

St. Johns River

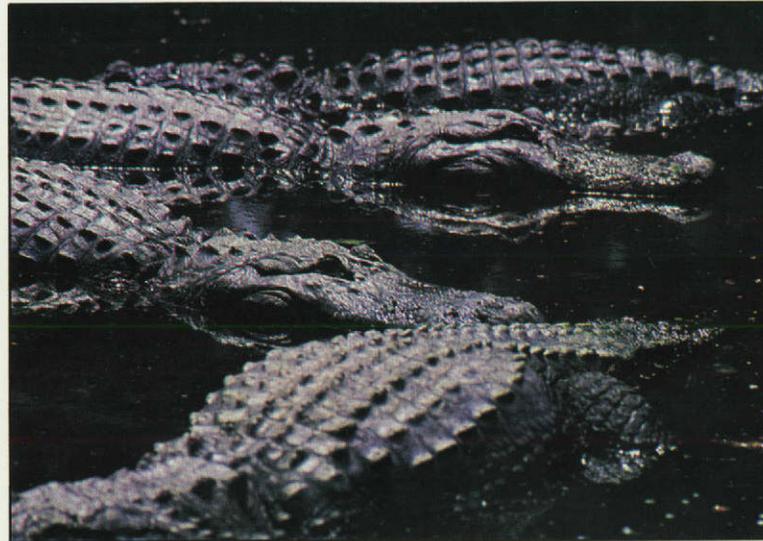
Water Management District

The St. Johns River is the largest river system that is entirely in Florida. It is one of the very few rivers in North America that flows north. It is Florida's longest river; its 300-mile length drains 9,100 square miles, almost a sixth of the state. Its largest tributary, the Oklawaha River, was once the route of part of the long-proposed and now-defunct Cross Florida Barge Canal.

The St. Johns was an aquatic highway from the earliest days. It was a path into and through Eastern Florida and was part of innumerable schemes for an intracoastal waterway to the south, as well as for the water passage across Florida to the Gulf of Mexico.

Early travelers in Florida used the St. Johns River as a safe route to St. Augustine and the interior of Florida. The alternative was the perilous trip by sea. St. Augustine travellers would complete their journey by horse from Picolata on the river.

"Here on the St. Johns," wrote author and river resident Harriett Beecher Stowe, "a water coach is more to the purpose, in the present state of our wood roads, than any land carriage..."¹



In the 1870s, large steamboats could easily navigate the river as far south as Palatka, and the more adventurous could travel much further south. Holidays on the river became a favored pastime. The river wildlife — its bird life, but especially the alligators — was a major attraction and as the river narrowed in the middle and upper reaches, steamboat captains soon were forced to prohibit the shooting of alligators from the decks.

One result of travel on this water highway was the opening up of the eastern interior and the upper river to agriculture.

Today's problems on the river stem in large part from agricultural drainage of the upper reaches of the river where more than 60 percent of the floodplain has been lost, including 42 percent of the annual floodplain. This loss, along with channelization of the river and drainage to the coast, creates a water supply problem during dry periods. These are the areas where *Save Our Rivers* purchases are attempting to restore a more normal hydroperiod.

Save Our Rivers Purchases

Acres Purchased: 48,325

Cost: \$53.5 million (including bonds)

Selected Parcels

Seminole Ranch: 14,000 acres

Latt Maxcy: 9,800 acres

Lake Miami Ranch: 2,800 acres

Greenbaum: 3,970 acres

D. C. Scott: 4,100 acres

Fellsmere: 8,000 acres

Silver River: 1,100 acres