

The Everglades

A Reading A-Z Level O Leveled Book
Word Count: 667

LEVELED BOOK • O

The EVERGLADES

Connections

Writing and Art

Why is it important to protect the Everglades? Draw a picture and write about it.

Science

Research to learn more about one of the animals from the book. Create a poster to hang in your classroom to show what you learn. Include pictures and text.

**Multi
level
1•L•O**

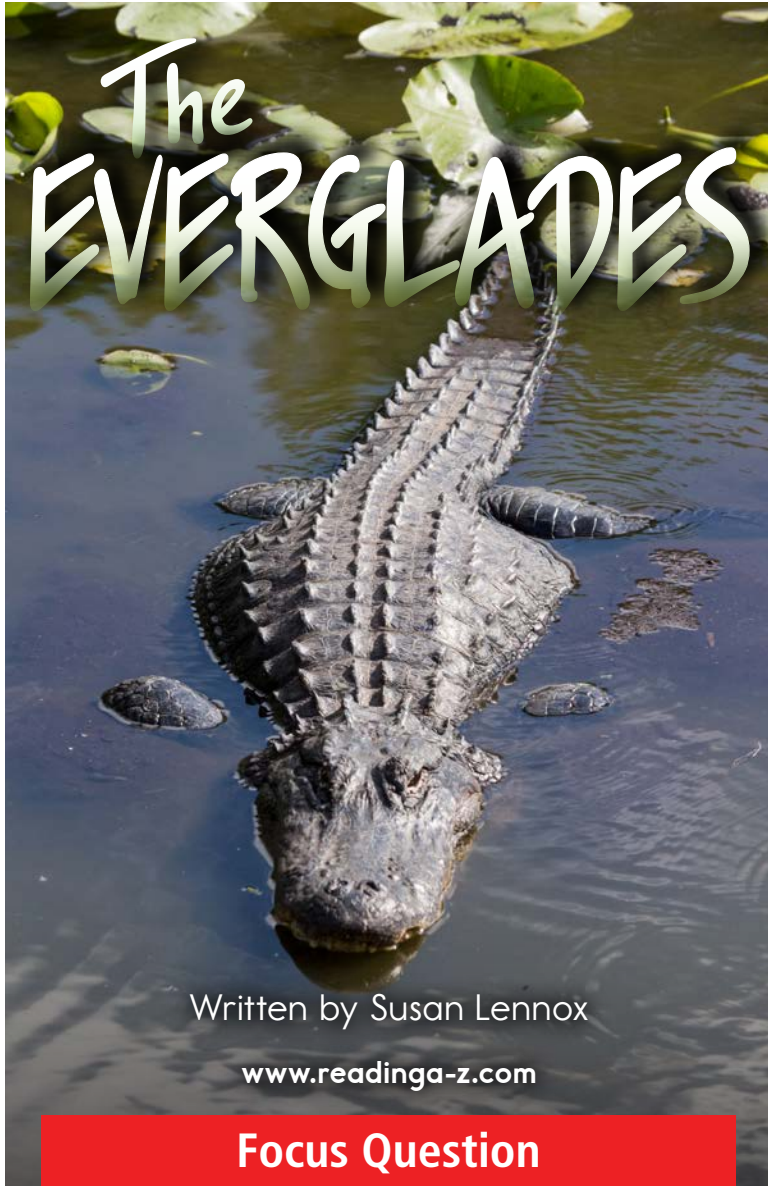
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Focus Question

Where is Everglades National Park,
and what can you see there?

Words to Know

development	national park
ecosystems	roots
mild	subtropical

Cover: Everglades cypress trees grow in areas covered in water.
 Title page: An American alligator rests in the Everglades marsh.
 Page 3: The Everglades was made a national park in 1947.

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Correlation

LEVEL O	
Fountas & Pinnell	M
Reading Recovery	20
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Table of Contents

Weird and Wonderful	4
More Than a Swamp	5
A Park Is Born	10
Protecting the Park	12
Into the Wild	14
Glossary	16

Weird and Wonderful

Have you ever heard of a gumbo-limbo? How about a skink? Or a stinkpot? These are not cartoon characters. They are the names of plants and animals that live in Everglades **National Park** in Florida. It is a weird and wonderful place, unlike any other.



gumbo-limbo tree



skink lizard



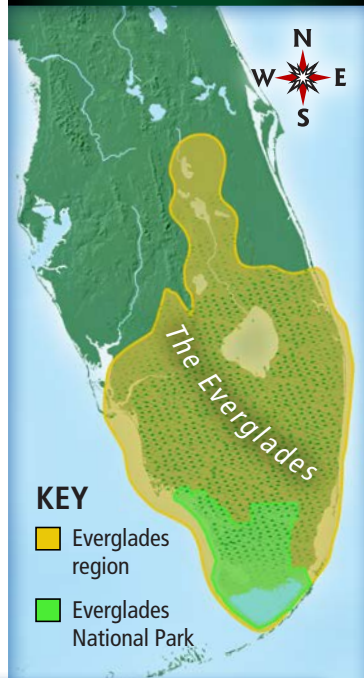
stinkpot turtle

More Than a Swamp

The area known as the Everglades makes up much of South Florida. Everglades National Park lies within this area. The region is the largest **subtropical** wilderness in the United States. It has hot, wet summers and **mild**, dry winters.

Some people may think the Everglades is just a big wet swamp. The Everglades does have lots of water, but its waters connect different **ecosystems**. Each of these ecosystems supports different life-forms. There are mammals, reptiles, birds, and fish. Many are found only in the Everglades.

Where Are the Everglades?



Trees with Knees

Cypress trees have strange-looking growths called *knees*. A cypress knee grows up from the tree's roots. Part of these knees live above water and help bring air to the rest of the roots. The other part lives below the water and helps to anchor, or support, the whole root system.



To the north are freshwater cypress swamps. They are named for the cypress trees that grow there. Cypress swamps cover an area bigger than the state of Rhode Island!

Cypress swamps are home to a wide variety of animals. These include panthers, rabbits, turkey, and deer.



The Florida panther became the official state animal in 1982.

Mangrove swamps are saltwater swamps. They are found at the Everglades' southern tip. They get their name from trees that grow there.

Mangrove trees have long **roots**. The roots rise above the water. They hold the trees steady as ocean tides rise and fall.

The roots are also home to other living things. Algae and tiny shellfish live there. Fish hide in the roots to keep safe from animals that might eat them.



Mangrove forests protect the Florida coastline from storms, waves, and tides (main). Fish hide in mangrove roots (inset).

Between the different swamps are sawgrass marshes. Sawgrass is a tall plant that grows in water. Each blade of grass has sharp teeth, like a saw. Alligators that live in the marshes use sawgrass to build their nests.



Sharp teeth line the edge of a blade of sawgrass.

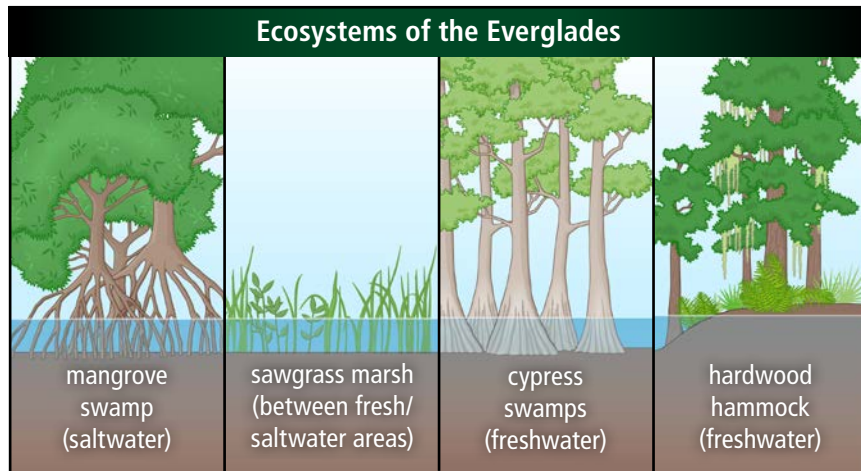


Female alligators build nests above the water level to keep their eggs safe.



Trees grow close together in the hardwood hammock to create a cover that keeps the area shady and cool.

Trees thick with leaves grow in areas called *hardwood hammocks*. The leaves block sunlight and shade the ground. There is so little light there, few plants can grow. That is why some plants grow on the trees instead.



The Everglades is made up of a variety of salt and freshwater ecosystems, or a combination of both. Four of the major ecosystems are shown here.

A Park Is Born

For many years, people left the Everglades alone. Then, in 1903, the United States government gave twenty million acres (8,000,000 ha) of land to Florida. It wanted the state to drain the land and turn it into farms. It wanted people to build homes. Soon developers started drying out the land. The Everglades was slowly being destroyed.

Some people wanted to protect the Everglades. A writer named Marjory Stoneman Douglas fought hard to keep the land safe.

River of Grass

In the 1940s, Marjory wrote a book called *The Everglades: River of Grass*. The book was a great success and helped bring attention to the park project.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas



President Harry Truman dedicated Everglades National Park on December 6, 1947.

Marjory spent five years studying the Everglades. She wrote about making the Everglades a national park.

In 1934, the United States government agreed to set aside one-and-a-half-million acres (607,000 ha) for a park. Times were hard, though, and there was no money. Finally, in 1947, Everglades National Park was created.

Protecting the Park

Making the park was just the beginning. The Everglades is protected from **development**. However, there are other challenges.

There are dozens of animal and plant species that are in danger in Everglades National Park. Their homes are at risk due to changing weather patterns and human activity.

How Fire Saves the Marshes

Unlike a swamp, a marsh has no trees. That is in part due to fires. Florida has many lightning storms. The lightning starts brush fires. The fires burn any plants or trees growing in the marsh.

The fire kills young trees. It does not kill the sawgrass, though. That is because sawgrass roots grow deep. They stay safe in a marsh's wet, rich soil. When the fire passes, the plant sprouts new leaves.



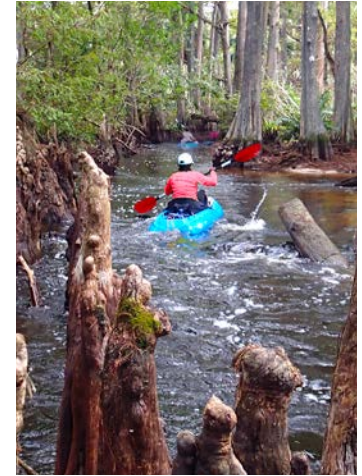
The balance of life in the park is changing, too. That is because non-native species now live in Florida. These plants and animals came to Florida from other places. Some are pets that have been turned loose. Some are plants that grew from seeds people threw away. Other seeds were carried into the state by the wind. These new species create problems. They eat animals and plants that native species need to live. Special programs have been put in place to get rid of unwanted species.



Scientists hold a huge python caught in the Everglades in 2009. Pythons are not native to the Everglades.

Into the Wild

Today, many people come to the Everglades. They hike on trails through the swamps. They paddle through the marshes. They camp under the hardwood hammocks. There is an amazing variety of life to see along the way.



Kayaking through the cypress swamps is a popular activity in the Everglades.



Airboats have flat bottoms that make travel across the shallow water in the Everglades easy.



The manatee, a native species, is found in the southeastern United States, but its primary range is in Florida.

Everglades National Park is a special place. It has many unusual plants and animals. People from all over the world come to see them in their natural state. They come to admire the natural beauty of the Everglades. It is a park like no other.

The Everglades by the Numbers

- ✦ 1.5 million acres (607,000 ha)
- ✦ Over 1 million visitors each year
- ✦ More than 40 types of mammals
- ✦ Over 360 types of birds
- ✦ About 120 different types of trees
- ✦ More than 50 unique types of reptiles



Glossary

- development** (n.) the process of building houses, businesses, or roads on an area where there were none before (p. 12)
- ecosystems** (n.) communities of living things together with their habitats (p. 5)
- mild** (adj.) not extreme (p. 5)
- national park** (n.) an area of government-owned land protected for its historic importance or natural landscape and wildlife (p. 4)
- roots** (n.) the parts of a plant that grow under the ground, holding the plant in place and taking in water and nutrients from the soil (p. 7)
- subtropical** (adj.) of, or occurring in, an area that borders the tropics (p. 5)