicine woman doesn’t want to come, she won’t come. No ‘why’ to it.”

Marjory’s next trip to the Everglades was in 1998 and she was ashes, having died a month after her 108th birthday. Suzie Billie, born in the swamp with no birth certificate, died six years later, said to be almost 108.

PETER B. GALLAGHER is a Florida folk musician and lyricist, public-radio host, and writer who lives and works in St. Petersburg. Gallagher worked for the Seminole Tribe for 15 years, until 2001. He supervised the Seminole Tribune, and the tribal website and produced several large tribal events.

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River of Grass. This lyrical other name of the Everglades was conceived by Marjory Stoneman Douglas. It came to her much as story ideas come to a writer: through personal experience, research, and learning from others. When she contemplated using it in the title of a book, Gerald Parker, a hydrologist who knew the natural mechanics of the Everglades better than anyone, told her the concept fit with scientific reality. It also bordered on radical. A hideous swamp, the common perception of the Everglades, was contrary to poetic references. But Douglas discovered a “shining and slow moving” body of water, a truly dazzling wetland, in South Florida’s famous swamp, and with the 1947 publication of *The Everglades: River of Grass* she extended a felicitous corrective to a traditionally maligned place. The Everglades were (she referred to them in the plural) a river of grass.

In recent years, scientists and others have criticized Douglas’s phrase as a poetic oversimplification. They argue that as an ecosystem the Everglades is (they prefer the singular) more biologically diverse than sawgrass and water, and that Douglas’s lamentable representation undermines the complexities of restoration. Read *River of Grass*, however, and you will see that Douglas faithfully details the multifaceted nature of the Everglades. She also celebrates it.

She did so even though her sense of natural beauty matured elsewhere. A New Englander, she grew up amidst rolling hills and dales, babbling brooks, and minty birch and hemlock woodlands, where birdsong began in the predawn hour, sometimes with the morning hail of loons, and the day ended with the waning sun casting gold on lake and pond. At age 25, seeking a divorce and new direction in life, she settled in Miami in 1915. Home for the next 83 years, South Florida heedlessly pursued destructive growth. Douglas noticed this proclivity from the first. She saw too how physically different this new place was from New England. Florida was relentlessly flat, but it was equally a land of contrasts and extremes—mucky swampland and dry limestone ridge land, thick jungle and open prairie, moderating trade winds and stifling heat, protracted droughts and flash storms. She found a desperate sort of paradise here, and yet, unlike many northern transplants, she sought not to change it. If memories of New England vistas filled her with longing, she only had to look toward the cumulus clouds that piled up in late afternoon over the Everglades; there she saw white mountains. Nothing otherwise contrasted more with New England than that rarified wetland, and nothing inspired her so greatly.

The late nature writer Edward Abbey said that the “human sensibility cannot assimilate” the desert. This has been the history of the Everglades. Many sorts of people, from Spanish settler-soldiers to American land merchants and agricultural barons, hesitated before this vast and
forbidding quagmire, even as they thought about, tried, and eventually succeeded at subduing it. Conquistadors all, they could neither assimilate nor accept the Everglades in their raw, uncharted grace. Efforts to take command of the wet wilderness began in the 19th century with private drainage concerns and continued through the 20th with government water-management projects. Douglas eventually condemned these activities.

But she was not the first to perceive the need for a new sensibility. In 1928, Ernest Coe, a semi-retired landscape architect, and David Fairchild, a famous tropical-plant scientist, organized an association to lobby for the creation of a national park. They recruited Douglas to join their group and write supportive newspaper and magazine articles. The odds were stacked heavily against them. National parks were supposed to embody a rare natural keepsake—a geyser, waterfall, desert rock formation, or mountain—and public recreational opportunities. To the average American, the Everglades were an outsize no-man’s land fitting for only alligators, snakes, and biting vermin. But after a six-year struggle, the association convinced policymakers of the prospects for recreation and vistas of singular beauty in this proposed park like no other. And approval came with an unexpected bonus. Everglades was the first national park authorized with the goal of protecting biological features for scientific study. Still, 13 more frustrating years passed before the park opened.

In the meantime, Douglas, who had established herself as a magazine writer, entertained an invitation from a major publishing house to write a book about the Miami River. She suggested the Everglades instead. Over the years, she had eased into a relationship with them as one does with a lifelong friend. In addition to her work on the park association, she spent time fishing and bird watching and used the wetland as a setting in her short fiction.

The book required years of research. She met hydrologist Gerald Parker, along with geologists, anthropologists, biologists, meteorologists, ornithologists, and historians—and she consulted famous naturalists who were part of her rich social and intellectual life. A lot of people knew a lot of things about the Everglades, but no one had ever brought that accumulated knowledge together in a single source. And she did so with consummate passion and tantalizing eloquence. Piece by piece she assembled the bountiful ecosystem for readers—the plant and animal life, the scrubland, tropical hardwood uplands, pine flatwoods, mangrove forest, wet prairie, and sawgrass marsh. All formed a vibrant community sustained by lifeblood water passing through the arterial Kissimmee River-Lake-Okeechobee-Everglades flowway, which she described as maintaining “the persistent fine balance” of the “long heart of this long land.” Where others saw only green and brown emptiness, Douglas argued infinite variety thrived. How could she not refer to the Everglades in the plural?

The book debuted in late 1947. The timing was perfect. Four weeks later, on a blue-sky December day, President Harry Truman dedicated Everglades National Park. In his ceremonial remarks, Senator Claude Pepper referred to the great wetland as the River of Grass; so too did newspapers and magazines reporting on the event. As Douglas’s phrase embedded itself in the national language, few people suspected that the Everglades’ worst days lay ahead.

Within weeks of the dedication, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers launched a bulldozer assault on the Everglades,
ultimately conquering them with a mind-boggling system of levees, canals, and building-size water pumps. In her book’s last chapter, Douglas welcomes anticipated water management for the good of the park. But government engineers arranged their priorities for the pecuniary benefit of commercial agriculture and urban development. In a magazine article twelve years later, Douglas chastises them for impeding water’s natural flow and endangering the park’s ecological health. Destroy the River of Grass, she had first warned in 1947, and you destroy the organic center that supplies the region’s freshwater, moderates the local climate, and checks population sprawl. Her activism, for the time being, ended with the article.

But others were paying attention. During a five-year drought in the early 1960s, the park thirsted on the brink of death when Army engineers refused to direct flow away from vegetable and sugar farms. (The latter were undergoing massive expansion after securing a federal embargo on sugar from communist Cuba). Environmentalists fought through the decade to win a congressional mandate forcing the Corps to share water with the park. By then, their attention had shifted to a new insult. Dade County had broken ground for the world’s largest airport—in the Everglades a few miles from the park.

Seeking reinforcement, activists searched for a spokesperson with public appeal, one who carried the authority of local history and the truth of the Everglades. Douglas was their person. A remarkable speaker, she projected ideas with high-volume clarity, despite her age. (A friend would dub her the “elocutioner”; she is truly one of Florida’s finest orators.) For more than 50 years, she had valued South Florida not as a slice of real estate but as a place to make a life. And her book, tucked like the Bible under the arms of local environmentalists, delivered the important truth, easily translated from the subtitle River of Grass. That was her lasting “genius,” said her longtime friend Helen Muir, transforming with three words a debased wasteland into the country’s most cherished wetland.

In 1969, the 79-year-old writer-turned-environmentalist founded Friends of the Everglades. After joining in the defeat of the airport, she guided her organization to press for the establishment of the Big Cypress National Preserve (1974), an end to agricultural pollution fouling Everglades water, reform in the expansionist impulses of water managers, and restoration of the channelized, diked, and otherwise arrested Kissimmee River-Lake Okeechobee-Everglades heart of the region. She spent her remaining decades moving the country toward a sensibility that assimilated the natural Everglades.

Much like her famous phrase, her name became synonymous with a valued place. In 1997, Congress attached it to a new 1.8-million-acre Everglades wilderness area, four years after President Clinton awarded her the Medal of Freedom. When she died in 1998, at 108, park rangers appropriately broadcast her ashes in the beloved river she gave to America, the River of Grass.

JACK E. DAVIS, an associate professor of history at the University of Florida, holds the title of 2009-2010 Waldo W. Neikirk Term Professor. Davis’s book, An Everglades Providence: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the American Environmental Century, was published this year.

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The hours I spent in the Fakahatchee...were probably the most miserable I have spent in my entire life.

THE SWAMPY PART of the Fakahatchee is hot and wet and buggy and full of cottonmouth snakes and diamondback rattlers and alligators and snapping turtles and poisonous plants and wild hogs and things that stick into you and on you and fly into your nose and eyes. Crossing the swamp is a battle. You can walk through about as easily as you could walk through a car wash. The sinkholes are filled with as much as seven feet of standing water, and around them the air has the slack, drapey weight of wet velvet. Sides of trees look sweaty. Leaves are slick from the humidity. The mud sucks your feet and tries to keep ahold of them; if it fails it will settle for your shoes. The water in the swamp is stained black with tannin from the bark of cypress trees that is so corrosive it can cure leather. Whatever isn't wet in the Fakahatchee is blasted. The sun pounds the treeless prairies. The grass gets so dry that the friction from a car can set it on fire, and the burning grass can engulf the car in flames. The Fakahatchee used to be littered with burned-up cars that had been abandoned by panfried adventurers...

In the Fakahatchee there used to be a carpet of lubber grasshoppers so deep that it made driving hazardous, and so many orchids that visitors described their heavy sweet smell as nauseating...
When I walked in, an owl gave me a lordly look, and when I walked out three tiny alligators skittered across my path. I wandered into a nook in the swamp that was girdled with tall cypress. The rangers call this nook the Cathedral. I closed my eyes and stood in the stillness for a moment hardly breathing, and when I opened my eyes and looked up I saw dozens of bromeliad plants roosting in the branches of almost every tree I could see. The bromeliads were bright red and green and shaped like fright wigs. Some were spider-sized and some were as big as me. The sun shooting through the swamp canopy glanced off their sheeny leaves. Hanging up there on the branches the bromeliads looked not quite like plants. They looked more like a crowd of animals, watching everything that passed their way.

“...By the second day, I saw it: as immense in its way as the redwoods or the columns of Bryce canyon, the sawgrass owning the trailing edge of the continent, embellished with distant stands of slash pine and dotted with the islands-on-islands of hardwood hammock. I stop to watch an egret hunting, the wind ruffling his neck feathers. Hawks and vultures ride air currents against a god-huge acreage of clouds.”

From Sheri L. Lohr’s travel journal in the mid-1980s, published in Journeys on the Grassy River.
Clyde’s Quest

amid things that go bump in the swamp

By Jeff Klinkenberg

Clyde Butcher, a civilized wild man, has to be the most mosquito-bitten photographer in the history of Florida. Sometimes, as he stands waist-deep in a swamp and peers through his camera, he breathes them in. They land on him and turn his shirt and hat black. They blacken his hands when he takes them out of his pocket to adjust the camera. In the name of his art, in the name of celebrating the Everglades, he goes where many people talk about going but never actually go—into the wild heart of the wildest part of Florida. “A lot of people are afraid of the Everglades,” he says. “I give them very large photographs they can admire in an air-conditioned gallery if they want. Fine with me. All I want them to do is value the Everglades.”

Through his spectacular black-and-white photographs, people see a swamp in all its beauty and majesty—in a way they may never before have imagined it. These images have done for the Everglades what Marjory Stoneman Douglas’s River of Grass did with words—changed the way people think about this unique part of the world. Clyde Butcher photos have become iconic over the nearly 25 years he’s been focusing on the Everglades. The huge, sometimes life-size images are full of mystery and passion.

“I want people to be stunned by the size,” he says. “I want them to think they are actually walking into the scene. And it’s going to be a black-and-white scene. Black-and-white, to me, stays with you. It can be haunting.”

It also harkens back to an earlier time and place. In fact, Clyde deep down is a 19th-century man. He prefers the wilderness to civilization and the company of panthers to city folk. With his scraggly hair, flowing gray beard, and battered hat, he could be Walt Whitman’s long lost cousin.

He had discovered that being physically part of the scene, literally immersed in it rather than simply passing through, made images leap out at him one after the other.
—Tom Shroder and John Barry, in Seeing the Light
"Where is Matthew Brady when you need him?" he often jokes as he sets up equipment that looks as if it was last used by the famous Civil War photographer. Actually his beloved Deardorff camera, a wooden box the size of a small television, was manufactured in 1942, the year before he was born. He hauls the 60-pound camera, along with 10 pounds of equipment, on his back through waist-deep water.

He does not shoot pictures from a road or a bridge or from a vehicle. Sometimes he and his wife, Niki, row a creaking skiff a mile through cypress knees to find a beautiful spot. "This looks like a good spot to make a photo," he’ll say. "I like this fern."

He’ll get out of the boat, set the camera on a tripod in the water, and wait for the light to get right—favoring overcast days without shadows. Sometimes he stands for hours at a time, very conscious of the alligators and the water moccasins lurking nearby.

On several occasions, as he has concentrated on his camera, 5-foot alligators have cruised right up to him. He punches them on the nose with his fist. "I call the 5-footers 'teenagers.' They're curious, is all."

Only once has Clyde actually been frightened by alligators. That was in Central Florida. He was standing between cypress trees in a lake and waiting for a thunderstorm to get closer. He apparently had trespassed into alligator feeding territory. They were behind him, hissing. The storm got closer. Clyde, who weighs nearly 250 pounds, sank deeper into the mud.

Finally he took the photo. He had sunk about 4 feet. Only his head and neck were above water. The alligators drew
closer. Clyde couldn’t move. Niki couldn’t pull him out with their small boat. She wondered if she was going to have to go back to the fish camp for a bigger boat.

“Don’t leave me here with these alligators,” Clyde told her. He wallowed in the mud like a water buffalo and finally was able to swim out.

He has also had a few close calls with the heavy-bodied, venomous water moccasins. Once, stuck in the mud and unable to move, he watched a big one slither past him, inches away.

He now packs a stun gun, something that Amazon

rain forest travelers reportedly use to treat snakebites. “I don’t know if it really even works,” he says. “You’re supposed to hit yourself where the snake bit you. The idea is supposedly that the electricity destroys the protein that causes the pain and makes you sick.” He doesn’t mention whether the bite or the cure would be worse, saying, “Your chances of being bitten are pretty slim. The odds are against it.”

He’s become almost oblivious to mosquitoes, although in summer he sometimes submerges himself neck-deep to escape. Summer, of course, also produces vicious thunderstorms. He has never been struck by lightning, but a few times the storms

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THE SANCTUARY THAT RESTORED HIS SOUL

A TRAGEDY CHANGED CLYDE BUTCHER’S LIFE and his art in 1986. He and his family were living in Fort Myers, and he made a good living taking color photographs of beautiful Florida scenes and selling them to people who wanted pictures “to match their shag carpeting,” he says.

He yearned to work in black and white, like Ansel Adams, the 20th-century nature photographer famous for capturing Yosemite National Park in magnificent black-and-white images. But he was told there was no market for black-and-white photography in Florida—and he had to make a living.

Clyde and his wife Niki knew what it was like to be broke, and now they had two kids ready for college. Clyde had started his professional career in California as an architect with a degree from California Polytechnic University; but he discovered that he didn’t like wearing a tie, commuting long distances, and working for someone else. He gravitated to photography, which had been a hobby. His life as a photographer in California was a financial roller coaster of boom and bust, at times leaving his family homeless and camping out in state parks.

After going broke, they moved to Florida because a friend, a Fort Lauderdale lawyer, offered to help get them established and wanted to invest in Clyde’s work. The Butcher family eventually settled in Fort Myers. They made a good living traveling around the state to weekend art shows to sell photographs.

But in 1986, their world collapsed. On Father’s Day, 17-year-old Ted gave Clyde a giant cookie with “World’s Greatest Dad” inscribed on the top. Then Ted hopped in a car with some friends to go to a movie. On the way, their car was hit by a drunk driver. Ted was killed instantly.

The Butcher family plunged into depression. Clyde’s father, who doted on his only grandson, died only days later—seemingly of a broken heart. Ted’s sister Jackie, 19, developed temporary amnesia, losing most of her memories of her brother. Niki barely hung on. Clyde’s grief was total.

Coping at that moment, in that place, seemed beyond Clyde’s powers. He began taking daylong excursions into the swamp with friend Oscar Thompson (See page 37). During this time, he created black-and-white photographs inspired by Ansel Adams and by his terrible grief—primeval images of a Florida that bore no resemblance to any postcard. Instead of diminishing the scenes, the lack of color did the opposite.

“Life is too short for you not to do what you want to do,” he told friends. His black-and-white photographs probably wouldn’t sell, but he didn’t care any more. The first time he put them on display, at a festival in Orlando, he was stunned when people crowded into his booth and stared, wide-eyed, at his photographs. He made $2,000 in sales that day and won blue ribbons for best in show. Since then he has become well known for his iconic depictions of the Everglades.

In 1993, the Butchers moved from the suburban sprawl of Fort Myers to the heart of the Everglades. They opened a gallery and built a home on the lush grounds of the former Orchid Isles, on the Tamiami Trail halfway between Miami and Naples.

Clyde says his goal is to inspire people to value and preserve nature. When he fled to the wilderness after the death of his son, “it helped restore my soul,” he writes in his "Artist Statement." Now he wants to use his work “to save nature’s places of spiritual sanctuary for future generations.”

This article includes excerpts and information from Seeing the Light, by Tom Shroder and John Barry, and from work by Jeff Klinkenberg.

To listen to or download an interview with Clyde Butcher, go to the new FORUM EXTRA! at www.flahum.org.
have passed so close that the hair on his body stood up. "Also, I’ve seen—what do you call it—St. Elmo’s Fire. It’s like a blue spark and it shoots out of my hands when there’s a lot of electricity in the air."

When his camera is set up and the light changes to his satisfaction, he puts his head under a black hood and focuses. "What I like here is the contrast between the leather fern and the arrowhead leaf and the dappled-light effect coming through the trees," he’ll say.

Those accompanying him on these adventures function like surgeon’s assistants. "Lens," he says, and the 90mm Super Angulon Excel is placed into his meaty hand. He calls for and receives his light meter, his cable release, his film. The film is an 8-by-10-inch plate, and he slides it into his camera. "Nobody move," he says. "Movement is my enemy."

The people with him dare not move, not even to swat a mosquito. Any movement may disturb the surface of the water and set off a chain reaction of other movements. "I have no idea how this one will turn out," he says, preparing to shoot. "I depend on my intuition. I think it’s going to be okay. Does that make sense?"

Sometimes he opens the shutter for one minute, sometimes two minutes, other times maybe 45 minutes. Long exposures bring out tiny details and exaggerate motion.

He touches the cable release that opens and closes the shutter. That’s it—a Clyde Butcher photo. He takes his camera apart, and stuffs everything back in the pack, ready to go.

"I can’t move," Clyde says after one photo shoot. He has sunk into the mud to midcalf. "I’m going to lose my boots. Lost boots are no novelty to him. "Trying to get my boots, I’ve had the mud suck the wedding ring off my finger. Twice." He kicks his way out without losing his boots or ring.

If Clyde opted to use a modern digital camera, he could fire off a dozen frames and hope for a keeper. But the digital revolution has passed him by. “Maybe the equipment will be good enough one day,” he says. After each of his shots he has to stop and reload the camera. In a good year, he develops about 60 photographs in his old-fashioned darkroom using chemicals. If he is lucky, he ends up with four or five he likes.

What makes a Clyde Butcher photograph? “Everyone asks that,” he says. “It’s not just trees and grass and water and sky I’m trying to capture. I am also trying to get my feelings about the place. The emotion. Does that make sense?” He adds, “If you can explain it, maybe it’s not art.”

He’s currently compiling a photo collection that may end up in a book and then in a traveling exhibit to introduce the Everglades to the rest of the country. Recently he and Niki hired an airboat and driver to go out on Lake Kissimmee, part of the headwaters of the Everglades. The system begins south of Orlando in a series of creeks that become ponds that become rivers and lakes before flowing into the sawgrass, cypress swamps, and mangroves of Everglades National Park.

The boat took them to the big lake’s Brahma Island, a wilderness known for enormous oak trees and husky rattlesnakes. A pickup truck took them into the woods on the island. No rattlesnakes were visible, but bald eagles floated over the oaks and deer jumped the trail.

He stopped at a live oak that was both majestic and grotesque. It was probably 400 years old. Nobody knows how many storms have pushed it over, but it has refused to die. It has put down new roots and thrived again. Clyde began assembling his equipment and took aim. The huge main trunk lay parallel to the ground like a coiled rattler. Out of that sideways trunk emerged seven other trunks reaching for the sky like Medusa’s hair.

"I have to make a photograph for posterity," he says. "It’s my job. This tree has been here four centuries. Lightning could hit it tomorrow. It could kill it tomorrow. The Everglades is life, but also death."

Okay. Nobody move.

"Niki, stop talking," he says crossly. "I need you over here while I got good light." She stops talking, hands him a lens, hands him film.

He waits for a cloud to drift across the sun. Click. Clyde makes the photograph of the 400-year old oak tree, for posterity.

JEFF KLINKENBERG, who writes about Florida culture for the St. Petersburg Times, has accompanied Clyde Butcher on photo shoots a half-dozen times over the past two decades.

Here it was as if he could touch the eternal, a place that had been remaking itself ever since the ocean rolled back and sun shone on the reef. Only, Clyde knew now that it might be closer to terminal than eternal, and the knowledge hurt him, drove him again and again into the dark shroud of his camera cowl to save what he could before it was gone, to make people see what they were destroying when they still might have a chance to save it.

—Tom Shroder and John Barry, in Seeing the Light
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The man who introduced Clyde to the glades

OSCAR THOMPSON, a fifth-generation native of Southwest Florida, was Clyde Butcher’s friend and mentor in matters of the swamp. They first met at Oscar’s camera store in Fort Myers shortly after Clyde and his family moved to that city in the early 1980s. Before long, Oscar was taking Clyde on treks into the Everglades—a world Oscar knew well from his days as a child playing and as an adolescent hunting alligators.

Clyde had a hard time keeping up with him at first as they waded through prairie grasses and cypress strands. Oscar was straight and lean; his long brown face looked like it ought to be wrapped around a harmonica and glowing in the dying coals of a campfire. Born in 1943, he looked his years, until he moved. There was a fine, quiet grace to him, a youthful buoyancy in his body and even in his voice. Mixed with the slight cracker twang was a high tone never far from wonder or enthusiasm.

Oscar’s parents were both from Everglades pioneer stock. On his father’s side were the civilization-building Hendrys and Thompsons, who had fought Seminole Indians, cut the first roads, and strung the first telegraph lines. On his mother’s side were the hardscrabble swamp survivors who moonshined and poached gators. Her brother was the well-known Totch Brown.

Oscar’s father made a living in the Big Cypress, guiding the rich and powerful men who followed Ford and Edison: the bankers, merchants, and developers. A man in one of his father’s hunting parties gave Oscar a camera as a tip, and that started his love of photography. He went on to develop a distinguished career as a commercial photographer, but all his life he also took pictures of nature. He was gaining fame for his landscape photography when he died in 2002.

This article includes excerpts and information from Seeing the Light, by Tom Shroder and John Barry.

Photo courtesy Clyde Butcher

Oscar Thompson, on a swamp walk

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A T ITS MOST ELEMENTAL, the Everglades cradles the transition of land into sea. It is a primeval world that has entranced chroniclers and writers for centuries. Hernando D’Escalante Fontaneda, a shipwrecked Spanish teenager captured by Florida’s Calusa Indians in 1575, was among the first known scribes. He wrote: “Large numbers of very fat eels are found in the rivers, some of them as large as a man’s thigh, and enormous trout, almost as large as a man’s body; although smaller ones are also found. The natives eat lizards, snakes, and rats.”

Hundreds of writers have dipped into the glades since then. The classic work, of course, is *Everglades: River of Grass* (Pineapple Press, 1997—50th anniversary edition) by Marjory Stoneman Douglas. First published in 1947, it catapulted the Everglades toward national recognition as a unique ecological system and not just a fetid swamp. This book was published just before the Everglades was designated a national park. Since then, several other “eco-books” have helped change the wetland’s image from one of a noisome swamp to that of an important ecosystem. Recent work includes Michael Grunwald’s *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise* (Simon and Schuster, 2007); and Jack Davis’s *An Everglades Providence: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the American Environmental Century* (University of Georgia Press, 2009).

But while nonfiction builds a foundation for understanding, sometimes fiction can capture a larger truth. Peter Matthiessen’s *Shadow Country* (Modern Library, 2008) reflects the dark side of a last frontier, where men settle their accounts with violence. This visceral tale of the notorious murderer Edgar Watson is Matthiessen’s retelling of his original trilogy on the Watson saga. *Shadow Country* won the National Book Award. It contains few rhapsodies to nature, but suggests something dire, even in its opening lines: “Seabirds are aloft again, a tattered few. The white terns look dirtied in the somber light, feeling out an element they no longer trust.” Threatening, fascinating, dangerous, possessed of a terrible power, Watson himself is metaphor for the swamp.

Another grim story, this one a nonfiction work, tells of environmentalism’s first martyr. Stuart Melver’s *Death in the Everglades: The Murder of Guy Bradley* (University of Florida Press, 2003) chronicles how this game warden was shot by a man who illegally hunted egrets and other birds in order to sell their plumes to the millinery industry.

Turn to autobiographies for plainspoken language describing the beauty and travail of life on the ground. Four come to mind. *Crackers in the Glade: Life and Times in the Old Everglades* (University of Georgia Press, 2000) describes the 20th-century world of fisherman and folk artist Rob Storter, whose ancestors built the house that was converted into Everglades City’s famed Rod and Gun Club in about 1893. This book, written with Betty Savidge Briggs, is illustrated throughout with Storter’s sketches depicting the places he loved.

The life of another such pioneer, Glen Simmons, recalls a rough-and-

And a first-person account by Buffalo Tiger, first chief of the Miccosukee Tribe, discusses life in the glades from the Indian perspective. *Buffalo Tiger: A Life in the Everglades* (Bison Press, 2002) written with historian Harry Kersey, also recounts the long battle to gain U.S. recognition for the Tribe—including the strategic trip Tiger led to Havana in 1959. There, he and a tribal contingent requested and received Fidel Castro’s official recognition of the Miccosukee Tribe as separate from the Seminole Tribe. The U.S. government previously had rebuffed this request. After the Castro recognition, however, the anticommunist U.S. administration granted its recognition—after extracting a promise that the tribe would stay away from Cuba.

The impact of agriculture, particularly the sugar industry, is an important part of any glades study. Among the most recent works is *Raising Cane in the Glades: The Global Sugar Trade and the Transformation of Florida* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). Written by Gail Hollander, professor at Florida International University, this book has been compared to Sidney Mintz’s classic study of sugar’s influence as a global commodity, *Sweetness and Power*. David McCally’s *The Everglades: An Environmental History* (University Press of Florida, 2000) argues that sugar cane cultivation must end or change dramatically to save the wetland. It is more difficult to locate work that discusses the sugar industry’s perspective. One is *Sugar and the Everglades*, published in 1939 by the United States Sugar Corporation.

Young readers will also enjoy fictional adventures, beginning with Kirk Munroe’s *Big Cypress* (W.A. Wilde and Co., 1894). Other favorites might include *Frank Armstrong’s Vacation* (Hurst and Company, 1911), about a boy’s Everglades exploits; this book was written by Mathew Colton, pen name of Walter Camp, considered the “father of American football” and author of the first All-America list. More recent titles include Carolyn Keene’s Nancy Drew mystery, *Lost in the Everglades* (Aladdin, 2001), and *Deadly Waters: A Mystery in Everglades National Park* by Gloria Skurzynski and Alane Ferguson (National Geographic Children’s Books, 2007).

Much more literature on the Everglades is available to teach and tease, and you can be hooked exploring it. Try *The Florida Panther: Life and Death of a Vanishing Carnivore* (Island Press, 1997), for example. For more, check out FORUM EXTRA! at www.flahum.org.

JON WILSON, retired after 35 years as a journalist in St. Petersburg, researches and writes for FORUM.

A Jamaican laborer cuts sugar cane near Clewiston in 1947.
Burmese pythons were popular exotic pets in 1990s Florida. As hatchlings they looked cute and cost only about $20 in local pet stores. But this Southeast Asian species grows to be one of the largest snakes in the world—reaching more than 20 feet in length and weighing 200 pounds. When pet pythons grew too big to handle, many were released into the Everglades, wildlife experts believe. The formidable predators adapted well to this swampy, subtropical habitat and began breeding. Their numbers now are estimated to be in the thousands. Pythons are probably the most publicized of numerous exotic animals and plants that are pushing native species out of the Everglades. “They’re really a threat to this ecosystem, one that we’re spending billions to restore,” says Skip Snow, a wildlife biologist at Florida’s Everglades National Park.

This article includes excerpted information from National Wildlife Federation magazine.

Holding On

BY ANNE MCCRARY SULLIVAN

I’m thinking of them tonight, locked in their embrace, waters dark and cold. Do they have any warmth to give each other? Late yesterday, near exhaustion, they lay in the slough overhung with reed and pond apple, motionless—gator’s jaws clamped onto the python’s thick muscle, python wrapped around the gator’s rough trunk. It started early, morning light slicing water. The python coiled and writhed, head waving above the fight. The gator wrestled, then backed from the slough, submerged and swam through open water—a gator drowns its prey—but when he surfaced, the python’s head lifted, stared him in the eye. All day it went like that, slough to slough, diving and surfacing, python wrapped around the gator’s snout, then a lurch, python in the gator’s mouth but the head still lifting. What respect they must have for each other by now. Neither lets go. Neither is winning. They aren’t even fighting. They lie in the dark and hold on.

From Ecology II: Throat Song from the Everglades by Anne McCrary Sullivan, a Florida Master Naturalist who has been Poet in Residence in Everglades National Park and in Big Cypress National Reserve.
FOR MANY YEARS, my image of the Everglades was a tundra-like expanse of water as I cycled along the Tamiami Trail from Naples to Miami. My perception changed radically when I accompanied a group of Floridians to the Everglades for FHCS’s first cultural-travel “Gathering” in 1994. These scholars, led under the baton of off-the-beaten-path destinations are still offered by FH today.

Everglades City served as our home base for the weeklong. Clinging to the edge of the Florida peninsula, this frontier town belied everything I had come to associate with Florida from Disney and Cape Canaveral. As Pete Gallagher describes it in his article about Florida’s Frontiers, it is a town of “terns, cicadas, old men of the sea, good honest people—gun-toting, voracious, sportsmen, all manner of it—do-wells, waiters, and mechanics mixed in with millionaires, CEG, and MIA.”

Our week-long exploration led us deep into the culture and habitat of the Everglades, providing a perspective few are afforded. Miccosukee Elder Buffalo Tiger took us on a wilderness hike to his ancient home. He told us about the Everglades of his childhood when fish were so plentiful that they would jump into his canoe. Anthropology Professor Perry Wirt showed us historic photographs of the Seminole Indians hunting alligators and creating patchwork for the tourists who stopped at their roadside attraction on the Tamiami Trail. We stood on the porch of the Smallwood Storehouse, overlooking a panoramic view of the Ten Thousand Islands and had no trouble imagining the world brought to life in H. Rider Haggard’s All Quiet Land and Quiet Wave.

Much like our Everglades Gathering, this issue of FORUM puts a human face on the unique ecosystem that wetland Michael Grandad describes as “not quite land and not quite water, but a sassy confection of the two.” While there is much we can do for our Everglades, the story of this ancient landscape, the anthropologist believes it is also home to North America’s first people—and later inhabited by pre-colonial Calusa and Tequesta tribes, runaway slaves, and the Seminoles and Miccosukee bands.

My drive on the Tamiami Trail are different today. I think about young Buffalo Tiger and his caie full of fish, I imagine the brutal killing of Bird. I wonder, I hope paleoindian people survived on this punishing land on this windy day and I worry about those with whom we are struggling to preserve it. I remember the cautionary words of Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who spent the last half of her 108 years protecting the Everglades for her children, as the Everglades and creating patchwork for the tourists who stopped at their roadside attraction on the Tamiami Trail. We stood on the porch of the Smallwood Storehouse, overlooking a panoramic view of the Ten Thousand Islands and had no trouble imagining the world brought to life in H. Rider Haggard’s All Quiet Land and Quiet Wave.
Meet outlaws, poets, and old men of the sea on Florida’s last frontier.

Why a mosquito-bitten photographer hopes to capture the soul of the swamp.

How we created an ecological mess—and how we’re trying to fix it.

Voices of the Everglades

Lyrical, beautiful, and haunted by a sense of a place unique to all the world, the music and stories collected on this very special CD celebrate the people, the animals, and the places collectively known as the Florida Everglades.

Here is the actual voice of beloved smuggler Tootch Brown crooning about his Chatham Bend island home—and here is Steve Blackwell’s nostalgic ode recalling Brown himself. Ralph Martin, on guitar and banjo, reenacts the vigilante death of outlaw Edgar Watson. Boomslang Meade’s earthy lullaby for the “River of Grass” evokes the spirit of this place. Chief Jim Billie and Jennifer Warner sing a duet of Billie’s signature “Sawgrass Flower” love song.

As inimitable as the exotic landscape itself, this is the finest collection ever assembled of Florida songs, stories, and interviews about the Everglades.

Available only from the Florida Humanities Council

To order, visit www.flahum.org

Agenda and registration details will be available by early November. To receive details as soon as they are available, or to add your name to the tentative registration list, contact lberling@flahum.org or 727-873-2006