

present name is a composite of the Seminole Indian words "oki" for water and "chubi" meaning big. At a stage of 15.5 feet msl, the Lake covers an area of about 725 square miles (464,000 acres) (Jones, 1948). Prior to artificial drainage attempts by man in south Florida, the Lake received drainage water from approximately 4,000 square miles (2,560,000 acres) of watershed area (Federico et al., 1981). Since the canal networks have been installed, approximately 600 square miles (384,000 acres) have been added to the Lake watershed area.

Prior to man induced drainage, the Lake stage stood between 18 and 20 feet msl (Jones, 1948). There was no well defined outlet and during high stage, water would overflow the southern rim and proceed slowly through the Everglades and nearby swampland (referred to as a "river of grass" by Marjory Stoneman Douglas) as a result of a very slight north to south grade of about 2 to 3 inches per mile. What was not evaporated or used by native plants drained to the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean.

Land Drainage and Development

On January 6, 1855, the State of Florida Legislature passed an Act to create the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida (Jones, 1948; Smith, 1980; Knecht, 1986). Simultaneously, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund (TIIF) was created and given the responsibility of managing the land given to Florida under the Federal Swamp and Overflowed Lands Grant. The Board was made up of the Governor and his cabinet and remains as such to date (1987).

The TIIF mission was to sell lands and use the generated revenue to reclaim and improve them. They were responsible for receiving and reviewing applicants for canal and railroad projects. If the TIIF determined that a project was desirable, the applicant received State assistance. In addition, companies received a 200 foot wide right of way through State lands, plus alternate sections of land, 6 miles deep, on both sides of the railroad track. A symbiotic relationship developed since railroad companies had to drain land to lay their tracks. It was envisioned that completed railroads and transportation companies would encourage settlers to enter the area.

By 1877, the Internal Improvement Fund was bankrupt (Jones, 1948; Smith, 1980; Knecht, 1986). To save the Fund, the Trustees had to find an immediate buyer for a large parcel of land. A search led them to Hamilton Disston of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Together, they negotiated two large land deals which became the foundation for all future drainage efforts. In 1881, after lengthy negotiations, Disston officially contracted to drain

land in return for one-half the acreage that he could reclaim. The deal, however, fell through. Subsequently, Governor William Bloxham persuaded Disston to purchase 4 million acres at 25 cents per acre. The first canal, between Lake Okechobee and the Caloosahatchee River, was dug in 1883. Disston's was the first attempt to drain a large land area as a single unit. With his new lands, Disston developed a sizable sugar industry.

The TIIF had depended heavily on the railroad company interests to raise money for reclaiming the Everglades in the late 19th century. Wealthy businessmen such as Disston, Plant, and Flagler had virtual control of drainage projects because of the TIIF dependence on their money. Development was on-going, but in a haphazard, uncoordinated manner, subject to the whims of the developers (Smith, 1980).

In 1899, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (COE) began a survey of the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Caloosahatchee water system and the effects of Disston's drainage project on the area (Smith, 1980). The Corps of Engineers (COE) recommended to the United States Congress that navigational improvements be made. The result of this was the renewed involvement of governmental agencies in the development of south Florida. This involvement acknowledged that private developers were not likely to lead the efforts towards a balanced, well developed territory. Government and public interests had now been drawn into the water management process.

Under Governor Jennings, in office from 1901 to 1905, the present drainage program began (Jones, 1948). Extensive land surveys were made to re-evaluate the feasibility of reclaiming the Everglades from an overall standpoint. Data on topography, rainfall, watersheds, and soils were collected.

Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, Florida's 19th Governor, actively brought government and public agencies into water management and land development (Smith, 1980) in response to his beliefs that the railroad industry was too dominant.

In 1905, the Board of Drainage Commissioners was created to oversee the State-wide development of land and the necessary water management. The United States Supreme Court, however, decided that such a Board was not authorized by the State constitution. In 1907, an amendment was attached to the Act that was to establish the Board of Drainage Commissioners. The amendment created an agency responsible solely for the Everglades and the Act was passed. Its passage in May of 1907, created the Everglades Drainage District (EDD) and allowed the EDD to levy a 5 cents per acre tax.

With the coordinated and active drainage plan in effect, land ownership in the Everglades rose