

FLORIDA WILDERNESS AREA IMPERILED

Fakahatchee is the heart of the Big Cypress Swamp country, available for about \$100 per acre, about 8 1/2 million dollars, a land bargain in South Florida. Possibilities exist for the world's first wild orchid sanctuary and wildlife preserve, wilderness canoe trips, wilderness camping, hiking, picnicking, nature study, etc. Preservation of the wilderness environment with complete protection of endangered species of flora and fauna, paramount.

By JOHN BYRAM

NAPLES, Fla. — Near and mostly north of the Tamiami Trail, as it wends its way across Collier County, lies the Fakahatchee Strand, a 57,000-acre wilderness of cypress and palm trees, of prairies and hammocks, of lettuce lakes and of hidden pools of clear water.

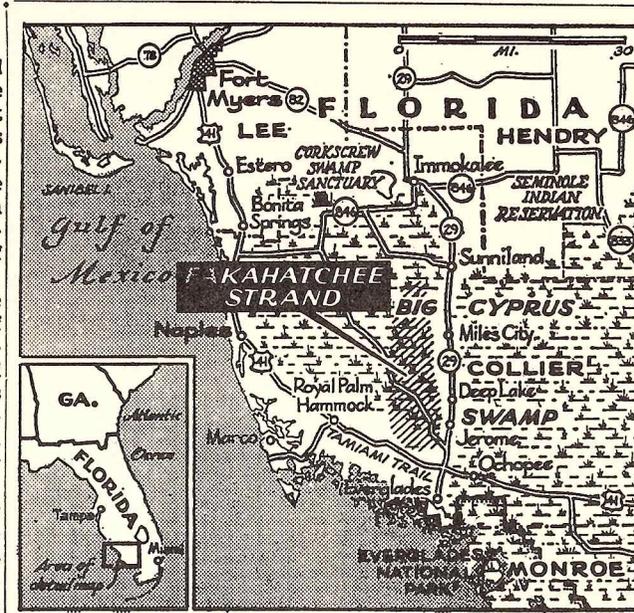
It is a hospitable and fertile retreat for countless species of animals, birds and plants; according to conservationists and scientists, it is South Florida's last available primeval watershed and true swamp area that functions as a self-sustaining ecological unit.

But Collier County, which for years has prided itself on being Florida's last frontier, is experiencing what can accurately be called a boom in the way of building construction, large-scale community development and agricultural expansion.

As a result, it looks as if the existence of this subtropical wilderness may be threatened by progress—by the drainage of its water through newly constructed canals, by new roads, by bulldozers clearing land and by other manifestations of civilization. One of these threats is the possible intrusion of salt water into the area from the bays and arms of the Gulf of Mexico.

Preservation Urged

Realizing what the loss of the Fakahatchee Strand would mean to the county and the state, several groups are making a determined effort to save it. The land is owned by the Lee Tidewater Cypress Company, a subsidiary of the J. C. Turner Lumber Company of



Perry, Fla., which aided the National Audubon Society in establishing the nearby Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

The Florida Nature Conservancy, with headquarters at 19 West Flagler Street, Miami, is spearheading a drive to have the state or Federal governments, operating singly or in conjunction, acquire the Fakahatchee for park purposes at an estimated cost of \$4 million. It has the full cooperation of its parent organization, the Nature Conservancy of Washington.

Situated roughly 25 miles east of Naples, the Fakahatchee comprises a region about 20 miles long and five or six miles wide. On the south, the strand touches the border of Everglades National Park. The projected Fort Lauderdale-

Naples toll highway, referred to by its detractors as "Alligator Alley," will cut through the extreme northern segment of the strand. Further north lies the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

Housing Project

On the west, the Fakahatchee Strand borders land held by the Gulf American Land Corporation, which is in the process of preparing a large residential development. It has had to construct drainage canals, including one that eventually will be 32 miles long.

Nimrods from such metropolitan centers as Miami and Tampa say the Fakahatchee is the last unspoiled game area, one where the elusive panther can be found, as well as deer, black bears, bobcats, raccoons,

otters and alligators. Rare birds also make their homes in the strand.

From the botanist's point of view, the area, in addition to its cypress trees, contains 5,000 native royal palms, many of which are 150 feet and more tall. Here also are more than 100 species of orchids, unusual ferns and a remarkable mixture of trees indigenous both to temperate and sub-tropical climates.

"Being a complete watershed and self-sustaining ecological environment, the Fakahatchee could remain an oasis of emerald wilderness, an island of nature's own creation and natural beauty—quiet and serene—even when surrounded by a noisy, hostile world of roads, motor cars, bulldozers, pollution, drainage and despoilment," says the appeal prepared by the Florida Nature Conservancy.

View From the Road

Visitors to Naples and Collier County can get a good view of the Fakahatchee Strand by taking the Winford James Memorial Drive. The drive is reachable from the Tamiami Trail by turning north on State Route 29 at a point about 33 miles east of Naples.

Woodsmen and hunters, however, say that parts of the dense interior can be penetrated only by crawling through the growth or hacking one's way through with a machete. They claim there are places where the vegetation is so abundant that not even the Seminole Indians, old hands at Florida exploration, have been able to view all of the Fakahatchee's secrets.

For more information write to
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