

LAST CHANCE FOR THE EVERGLADES



—F.S.N.B.

Campground in Everglades National Park—If, as authorized in January, a canal is “unplugged” along the park border, it “could complete the ruin of . . . a unique scenic and ecological treasure.”

By WALLACE STEGNER

THE Everglades National Park, swarming with exotic bird life and crawling with delightfully shuddery reptiles, is a unique scenic and ecological treasure. Since 1961, it also has been a conservation issue of the first magnitude. For here a combination of inertia, conflict of interests, competing land uses, natural disasters, and human mismanagement have combined to place an incomparable million-acre preserve in danger of imminent extinction. This year may determine its fate.

Paradoxically, in view of the park's southern-Florida location—a region of usually heavy annual rainfall—the root problem is lack of fresh water. After a period of abnormally low rainfall beginning in 1961, the problem presumably was partially solved in March 1966 by an interim agreement between the National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Central and South Florida Flood Control District. The agreement guaranteed the Everglades's Shark River Slough minimal water when and as available until a permanent agreement could be worked out. The arrangement, however, did not guarantee that water would be provided through the Shark River Slough during low stages in nearby Lake Okeechobee or in the “conservation area” formed by the Corps' dikes.

A solution has now been postponed by an unexpected delay in completion of a study by the Corps of Engineers. The Corps had been scheduled to deliver a study report to Congress in June. Its report now has been postponed until fall. Meanwhile, at a meeting on January 24 involving Senator Holland and Congressman Fascell

of Florida, as well as representatives of the Corps, the Park Service, the District, and other interested agencies, the decision was made to risk a major intrusion of salt water into the park by “pulling the plug” on Canal 111 on the eastern border of the park—something the park has been resisting, and the Corps, the District, and agricultural interests have been wanting for a year. If the decision sticks, this is a defeat for the park that could complete the ruin begun earlier by flood-control operations further north. The decision will probably stick unless every public pressure and some form of legal action are brought to bear on it, and unless the proposal of a diversion canal, made at a meeting in Jacksonville on March 24, should turn out to get all the contending agencies off the hook. That proposal is still under study as this is written.

WHY should anybody care? To answer this, one must know something of the history of the park and its present problems. The Everglades National Park, the most “unreclaimable” part of the watery wilderness stretching from Lake Okeechobee to the Florida keys, was authorized by Congress in 1939, and finally opened on December 6, 1947. It was a year of heavy rain, and floodwaters scouring the overdrained country south of the lake had badly flooded agricultural land and the Atlantic Coast communities. Even as the park received its first visitors, the Corps of Engineers was making preliminary proposals to Congress about a Comprehensive Flood Control Plan for central and southern Florida.

In the proposal were specific assurances to the new park: “The proposed plan of improvement . . . would not

damage or interfere with this great national park as the purposes of the comprehensive plan are aimed at restoring and preserving natural conditions over areas which appear unsuited to agriculture. During large floods . . . substantial releases of water through the controlled Tamiami Trail embankment would result in flows into the national park area which would be similar to those which prevailed when the natural flood waters of the Everglades passed to the sea through that region. In dry periods it would be possible, because of the proposed conservation areas, to release water into the park area which would assist in reducing fires and other damages which accompany periods of drought. In brief, it is believed that this comprehensive water control plan and the national park plan are complementary features of federal activity necessary to restore and preserve the unique Everglades region.”

As a result of this and other equally specific assurances, the director of the Bureau of the Budget and the National Park Service concurred in the plan, which was authorized by Congress on June 30, 1948. The entire Engineers' Report containing these assurances was incorporated into the act as HD 643. Presumably the Corps meant what it had repeatedly said while the project was under discussion. Nevertheless, it was tragic that the Park Service did not know enough about the ecology of its new area to demand more particular guarantees, for, as it turned out, the Central and South Florida Flood Control Project was not complementary to the national park; it was incompatible with it. Further, after construction began, the Park Service discovered that it did not have as much to say about pro-

ject plans as it had expected to. It got to review plans already proposed, but if it objected to anything it had no power to get it changed.

As successive canals and levees cut off more and more of the slow ooze of surface water southward, the park, which was nearly all water, began to feel the drought, and it became ever clearer that what had seemed a simple, ageless swampland ecology was actually as fragile as a glacier meadow. It was balanced between land and water, fresh and salt, and a very slight upsetting of the balances threw countless interdependent communities of life out of adjustment and threatened the very thing for which the park had been created. Trying to make a partnership between that water-hungry swamp and a well-drained agricultural area was like asking for a partnership between a gar and an alligator.

On July 18, 1961, in the middle of a year of abnormally low rainfall, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall wrote to the Secretary of the Army expressing the Park Service's concern over the mounting effects of the water cutoff. He indicated his dissatisfaction with the way the park's needs had been ignored in project planning, and requested firm agreements covering amounts, places, and times of water release by the Corps and by the District. The Secretary of the Army let seven dry weeks go by before he replied. When he did reply, he said that in flood times the park would, of course, get the major part of the water, as in the past. But "during low-flow periods the water supply requirements may easily exceed the supply available and it may be necessary to allocate the available water to potential water users." The flood control project had become a reclamation project sympathetic to the needs of agricultural interests. Moreover, said the Secretary of the Army, the authorization for the Central and Southern Florida Project had placed the responsibility for water allocation "on the State cooperating agency"—the District, which was in direct competition with the park for water. And though the Corps had always considered coordination with the National Park Service essential, the Secretary of the Army added that "the authorization for the Central and Southern Florida Project does not provide for construction of facilities for the benefit of the Everglades National Park."

The West would have had a word for it: "euchred." The West would have had a law for it, too, since Western water law very early developed the right of prior appropriation. But Florida has no such law. And Florida had a land boom going in the regions north

and east of the park which had been reclaimed by the Corps' canals and levees. Tomato growers got the water; the park stayed dry.

Through four years of continued drought, the sloughs dried up and the fish died by millions and the alligators and birds gathered to fewer and more savagely disputed holes. The Audubon Society and other conservation groups filled the press with angry questions, but the Corps steadfastly maintained that it had no authority to control any but the floodwaters. All other releases must be made by the District. Asked why, in infrequent flood periods, it continued to dump water into the Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico instead of turning it into the desperately thirsty park, it said it had no authorization or appropriation to build structures or pay for pumping. Asked by what machinery it had turned control of all non-flood releases over to the state, it replied that it had given "formal assurances." Asked what those assurances were, and whether they were any more binding than the assurances of cooperation with the park incorporated into HD 643, the Corps did not, so far as I can discover, reply.

IN April 1962, Secretary Udall proposed a water study, to be made by the Corps, and in two successive resolutions in May 1962 and June 1963 the Senate Committee on Public Works requested it. That is the report which was to have been completed by June of this year and is now postponed.

Even if it had been completed on schedule, it was aimed at long-term solutions and could be of no immediate help. Meantime, 1962 was dry. It also saw the closing of the gates in the Tamiami Trail embankment and the complete exclusion of the natural flowage from the park. The year 1963 was dry; 1964 was dry; 1965 was dry. Yet in 1963 the Corps dumped 33,000 acre-feet of "excess" water through the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Canals into the Atlantic and the Gulf; in 1964 it dumped 163,000 acre-feet; in 1965, 186,000 acre-feet.

And in the park the remaining sloughs dried, the gator holes were fewer, thicker with suffering wildlife. Lacking their normal food, gators ate other gators. The crackling flats stank of dead fish and were lined with turkey buzzards, the only beneficiaries of the Corps' mastery of the floodwaters. Several years in succession the rare wood ibis, the only American variety of stork, abandoned their eggs and young to the crows because the food supply that must be within a few minutes' flight from the nest was simply not there. Destructive fires swept the River of Grass. Rangers, struggling to save what little could be

saved while their superiors in Washington fought for water to rescue the park, blasted artificial gator holes in the limestone and captured a hundred or more alligators and a Noah's Ark selection of other wildlife and brought it to these inadequate sanctuaries.

In May 1965, the District was still releasing no water, the Corps was still declaring its helplessness. But the Audubon Society, which had been born of the struggle to protect the wading birds that had once made the Everglades a world wonder, had roused so much public protest that the executive director of the flood control district complained about the unfavorable publicity, including some in Miami papers.

By June, with the park in desperate circumstances, the Park Service had held meetings with Senator Holland, Representative Fascell, the District, and the Corps, and managed to get approved a sump-and-pump operation designed to provide 100 cubic feet per second of water for the parched Everglades. But no water source from wells within the park could be found, and the plan came to nothing. Even if it had, it would have been, as one conservationist remarked, like spitting on a forest fire.

By August, the grimly persistent Park Service and the growing chorus of pub-



—National Park Service.

Roseate spoonbills—"Many of the park's rarest and most beautiful birds [are] endangered."

lic anger had forced the beginning of discussions to find some temporary relief. The interim agreement was finally worked out, and, on March 22 of last year, was approved by the Florida Board of Conservation. Ironically, shortly after the agreement went into effect, it began to rain—1966 was a year of near-record precipitation. The minimum of 280 acre-feet per day provided under the interim agreement, plus 67 inches of rain, rescued the Everglades just short of total

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Slavery Still Plagues the Earth

A SHOCKING news story cabled by Dana Adams Schmidt to *The New York Times* reports that the buying and selling of human beings is by no means dead in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, though slavery was legally abolished by Crown Prince Faisal on November 2, 1962. To learn that Saudi Arabian slavery and the African slave trade that helps to feed it persist despite legal repudiation is likely to astound anyone aware of any history at all. The American Civil War ended slavery in North America, or so it was supposed, and Russia's freeing of the serfs in 1861 closed the door to European slavery, or so we were taught in school. Yet one has but to go to the United Nations building in New York or read the reports of world antislavery societies to realize that, as the human family approaches a hopefully enlightened twenty-first century, human slavery in one form or another has actually been on an increase since the end of World War II. It is an unbelievably persistent plague, this ancient pestilence of one human being's bondage to another.

When Ethiopia sought participation in the League of Nations in 1923 the existence of slavery within its borders was used as an argument against the country's admission. But the government pledged that it would, step by step, abolish slavery, so the League admitted Ethiopia, though it was not until 1942 that slavery was legally eliminated there. In Saudi Arabia the existence of slavery was officially confirmed in 1936 when King Ibn Saud decreed certain regulations regarding the condition of

slaves, naming the terms under which they were to receive their freedom, though this same decree authorized the Saudi Arabian Minister of the Interior to license slave traders.

The question of slavery has been on every agenda of the League of Nations and the U.N. since these world assemblies began to function. But we have been told privately at the U.N. that the slavery issue has been downgraded once again in recent months and that little or nothing can be expected in the direction of a world resolution or edict to eliminate both slavery and the slave trade. Though all governments that are members of the U.N. publicly condemn slavery and almost all deny that slave trading exists in their territories, many are loath to bring the issue to a head on the floor of the U.N. Slavery is known to exist in many parts of the Arabian peninsula, as well as in several African countries. Middle Eastern and African governments are now in the majority in the U.N. and seem to resent the slavery issue or a discussion of it on grounds that it has been raised to discredit newly independent countries. Many of the newly elected African states oppose any U.N. action on slavery and have the secret support of much of the Middle East.

One of the reasons why debate on slavery is seldom heard anywhere in the U.N. stems, apparently, from the sensitivity of many of its members to current labor practices ranging from outright slave trading to unofficial governmental slavery and forced labor. As recently as March 22 the United Na-

tions Human Rights Commission voted in Geneva to ask Secretary General U Thant for up-to-date material on the problem of halting slavery and the slave trade. The United States was one of the sponsors of a Geneva resolution coupling colonialism, particularly South African apartheid, with slavery and urging that all be eradicated as soon as possible. But, privately, those at the U.N. will tell you that a U.N. resolution along these lines stands no chance with the present membership.

Col. Patrick Montgomery, secretary of the Antislavery Society of Britain and a man who has struggled for years to persuade the U.N. to enforce compliance of international conventions prohibiting slave trade and slavery, stated recently that slavery still exists in twenty-five or thirty countries. Apartheid and the more severe colonial patterns are, of course, forms of slavery. So is the state's policy in many Communist countries of sending political prisoners to slave labor camps, from which few return. It is probably this overlapping of interests on both sides of the Iron Curtain that keeps the slavery issue from coming within the purview of world law.

THE British antislavery group has been moving toward its humanitarian goal for the last 144 years, first on a national basis leading to the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833, and since then fostering international measures against slavery. The Society exposed forced labor on King Leopold's rubber plantations in the Belgian Congo in 1908 and, in the following year, through the force of world opinion, made the Amazon Rubber Company in Peru end operations based on enslavement of Indians. It was, of course, deeply interested in America's battle to eliminate slavery in the South and Russia's equally dramatic antiserfdom movement at virtually the same historical time. After World War I and World War II it helped, first, the League of Nations and, later, the United Nations, to draft antislavery conventions which have never been enforced in a hypocritical world.

The recent upsurge in slave trading now interesting the Antislavery Society has come about through increased purchasing power from oil revenues in the Middle East, where slavery has always been traditional. The Antislavery Society has even looked into the problem of European girls in harems who, either through enticement or kidnaping, disappeared without a trace, and the practice of taking children on pilgrimages to Mecca and selling them as slaves in the Middle East to pay for the return journey. A Roman Catholic organiza-

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