

# Introduction

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The time: Some day in the not too distant future.

The place: An oxbow in a seemingly unspoiled river that meanders slowly through a marshy floodplain just north of Lake Okeechobee.

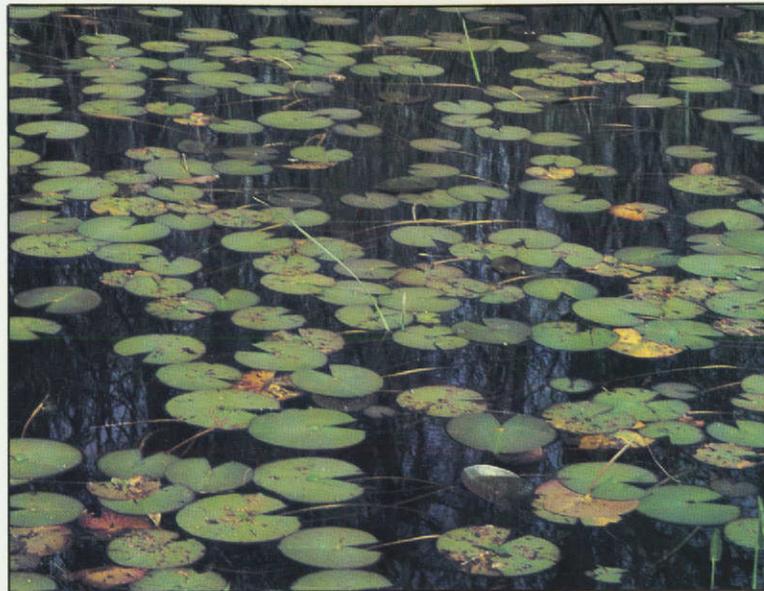
The event: Nothing special.

A lone canoe ripples silently through the quiet, brown water, disturbing the faint wavering reflections of the palm trees that line the low banks and the late afternoon thunderclouds that hang overhead.

Just overhead, a pair of white egrets swoops gracefully down to land somewhere out of sight around a bend in the oxbow. In the distance, angry crows are arguing with a blue jay; and above, a pair of red-tailed hawks soars lazily, calling to each other across the breeze.

On the marshy bank of the river, a great blue heron watches the canoe pass without much interest. It is a common event these days, and the heron is not afraid. A frog, startled by the ripples as they touch the bank, leaps into the river with a splash and the heron's slight attention is diverted.

Frogs are important, canoes are not.



The time: The same day.

The place: Hundreds of miles south.

The event: Again, nothing special.

The sound is most noticeable — a steady throb from several huge pumps that suck water from the ground and into pipes that lead to the teeming city just over the horizon. The land 'round-about is flat and a summer sun beats down on it.

And the pumps throb.

Why take notice of two events that are "nothing special"? There can be no possible connection between the canoe gliding through the quiet, brown water so many miles to the north and the ceaseless pulsing of the pumps in the south. Or can there? Could it be that without the water that the canoe glides across, these pumps might be silent? Yes.

The water, the canoe, the egrets, the great blue heron, the frog, and, to a lesser extent, even the hawks, the crows, and the blue jay are there — at least in part — because of an innovative Florida program called *Save Our Rivers*. Announced in 1981 by Governor Bob Graham, the *Save Our Rivers* program aims to protect Florida's natural waterways, wetlands and the state's drinking water.

ABOVE Lily pads dot Florida's lakes and rivers.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

OPPOSITE Trees are mirrored in the calm waters of Blue Springs.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)