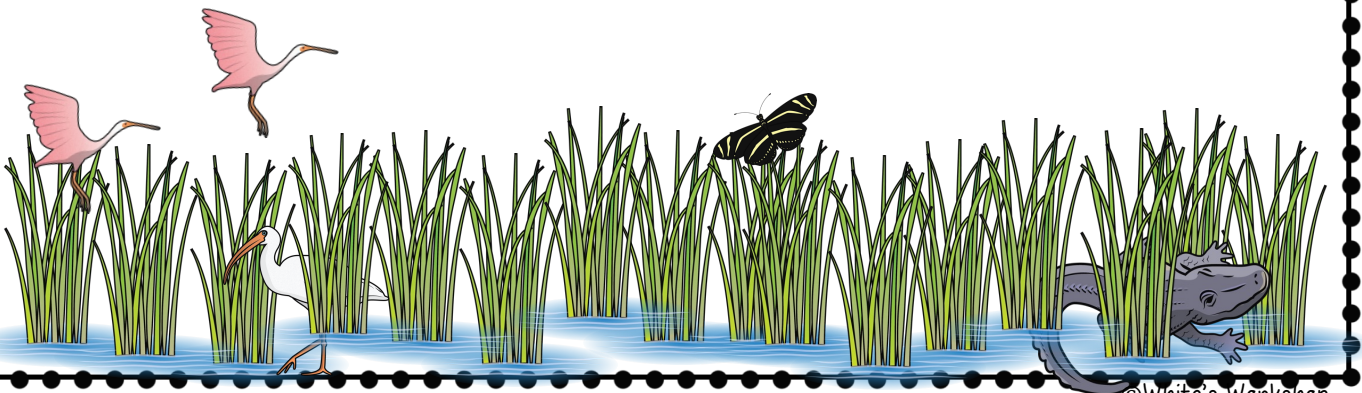


Welcome to **THE EVERGLADES**

Name _____



The Everglades

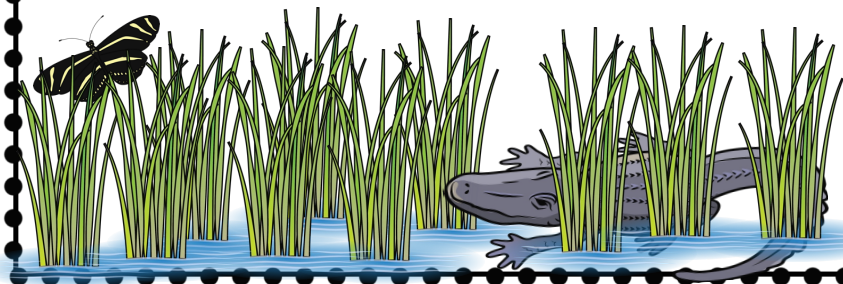
Name _____

What is the Everglades? I've heard of it, but I don't know what it is.

The Everglades is an amazing, unique **wetland ecosystem** located in southern Florida. Wetlands means that the soil is completely soaked with water for most of the year. It is hot, humid, swampy, wet and home to thousands of plants and animals that thrive in this environment. The Everglades' water system stems from a large Florida lake called Lake Okeechobee. Lake Okeechobee is about 100 square miles wide, but it is not very deep. It is only 9 feet at its deepest point. Each year, during the rainy seasons of summer and fall, Lake Okeechobee floods its banks and becomes a long snake-like river that spreads out all the way to the southern tip of Florida.

1. What is a wetland ecosystem?

2. What happens during the rainy season?



The Everglades

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What is the Everglades ecosystem like?

The Everglades is the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States. The Everglades National Park is a protected area that provides an important home to endangered animals like the manatee, the American crocodile, and the Florida panther. The Everglades ecosystem is as unique as it is beautiful. Here are 3 of the 9 habitats found in the Everglades.

Freshwater Marshes

During the summer, it rains nearly every day in southern Florida. With over 60 inches of rainfall a year, the low, flat areas flood and form freshwater marshes. Even though the water of the Everglades flows like a slow-moving river, it doesn't look like a river because of the plants that grow right out of the water. For example, saw grass is a tall, sharp plant that grows well in shallow water. Saw grass covers entire areas of the Everglades. Because of this, some people say the Everglades look like a "River of Grass". The name Everglades means "Forever Grass". The saw grass provides great protection for animals like the American alligator, egrets, and hundreds of insects.

Mangrove Forests

Mangrove forests grow along the coastal regions of the Everglades where the freshwater and salty waters mix. Mangrove forests are different than most forests you might see because the roots grow above ground. The mangrove forests stabilize the coastline and reduce erosion from waves, tides, and storms. They also provide a hidden sanctuary for birds, reptiles, and fish seeking shelter from predators.

Hammocks

Not all the Everglades is submerged in water. Rising up from the "River of Grass" are small islands of land. On these islands, the soil gets dry enough for pine trees and palm trees to grow creating small pockets of forests. This is where you will find woodland animals like the Florida panther, deer, raccoons, rabbits, and birds.

The Everglades

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What are some of the problems facing the Everglades today?

Invasive Species

Most of the problems facing the Everglades stem from people. One way people have upset the ecosystem is by introducing invasive species to the Everglades. An invasive species is an animal or plant that is not originally from that habitat. In this new habitat, the invasive animal does not have a natural predators or enemies. This allows for the species to spread rapidly and upset the balance in the ecosystem. Here are a couple invasive species:

The Burmese Python can grow up to 20 feet long and 200 pounds. People import them as pets and let them go when they get too big to care for. As the pythons reproduce, they have begun to compete with the alligators and crocodiles as the top of the food chain.

Walking Catfish – Yup, you read it correctly. This fish can stay out of water for days with moist scales. Not only does it compete with land animals for food, but it carries a deadly bacterial infection.

Cuban Tree Frog – This little guy may not sound harmful, but the female lays 4,000 eggs at a time. Not only do they eat native frogs, toads, and lizards, but they give off a deadly poison from their bodies..

Urban Development

Urbanization is the rapid growth of large cities. In the past 100 years, the United States government has drained 1.7 million acres of Everglades land. That's almost half of the Everglades. This has caused the loss of habitat, pollution, water loss, and loss of wildlife. Even though a portion of the Everglades is protected by the National Park Service, only 10% of the wading birds still exist today. Also, the manatee, the Miami black-headed snake, the wood stork, and the Florida panther are all at risk of extinction.

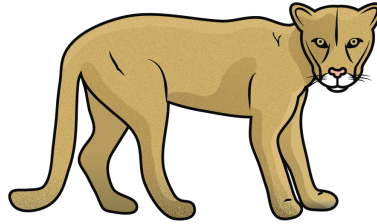
The Everglades

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Animals of the Everglades



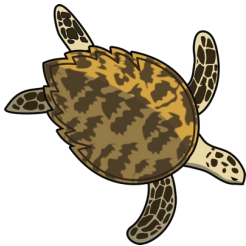
Manatees, also called sea cows, are a large aquatic animal related to an elephant. These large gentle giants are herbivores that graze on plants all day. Manatees are Florida's state mammal.



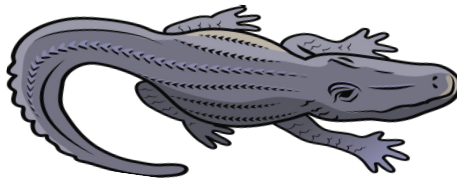
The Florida panther lives in the high hammocks of the Everglades. They are less than 100 panthers still alive. They are meat eaters that eat a hog, deer, or small animals each day.



The coral snake is one of the most venomous snakes in the United States. They use their fangs to bite into frogs, lizards, and reptiles.



Turtles are a reptile commonly seen sunning on a log or swimming in the shallow waters of the Everglades. They eat small insects, worms, and plants.



The Everglades is home to over 200,000 alligators. Also, the Everglades is the only place in the world where alligators and crocodiles live together. American alligators typically eat fish, turtles, birds, and mammals. They do not eat people, however, they will protect their territory with a SNAP!



The white ibis is a small wading bird that uses its curved beak to probe through the mud and water like giant tweezers. The ibis searches for snails, worms, and small crustaceans.