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Calusa Digest



Vol. XXIV, No. 2

Serving Southwest Florida

March, 2002

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Interested in receiving notification of **Emergency Action Alerts**? Send your email address to: **bobbieleeasty@aol.com**. You will be notified of events that require prompt action such as letters, phone calls, and email.

See our web page: **www.sierraclub.org/chapters/fl/calusa/enviro.htm**

White House's Everglades Claims Mostly Hype

The Everglades restoration still has nearly four decades to go. But already, the White House says, the effort is rescuing South Florida's endangered species from the threat of extinction.

So says President Bush's proposed \$2.13 trillion federal budget. The document also appears to endorse a still-unfinished proposal to relax legal protections next year for the American crocodile and four other species in Florida.

Both statements astonished some Everglades advocates. They accused the Bush Administration of trying to claim credit for a restoration that has yet to occur and may not occur for a decade or more into the \$8.4 billion project.

"Do they think we're stupid?" asked Barbara Lange, Everglades co-chairperson of the Sierra Club. "How can they put that in the budget when no restoration will supposedly take place for 20 years?"

Even if the crocodiles and some other species are improving, the Everglades restoration had nothing to do with it, argued Terry Rice, a retired U.S. Army Corps of Engineers colonel who headed its Everglades efforts from 1994 to 1997. "There's a great danger in claiming success using smokescreens," Rice said. "In the long run, you're not going to be able to fool the public."

In the budget proposal that went to Congress on 4 February, the Bush Administration touted the \$245 million it would spend next year helping the Everglades. That includes money for the

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Calusa Digest is a publication of the Calusa Group of the Sierra Club and is published ten times yearly. Subscription is included with Sierra Club dues or can be obtained by non-members from the Calusa Group for \$5/year.

Big Cypress National Preserve

The National Park Service is under pressure to make a quick decision on a petition for massive oil and gas exploration in Florida's Big Cypress National Preserve. Tell the Preserve's Superintendent Donahue that you **OPPOSE** the petition and that an Environmental Impact Statement should be completed before any decision is made.

The Big Cypress watershed, spanning 729,000 acres across southern Florida, was designated as the nation's first National Preserve in 1974 to assure the conservation, protection, and preservation of this unique area. Located next to Everglades National Park and comprising 40 percent of the Everglades ecosystem, the Preserve is a buffer zone against encroaching development and associated pollution. Together, they comprise one of the most spectacular and biologically important ecosystems on the planet.

The Preserve is home to the highly endangered Florida panther, with only fifty left in the world. It also provides a much-needed dwelling for the Red-Cockaded woodpecker, also endangered.

When the National Park Service (NPS) purchased the Big Cypress lands, they failed to acquire the underlying mineral interests. Since then, the Collier Resources Company, owner of the mineral rights, has offered to sell those rights to NPS, but the government has chosen otherwise. In order to ratchet up the pressure on the Bush Administration to cash them out, the Collier Resources Company has now

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FREE Readings and Estero Bay Buddies Annual Meeting and Recognition Ceremony

Thursday, 7 March, 7:00 PM
Rain or Shine
FGCU University Plaza

Tentative Schedule of Events

7:00 - 7:15 Introductions
7:15 - 8:30 Readings by Janisse Ray and Peter Matthiessen
8:30 – 9:00 Book signing
9:00 – 9:15 Slideshow about EBB
9:15 – 9:45 Recognition ceremony for EBB members and volunteers
9:45 – 10:00 EBB Annual Meeting

This event is hosted by FGCU, sponsored by the Estero Bay Buddies, and co-sponsored by the Friends of Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves, Friends of Rookery Bay, ECOSanibel, Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation, Sierra Club of Florida, Calusa Group, and the Audubon Society of Southwest Florida, Inc. For more information and to RSVP, contact Kelly at **463-3240**
Or email **kelly.victory@dep.state.fl.us**

Janisse Ray is a poet, naturalist, and the author of Ecology of a Cracker Childhood (memoir and nature writings). Her 1999 memoir tells how a childhood spent in rural isolation was transformed into a passion to save the vanishing longleaf pine ecosystem.

Peter Matthiessen is a writer of fiction and non-fiction, and his works include Far Tortuga, At Play in the Fields of the Lord, The Snow Leopard (which won the National Book Award), and Killing Mister Watson. As a naturalist and explorer, he has been a member of expeditions ranging across five continents from the Amazon to Nepal.

EBB Ribbon Cutting

Saturday, 16 March, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Who: Estero Bay Buddies Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the Boardwalk and Viewing Area
What: Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) funded boardwalk and viewing area; free guided tour and good time for friends and family
Where: Winkler Point Public Access to the Estero Bay State Buffer Preserve.

It is located at the very southern end of Winkler Road, just south of Summerlin Road. Turn south off of Summerlin Road onto Winkler Road at the intersection with the new Publix. Winkler Road can be found between Bass Road and Gladiolus Drive off of Summerlin Road. Meet at the kiosk to the east of the cul-de-sac at the end of Winkler. Dress for hiking: long pants and sturdy shoes, wear hat and sunscreen. Bring water and snacks (some refreshments will be provided).

In case of bad weather the event will be cancelled. Call 463-3240 Monday, 18 March to find out when the celebration will be rescheduled.

RSVP is requested. Please contact Kelly at **463-3240** or email **kelly.victory@dep.state.fl.us**

**Update from ABM
Representative Meg Hutchins**

As your Agency for Bay Management rep I want to update you on their activities. ABM was designated during mitigation for FGCU as an oversight agency for Estero Bay watershed. Proposed activities for 2002 are available by phone **992-0641** or E-mail at **flmeghutchins@aol.com**.

- ABM has been reforming and tightening their membership, procedures, and principles to avoid complaints or doubts about their decisions.

- ABM has been receiving presentations on planned developments of all kinds, giving members an opportunity to question presenters in detail. With this detailed information added to the expertise of the members, the group is then able to give opinions on the aspect of the project related to the health of Estero Bay to permitting agencies and the developers.

- It was brought out that discussions are going on between golf course developers and Lee County regarding lowering water quality and allowing more air pollution. There is the possibility that planned golf courses east of I-75 will be allowed to draw down the water table enough to allow salt water intrusion.

- I requested that the City of Bonita Springs present their plans for turning four blocks of Bonita Beach Road that borders the Bay on the

north into commercial marinas. Since only three marinas in Southwest Florida have received the Department of Environmental Protection "clean" designation and since Lee County has the highest number of deaths to manatees from boats, I would like to see this nipped in the bud now.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes, I want to be a member of the Sierra Club

Yes, I want to give a gift certificate.

My Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone Number _____ E-Mail Address _____

I understand that a gift announcement card will be sent for my use. I've entered my name and address above and the recipient's name and address below.

Gift Recipient's Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

(Check One)	Individual	Joint
INTRODUCTORY	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	
REGULAR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35	<input type="checkbox"/> \$43
SUPPORTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$68
CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$120	<input type="checkbox"/> \$128
SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$19	<input type="checkbox"/> \$27
STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$19	<input type="checkbox"/> \$27
LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250

PAYMENT METHOD: CHECK MASTERCARD VISA

CARDHOLDER SIGNATURE _____

CARD NUMBER _____

EXPIRATION DATE _____

Contributions, gifts, and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible; they support effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to Sierra magazine and \$1.00 for your chapter newsletter.

Enclose payment information and mail to:

SIERRA CLUB
P.O. Box 52968, BOULDER, CO 80322-2968 F99QV 3303 -1

Residents of Canada may remit in Canadian funds

Notes from Outings Chair Ryan Combs

On Sunday, 10 February 2002, your new Calusa Outings Chair led his maiden trip into the Crew Marsh Trail System. Our hiking team enjoyed a peaceful and relaxing walk through this lush ecosystem. We had some practice with field identification of wildflowers and animal tracks, talked about survival in lightning prone areas, and learned some land navigation by figuring out how to find True North using only a common wristwatch. Plans for future outings were discussed.

All Sierra Club members and friends are welcome and encouraged to join future outings. This is the perfect season to enjoy the beauty of Florida without having to endure the bugs or the heat. To suggest a trip or ask any questions, feel free to call Ryan Combs at **495-7962**. I look forward to seeing you on the March outing!

OUTINGS

- 1. Arrive 10 minutes before outing to get signed in. Every effort will be made to start outings on time. Please be prompt!*
- 2. A small fee will be charged for every outing. All outings are rated EASY unless otherwise specified.*
- 3. IMPORTANT! Call Leader first to be sure outing is still scheduled.*
- 4. You don't have to be a member to come to an outing. Everyone is welcome!*

Everglades

Continued from page 1

four-decade restoration that then-President Clinton signed into law fourteen months ago.

In fact, the White House proposal adds, "Everglades restoration efforts may start to pay off as early as September, 2003." That's because five endangered and threatened species in South Florida "are expected" to be given relaxed legal status, either downgraded to "threatened," or removed entirely from the federal government's list of protected species.

The White House proposal doesn't name the species, but federal biologists said they include the endangered American crocodile, which lives only at the state's southern tip. The others are the Schaus swallowtail butterfly, found in Miami-Dade County and the Keys, and three plants found only in Central Florida: wireweed, sandlace and papery whitlow-wort. All those species are improving for various reasons, said Kalani Cairns, an assistant field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Vero Beach.

The crocodile's population has roughly doubled in the past 25 years, partly because of protections it receives in canals at Florida Power & Light's Turkey Point nuclear power plant near Homestead. The three plant species are benefiting from state and federal land purchases. Changes in mosquito control practices and a federal breeding program aided the butterfly.

None of that is in the Everglades project. But they are part of the government's broader program to help South Florida's environment, Cairns said.

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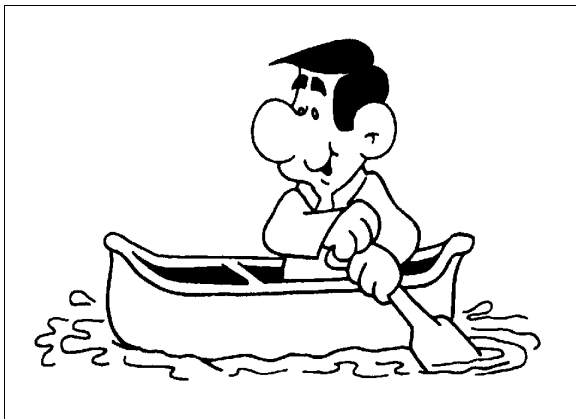
Everglades

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But it's misleading to try to tie those species to the Everglades plan, as the White House tried to do, argued George Dalrymple, who helped the wildlife service write a massive plan for helping South Florida's endangered species in the late 1990s. "It's mostly political hyperbole," said Dalrymple, a board member of the Florida Wildlife Federation.

Cairns said the wildlife service's proposal would remove all protections for the whitlow-wort and would reclassify the other species as threatened, with final action expected in September 2003.

One federal Everglades leader promised that the final decision will be based on science, not politics. "I'm going to be looking hard to make sure there's an integrity to this process," said Terrence "Rock" Salt, executive director of the federal South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force.



Big Cypress

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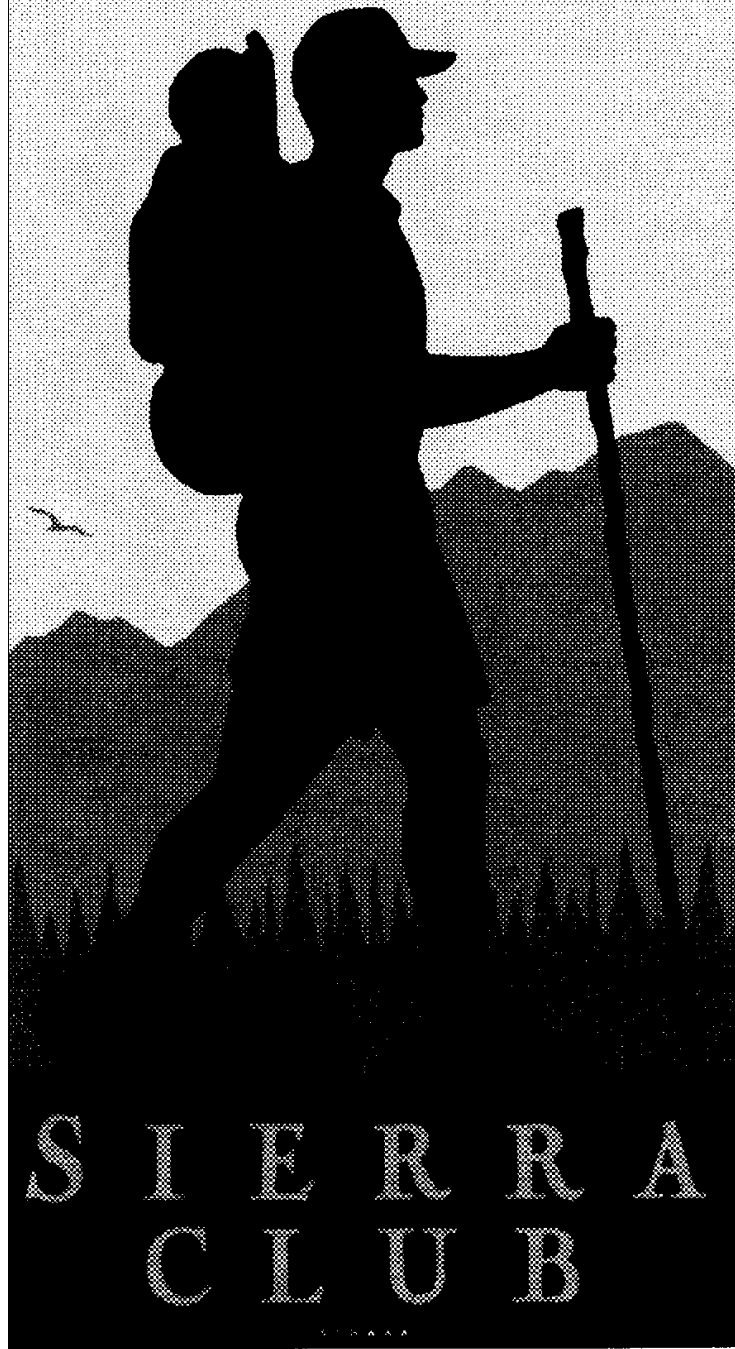
petitioned NPS to move forward with a sweeping plan for oil and gas exploration.

NPS is considering approving the plan quickly based on an inadequate and abbreviated Environmental Assessment, rather than through an Environmental Impact Statement. If approved, the plan would allow the drilling of 14,700 wells using high velocity seismic explosives. Eight miles of new roads would run directly through panther habitat and cross over the National Scenic Florida Trail.

The Preserve has already been damaged by unmanaged swamp buggy use, and its delicate ecosystem would be forever scarred if oil and gas exploration are allowed to expand within its boundaries. Acres and acres of wetlands would be filled and destroyed. Surface water could be contaminated from oil and gas spills, and fluid leaks from work site equipment. The few remaining Florida panthers would be driven from their protected habitat, while 47,000 acres of vegetation would be cut down or driven over.

The Park Service solicited comments on the petition through February 25th.

Come hike with us!



**S I E R R A
C L U B**

General Meeting

Second Thursday of Every Month

Calusa Nature Center Classroom

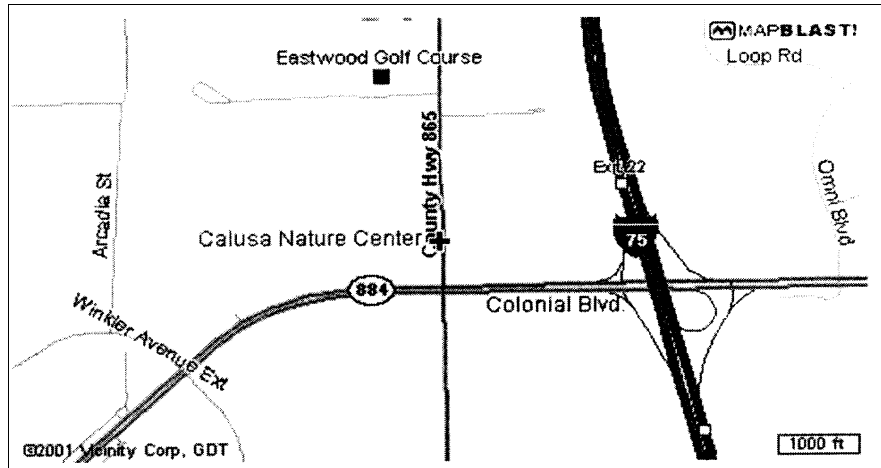
14 March 2002

6:00 – 6:30 PM Socialize and Snack

6:30 – 7:30 PM **Tips for Minimizing Everyday Environmental Impact**

7:45 – 9:00 PM Executive Committee Meeting for discussion of local issues

Everyone Welcome!



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