

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

THE EVERGLADES

A Paradise Between Land and Water

It is the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States and was the first national park to be designated, in 1947, solely on the value of its ecosystem, rather than its scenery. The Everglades are undoubtedly one of the planet's great wonders, and the world agrees: the park has been honored as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, International Biosphere Reserve, and Wetland of International Importance.

**Everglades National Park
is the third largest park
in the continental U.S.**

Here, the boundaries between water and earth blur, creating a haven for an astounding number of species. Florida panthers, crocodiles, and bears patrol the woodlands and coastal lowlands. A dozen species of frogs and more than a dozen species of turtles and tortoises find refuge in the mangroves, freshwater prairies, cypress groves, and estuaries. More than 350 species of birds preen, mate, rest, and feed here—John James Audubon once observed flocks of birds so great they blocked out the sun.

Sprawling across 1.5 million acres, Everglades National Park is the third largest park in the continental U.S. However, it is only 20 percent of the entire ecosystem. Biscayne National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve are also components of this endangered ecosystem that is threatened by urban sprawl and runoff from central Florida and surrounding communities.



Anhingas © Wirepec/Dreamstime

Everglades © Carlton Ward Jr.

Major Threats

The Everglades are an intricate system of wetlands, flora and fauna that create a river of grass. The quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water make all of the life within it possible and are critical to maintaining the delicate balance of life in this subtropical paradise. Booming population growth in Florida was accommodated by altering natural flow and draining much of America's Everglades.

Today, less than 50 percent of the historic Everglades ecosystem remains. Wading bird populations have declined by over 90 percent, fish stocks continue to plummet, and 68 species, including the Florida panther, wood stork, and American crocodile, are threatened or endangered.

Fertilizer and manure pollution from industrial agriculture wash down creeks into the Everglades, choking out native species and altering natural plant communities. Stormwater runoff carries waste into this delicate natural system, and limestone mining contaminates the aquifer and changes flow patterns.

The Everglades is dying of thirst. Municipalities, factories, farms, power

plants and families all depend upon the Everglades to naturally capture and store clean water. Increased water demands, shrinking wetland areas, and redirected water flows to prevent flooding have resulted in a shortage of flows essential to maintaining the extraordinarily diverse and abundant plant and animal communities that once thrived.

"The ecosystem is continuing to decline," says Dawn Shirreffs, Everglades Restoration Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. "The damage is still happening. We could get to a tipping point where it's too late and the ecosystem is not salvageable anymore."

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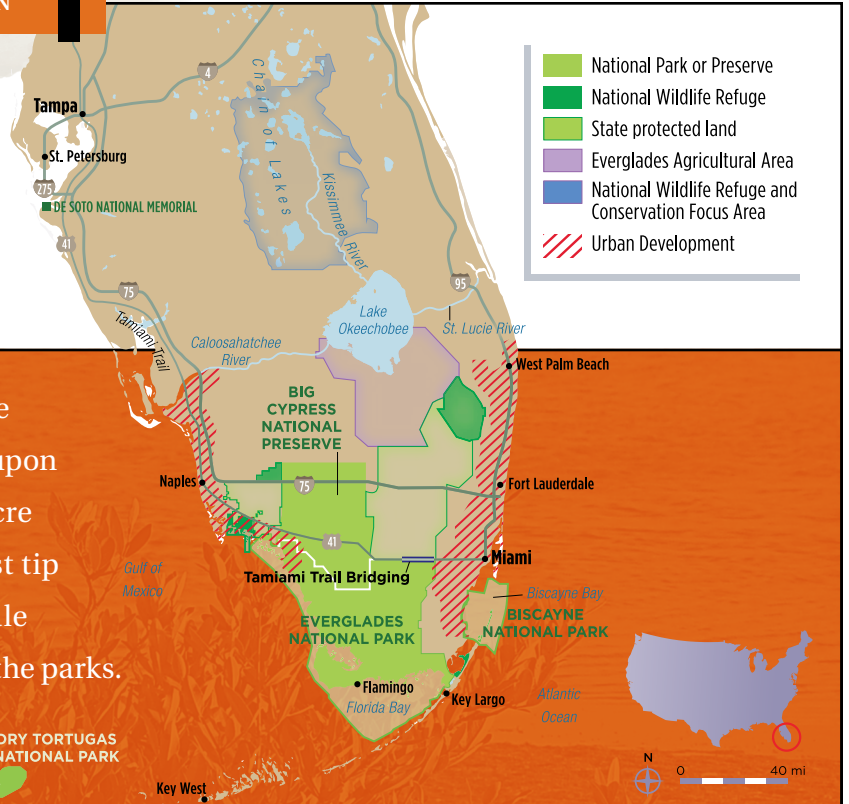
Dawn Shirreffs,
Everglades Restoration Program
Manager for the National Parks
Conservation Association.



Big-Thinking Solutions

Everglades National Park and the mangroves of Florida Bay rely upon water making the 1.5 million acre journey downstream to the southernmost tip of the ecosystem. An incredibly large-scale conservation effort is necessary to protect the parks.

DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK



With nearly 100 years of experience advocating for national parks, NPCA's policy expertise makes it a key player in restoring America's Everglades. NPCA works with government agencies and has assumed a leadership role in one of the country's most influential environmental coalitions to ensure restoration projects are built and deliver ecological benefits to Everglades and Biscayne National Parks.

NPCA is working to protect and restore the vast, wild areas of the Everglades by being a leading voice in executing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) authorized by Congress in 2000. This multi-billion-dollar collaboration between state and federal agencies is assuming more than 50 projects to restore the landscape.

NPCA helped identify and secure funding to elevate a one-mile stretch of road between Miami and Tampa, called Tamiami Trail. Once construction is complete, the project

will restore freshwater flow into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay—a major victory—by removing part of the road that acted as a dam. Our advocacy directly led Congress to authorize the National Park Service to build an additional 5.5 miles of bridging. Efforts are underway to secure funding for construction.

NPCA protects Biscayne and Everglades National Parks from adjacent incompatible development. Currently, Florida Power & Light Company recommends expanding a nuclear plant in Homestead, the gateway to Biscayne National Park, which would draw 80 million gallons of water daily from and Biscayne Bay. The utility also proposes to run transmission lines through Everglades National Park. NPCA generated more than 10,000 letters to the Park Service opposing the transmission lines and is working with the park and stakeholders to identify alternatives that would not impact Everglades and Biscayne National Parks.

Florida Panther

It is the state animal that inspired an NHL hockey team, however, the Florida panther is one of the world's most endangered mammals. This subspecies of the puma once ranged across the south, from Arkansas to Georgia, with males growing as large as 160 pounds and ranging some 200 miles. Now, fewer than 160 individuals remain in the wild, clustered in one of the region's last great wildlife refuges: the Everglades.



Cougar © iStockphoto



How Your Gift Will Make a Difference

P reserving a one-of-a-kind ecosystem for several of America's most biodiverse national parks is ambitious. Without the generous gifts of our donors, we simply wouldn't have the resources to engage communities, monitor, and implement key restoration projects, and protect natural resources. In addition to our large-scale policy advocacy, here are a just a few of the crucial projects donor gifts make possible:

- Taking inner-city Miami teenagers to Biscayne Bay to learn to fish and plant native species, helping to build a broad base of future parks advocates.
- Helping resuscitate the coral reef in Biscayne National Park by designating a 10,000-acre no-catch marine reserve. NPCA is working with recreational anglers and local dive companies to write letters to the park superintendent, testify before Congress, and generate support for the reserve.
- Monitoring the C-111 Spreader Canal Project, which will reestablish natural water flow through the southeastern Everglades to Florida Bay and Biscayne Bay.

Why Act Now?

A merica's Everglades are economically and ecologically important. One in three Floridians—seven million people—rely on the Everglades for drinking water, and millions rely on its fisheries.

National parks also drive local economies, providing important recreational opportunities, from fishing to camping. In 2010, Everglades National Park alone attracted more than 900,000 visitors, pumping more than \$136 million into local economies and supporting nearly 2,000 jobs. Restoration projects have an enormous positive impact on the economy; generating more than 10,500 private sector jobs in the last three years.

The Everglades have proven to be a resilient ecosystem, but continued degradation threatens irreversible harm and time is running out. In 2010, The National Academy of Sciences warned that ecological improvements are critical and decisive action must be taken today to restore clean water flows and protect America's Everglades.



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