



Liquid Land: A Journey through the Florida Everglades

Ted Levin

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Consider just two of the countless facts about the damage we have done to the Everglades: Half of its original 14,000-square-mile expanse is gone, and saving what is left will cost at least \$8.4 billion. Alluding to destruction on a scale we can barely grasp, figures like these can at once stir and immobilize us. In *Liquid Land*, Ted Levin guides us past the dire headlines and into the magnificent swamp itself, where we come face-to-face with the plants, animals, and landscapes that remain and that will survive only if we protect them.

Levin has traveled extensively through the Everglades, often in the company of such dedicated individuals as Archie Jones, the conchologist who for fifty years has been studying and rescuing tree snails, or Frank Mazzotti, with whom Levin spent two weeks in the field monitoring American crocodiles. Through Levin's adventures we come to know intimately a place where water was meant to flow as a broad, shallow "sheet" and where minuscule changes in elevation yield a dramatic change in the diversity of life, from manatees and mangroves on the coast to panthers and orchids in the interior.

Throughout, Levin profiles the various parties who have tried to master, protect, or coexist with the Everglades—from the agribusiness concerns known collectively as Big Sugar to Friends of the Everglades to a small community west of Miami, nameless but for the designation "8.5 Square Mile Area." As we float, sometimes slog, alongside Levin through hammocks, keys, and sloughs, we see firsthand how drainage and development have led to water pollution and salinity fluctuations, a disruption of the swamp's wet/dry seasonal cycle, an explosion in the mosquito population, and a weakened response of the ecosystem to drought, fire, hurricanes, and invasive species.

Liquid Land captures the Everglades' essential beauty and mystery as it explores ongoing restoration efforts. Our success or failure will have an impact on environmental policy around the world, Levin believes. As the preservationist rallying cry goes, "The Everglades is a test. If we pass, we get to keep the planet."

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