

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Getting Started

By Highlights for Children

*The Everglades is a region in southern Florida filled with all different types of plants and animals. In this Highlights text, the author discusses the effects that humans have had on this environment. As you read, take notes on how humans have helped and hurt the environment.*

[1] Sometimes we only appreciate something when we realize we may lose it. That is the story of the Everglades. A shallow slow-moving river, the Everglades once covered about 18,000 square miles of southern Florida. Until the 1900s, few people lived in the grassy wetlands.<sup>1</sup> Not much was understood about the unique balance of nature that existed there. Plants, creatures, and water had formed a remarkable ecosystem.<sup>2</sup>



*"Cypres dome with Alligator, NPSphoto, G.Gardner.jpg" by Everglades NPS is in the public domain.*

South Florida has two seasons — a dry season and a wet season. During the wet season from April to November, rain historically saturated<sup>3</sup> the land. It also filled Lake Okeechobee in central Florida. When it rained a lot, the lake overflowed its southern banks. It created sheet flow. Sheet flow is water flowing in a thin layer over the landscape. In this case, the water traveled slowly southward over Florida’s flat limestone shelf to Florida Bay.

By the early 1900s, Florida’s pleasant winters attracted more people. Visitors became new permanent residents. They built homes and roads. The conditions looked good for farming, so the newcomers planted large agricultural<sup>4</sup> crops. But South Florida’s cycle of flooding was a problem. To address that, developers attempted to drain the land. They also built structures to control water levels and flow.

Those changes made it easier for more people to live year-round in South Florida. They also disrupted life in the Everglades. The Everglades depends on freshwater regularly replenishing<sup>5</sup> the land. But the area’s growing human population needed freshwater, too. And large farms consumed<sup>6</sup> large quantities of freshwater. By the mid-1900s, Lake Okeechobee did not collect enough water to overflow and form sheet flow. Water levels in southern Florida began to shrink. A few new residents saw the Everglades as more than a vast marshland.<sup>7</sup> They saw that the Everglades was being harmed. Lack of freshwater wasn’t the only problem. As more and more land was developed for people and farms, the Everglades’ historic boundaries shrank. Loss of habitat and hunting threatened the survival of native species<sup>8</sup> in the Everglades.

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1. a land or areas covered in shallow water
  2. a physical environment and the creatures that live in it
  3. to thoroughly soak
  4. related to farming
  5. **Replenish (verb):** to fill something up again
  6. to use up a resource
  7. an area of land that is flooded during rainy seasons and remains wet
  8. plants or animals that grow or are born in a specific area

- [5] In the early 1900s, the federal government had set aside large natural spaces in the West as public parks. Some people hoped that federal recognition might save the Everglades. They fought for it. Everglades National Park was established in 1947. It is the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River. It became the first park in the United States created for its biodiversity.<sup>9</sup>

Today, people understand that the changes made to the land nearly 100 years ago are jeopardizing<sup>10</sup> the Everglades' future. Some things cannot be reversed. Six million people live in South Florida today. Major agricultural crops such as sugar cane and citrus fruits grow there. Still, a 40-year plan was enacted in 2000 to restore some of the natural flow of freshwater to southern Florida.

Everglades National Park protects 1.5 million acres along the southern tip of Florida. The site appears to be mostly marshy and flat. Yet, that description is deceiving.<sup>11</sup> An amazing variety of creatures live there. About 360 different species of birds have been sighted in the park. Nearly 300 different species of fish have been identified. About 40 species of mammals and 50 species of reptiles inhabit the park. Nature still rules in the Everglades. It remains a place that seems naturally wild. A place worth understanding, appreciating, and protecting.

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9. an environment with many different types of plants and animals  
10. **Jeopardize (verb):** to put something or someone at risk  
11. **Deceive (verb):** to cause someone to believe something that is not true

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence describes the main idea or the text?
  - A. The damage to the Everglades has been reversed since it was made a national park.
  - B. Humans helped improve the land in southern Florida by preventing flooding.
  - C. Changes to the weather in southern Florida has damaged the Everglades.
  - D. Humans upset the balance in the Everglades and need to continue to protect it.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to part A?
  - A. "South Florida has two seasons — a dry season and a wet season. During the wet season from April to November, rain historically saturated the land." (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "It is the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River. It became the first park in the United States created for its biodiversity." (Paragraph 5)
  - C. "Today, people understand that the changes made to the land nearly 100 years ago are jeopardizing the Everglades' future. Some things cannot be reversed." (Paragraph 6)
  - D. "About 360 different species of birds have been sighted in the park. Nearly 300 different species of fish have been identified." (Paragraph 7)
  
3. How is the text organized?
  - A. The author describes how the Everglades developed over time to be the ecosystem it is today.
  - B. The author discusses how humans abused the Everglades in the past, and how they continue to abuse the land today.
  - C. The author discusses why the Everglades exist, and then how humans have harmed the land and can help protect it.
  - D. The author expresses how healthy the Everglades are today, and then describes how damaged they used to be.
  
4. Which of the following describes the problems the Everglades face today?
  - A. Past damage and continued human activity affects the Everglades.
  - B. Humans didn't learn their lesson about controlling the water in southern Florida.
  - C. Humans hunt many of the species that live in the Everglades today.
  - D. Most of the Everglades has been destroyed to make room for homes.

5. What is the connection between the actions of humans and the Everglades?

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