

# [The everglades americas wetland heritage](https://assignbuster.com/the-everglades-americas-wetland-heritage/)

The Everglades: Americas Wetland Heritage. Jennifer WalkerUniversity of PhoenixOctober 14, 2010 The Everglades: Americas Wetland Heritage. We consider our heritage as what we hold on to from the past, what we possess today and what we will gift to those here after us. The natural heritage we possess is irreplaceable and a vital, tangible link to our past, gifted as a legacy especially for our future generations. There are many natural wonders in the world such as the wilds of the Serengeti, the Tasmanian Wilderness, and the Rain Forests of the Amazon possessing the legacy we bequeath to our children. World heritage sites are locations where persons from any background can make a link to their past.

Heritage locations do not just belong to the persons who live among them but to anyone that may have an interest in them and that could be anyone in the world (UNESCO, 2009). North America is home to one such natural wonder: the Everglades National Park at the southern tip of the state of Florida in the United States of America. Inscripted in 2010 on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the Everglades is a vast, diverse wetland providing critical ecosystem services to the human population. The Everglades is the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States. The wetland is essential to the health and wellness of the continent and all its inhabitants by improving water quality filtering pollutants, absorbing excess nutrients, reducing flooding, and replenishing aquifers. The Everglades also enjoys recognition internationally as a diverse and rich habitat for extraordinary wildlife including many rare and endangered species. Surrounded by urban development, the Everglades have suffered from human actions altering the landscape since the 1800s.

Greatly reduced in size, the wetlands faces threats from a combination of agricultural and continued urban encroachment. Sustaining, preserving, and restoring this geographically local property is not only important to our country??™s heritage, but the world as well. As the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States the Everglades ecosystem encompasses two million acres of marshlands and swamps beginning at Lake Okeechobee in the center of Florida and extends to the Gulf of Mexico and Florida Bay.

The waters of the Everglades are more than 110 miles long and about 50 miles wide, although flowing as a river the movement of water is imperceptibly slow enough appear not to move. The perception of miles of shallow water flowing through mats of grass has given the Everglades the name of River of Grass (National Park Service, 2010). The Everglades ecosystem is part of one of the youngest and most geologically stable portions of the North American continent. The low-laying geology is a result of marine and freshwater processes causing limestone deposits to create dunes and beaches. The South Florida geology in concert with a wet, warm subtropical climate provides conditions for the vast freshwater marshland ecosystem.

Although known for spectacular landscapes, the Everglades are a historic home and hunting grounds for many groups of peoples. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish in 1513, an ancient indigenous people, the Calusa, largely inhabit the region. Dating to 1, 000 BCE, the Calusa forms a highly organized society whose remnants of the society includes long-distance canoes, large-scale architectural shell works, tools, and carved wood. Once the Spanish establish civilization most of the Calusa population disappears from the ravages of disease brought by foreign settlers. With the early colonial settlements and land development the settlers view the Everglades as a worthless swamp in dire need of reclamation.

During the mid-1800s draining of the swampland takes place without care or understanding of the effects the canals will wreck on the ecosystem. Lack of experience and understanding of the dynamics of the environment causes significant silting problems; the resilience of the Everglades ecosystem sustains the diversity of life within the system (National Wildlife Federation, 2010). Internationally recognized for extraordinarily diverse wildlife, the Everglades is home for more than 350 species of birds including roseate spoonbills, ibises, egrets, and storks.

Also known for many species of wading birds the Everglades hosts many numbers of small migratory birds, some species such as the Snail Kite and the Cape Sable seaside sparrow reside on the endangered species register. Among the most endangered of the Everglade??™s residents is the Florida panther with numbers less than 80, faces extinction if human encroachment is not tempered with preservation and sustainable interaction. The Everglades plays host to more than 27 species of snakes, numerous species of amphibians and freshwater mammals like the endangered West Indian manatee, and the bottlenose dolphin. Quite possibly the alligator is the animal most often linked to the Everglades. The American alligator, once a highly endangered reptile plays an important, critical role in the Everglades ecosystem.

Requiring ample supplies of freshwater to survive the alligator creates dens called gator holes to live in. Plant matter and mud piled up around the edges of the holes create dry ground on which other plants eventually grow. Gator holes are important to other species as well. As water becomes scarce during the dry season, many animals rely on the remaining water for food and protection. The gator holes attract crayfish, frogs, turtles, fish, and other aquatic species, all seeking refuge in the deeper waters of the gator holes.

Muskrats, otters, deer, and raccoons as well as a wide variety of beautiful birds, visit these sanctuaries to feed on the small animals that can be found there. Because alligators and the watery hollows they make play such an important role in the Everglades ecosystem, they are a keystone species because many other species depend upon them for their survival. This has earned them the nickname Keepers of the Glades (Closer to Nature, 2010). Along with the variety of wildlife there is an amazing diversity of plant life that includes wetland plants from sawgrass and bladderwort to cypress and mangrove trees. These plants act as filters for the waters flowing through them maintaining freshwater quality. Wetland plants give way to hardwood hummocks with pine trees, deciduous soft and hardwoods, and many species of flowers and orchids. Unfortunately, the Everglades are host to other species of plants and animals that pose a threat to the health and wellness of the ecosystem.

Some of the dwellers of the Everglades are not native to the land; some species are invaders residing through human introduction by design or in error, increasing the threat of irreversible destruction. Human encroachment poses three primary threats to the Everglades: Pollution, development, and invasive species. Of these threats the greatest impact occurs from plants and animals not native to the region. When ecosystems are not in balance native plants and animals struggle to survive, species from other parts of the world can take advantage of the changed conditions to establish themselves.

Some of the invasive species become a small part of the landscape whereas others thrive at the expense of native plants and wildlife. Pollution comes from man-made sources and can come from human development. With an ever-growing population, people need places to live, food to eat, factories to produce goods, and jobs. Florida is an amazing location with a sunny, warm climate and a peninsula in the ocean, making this a place where many people want to go. The three categories of development are agricultural, urban, and industrial. Introduced species can completely overthrow the ecological balance, causing living organisms to die off. Humans are not content to leave environments preserved in the state in which they discover them: Think of it as a house of cards, aggressively put a piece in, or remove a piece and the house falls down. Not all human involvement in the Everglades is harmful, as the ecosystem succumbs to the pressure of man to redesign the environment to suit the needs and desires of the growing population conservation efforts coincide with and offset development.

Early proponents for preservation and restoration include actions from 1900 Florida governor Jennings instituting bans on plume hunting, and the hiring of Guy Bradley to warden the area against poaching and hunting. Bradley??™s dedicated enforcement of the laws led to his murder in 1905 marking important attention to conservation efforts that continue today. Another ardent supporter of the natural wonders of the Everglades is Ernest Coe, who in 1928 began efforts to designate the vest wetlands as a national park. The persistence of Coe and his supporters leads Congress to acquire land and secure funding to create the Everglades as a national park in 1934 (National Park Service, 2010). Marjory Stoneman Douglas rounds out the trio of early conservationists dedicating their lives to preserving the Everglades for future generations. In 1947, Marjory Douglas publishes The Everglades: River of Grass, a work that influences the public understanding of the often misunderstood environment. Coinciding with the book is the official opening of the Everglades National Park instituting the initial large-scale effort to protect the unique biology of the region. Today the park is a premier wetland wilderness unlike any other on the planet (National Park Service, 2010).

Past dedication to restoration and preservation continues as the state of Florida, along with many environmental groups, launches the Save Our Everglades campaign in 1983 with the legislature passing the Everglades Forever Act on 1994, which authorizes the institution of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, and the Modified Water Delivery to Everglades National Park and C-111 Canal projects. This plan is the largest effort ever attempted to restore an ecosystem including the construction of 40, 000 acres of artificial marshes with the clear goal of making the Everglades appear and function as it did in 1900 prior to widespread urban interference (United States Army Corps of Engineers, 2010). Along with political support, the public plays a major role in the success of each endeavor. Each person dedicating his or her time and resources secures the continuance of the restoration projects.

The Florida Everglades consist of a unique ecosystem where some important first steps have been taken toward preservation and rehabilitation. Individual volunteer work in the national park, artists in residence documenting the beauty of the region, and teachers in the public schools educating the next generation of the stewards of our world are integral to the survival of our heritage. Society must learn from its past mistakes and begin to place a higher value on natures limited resources. The Everglades is not yet out of danger, but because some important first steps have been taken, there is good reason to hope our unique wetland and the extraordinary variety of wildlife within it continues as the heritage of our past, present, and future.

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