

## EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK AND THE SEMINOLE PROBLEM

It seems we can't do anything but harm to those people even  
when we try to help them.

—Old Man Temple, *Key Largo*, 1948

Swollen by tropical rains and overflowing every summer for millennia, Lake Okeechobee releases a sheet of water that drains south over grass-covered marl prairie, seeping through Florida's wetlands into the Gulf of Mexico. Fifty miles wide and a hundred miles long, this shallow river of grass that the Seminoles called Pa-hay-okee is the heart of today's 1.4-million-acre Everglades National Park. An International Biosphere Preserve and World Heritage Site best known for roseate spoonbills, bald eagles, osprey, peregrine falcons, snowy and great egrets, herons, white ibis, anhinga, and flamingos, the park is also home to manatees, green sea and loggerhead turtles, bear, deer, alligators, crocodiles, and the Florida panther.

For more than two hundred years this subtropical wilderness of pines, palms, and palmettos also sheltered Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians, a people who have hunted, trapped, and fished in Pa-hay-okee since the eighteenth century. Today the Miccosukee's 333-acre Forty Mile Bend Reservation lies within Everglades National Park on the Tamiami Trail. More traditional than the Seminoles who live on the Brighton and Dania reserves, the Miccosukees finally gained federal recognition in 1972—fifteen years after the Everglades became a national park. Florida's Miccosukees and Seminoles participated in the creation of the park and Big Cypress National Preserve. Our story concerns only the Everglades, leaving events in Big Cypress for future study.<sup>1</sup>

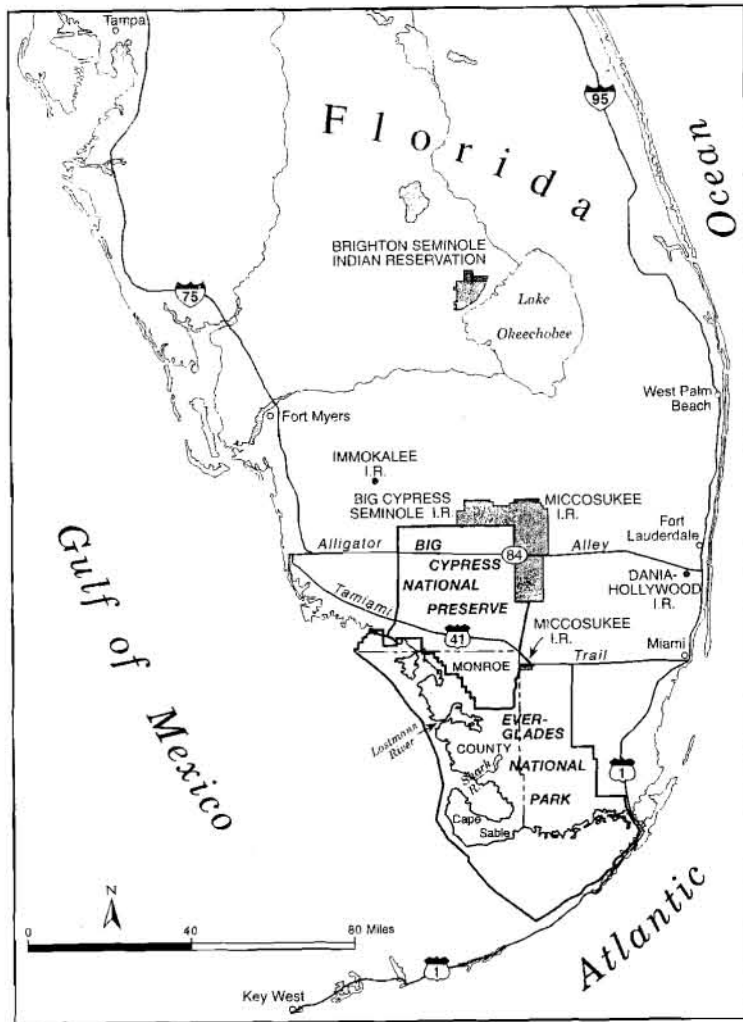
## Invaders and Swamps

Large numbers of Americans began migrating into south Florida during the late nineteenth century after railroads had cut through the forests and wetlands below Lake Okeechobee. By the 1880s engineers and land developers began promoting drainage projects, convinced that technology could transform this water-sogged country into land suitable for agriculture. At the turn of the century, steam shovels and dredges hissed and wheezed their way into the Everglades, bent on draining the Southeast's last wilderness. They were the latest of many intruders.

Although Spanish explorers had arrived on the Florida coast early in the sixteenth century, Spain's imperial toehold never grew beyond a few fragile outposts. Inland remained mysterious, a cartographic void, El Laguno del Espirito Santo. Following Spain, the British too had little success colonizing the interior. After several centuries, all that Europeans had established were a few scattered coastal forts. Nonetheless, Europe's hand fell heavily through disease and warfare upon the aboriginal Timucuan, Apalachee, and Calusa people. By 1700 the peninsula's interior and both coasts were almost devoid of Indians. The vacuum did not last long. Creeks from Georgia and Alabama soon filtered into Florida's panhandle and beyond, occupying native hunting grounds.

The Creek (Muskogee) Confederacy to the north comprised sixty allied towns with a total population of nearly twenty thousand people speaking two languages, Muskogee and Hitchiti. Sharing many cultural traditions, the towns joined together for war, trade, and celebrations. Georgia's "Lower Creeks" had raided Spanish and Apalachee villages in northern Florida since the early 1700s. Besides booty, they acquired valuable knowledge of Florida's terrain and wildlife. By the mid-1700s, several Muskogee-speaking "Upper Creek" towns had taken hold in northern Florida. When Americans crushed their confederacy in the Creek War of 1813–14, Indians fled southward into Florida seeking safety and sustenance. Eventually they reached the peninsula's end at Cape Sable. Rigging canoes with sails, the Creeks visited Cuba and other Caribbean islands, where they reestablished a Spanish trade. By 1830, Florida Creeks had adapted to a new homeland and become "Seminoles," a Muskogee word more properly pronounced *simano-li* and perhaps evolved from *cimarrón*, Spanish for "wild" or "runaway."

In north Florida, Creeks maintained traditional large towns with an agricultural economy, but to the south their way of life changed. The Everglades



Everglades National Park in southern Florida.

afforded no place for towns or extensive gardens: Creek villages became Seminole camps; traditional Creek log homes became open-sided, thatch-roofed Seminole *chickies*. On hummocks—mounds of fertile soil higher than seasonal floodwaters—the Seminoles cultivated corn, melons, squash, and pumpkins. Cattle made no sense in cypress forests, so Indians kept semiwild boars, creatures well adapted to rooting out a living in bogs and swamps. Where horses fared poorly, canoes did well; thus Seminoles became expert at building, paddling, and sailing watercraft as they harvested Florida's abundant fish and wildlife.

The former Creeks continued expanding their range during the early nineteenth century, becoming well adapted to life on the river of grass. Their dominion remained unchallenged until the United States defeated Great Britain in 1814; three years later the Seminoles were at war with Americans.<sup>2</sup>

Seeking retribution for Indian aid to the British, Andrew Jackson advanced into Florida after defeating the Creeks in Alabama and Georgia. Jackson wanted the Seminoles removed; colonial planters coveting north Florida land also sought to prevent fugitive slaves from joining Seminole villages. Between 1818 and 1850, Americans and Seminoles clashed in Florida's tangled swamps and forests. The Indians, using hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, held off the U.S. Army at great cost in dollars and human life until the Americans eventually overwhelmed most of the bands and forced their relocation to Oklahoma. Not all Seminoles moved, however, as several hundred diehards retreated into the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp. The government, confronted by a wilderness maze of water and tangled vegetation, decided to ignore them.<sup>3</sup>

Easily evading the sparse white population of south Florida, the tiny bands stayed isolated for several decades. As long as the Everglades and Big Cypress were wild, the Indians controlled interior forests and marshes, where they felt at home in what appeared to most Americans as an insect-infested swamp teeming with crocodiles, a wasteland requiring drastic reclamation to be fit for human occupation. Most early settlers in south Florida kept to the coasts, yet by 1870 a few "crackers" living at remote outposts began an Everglades trade with Indians who exchanged exotic feathers, pelts, plumes, and gator hides for beads, bolts of cloth, guns, ammunition, and liquor. Within a generation this trade pattern and the Seminole way of life had begun to unravel as the next invasion began.

At the turn of the century, draining, damming, and dredging Florida's wetlands opened another wilderness to American enterprise. A frenzied construction of rails, canals, and roads brought a new breed of farmers, developers, and

sportsmen. The Seminoles, once self-sufficient hunters, faced a shrinking territory. Suddenly losing their food supply and source of trade goods, families slid rapidly into poverty. Roads and canals brought white hunters deep into the wilderness, where newcomers soon surpassed the Indians in the wild animal and bird trade. Adding to native woes were changes in fashion coupled with state and federal legislation to protect plumed birds. Growing concern for wildlife conservation now threatened the Seminole way of life in the wetlands.<sup>4</sup>

In 1912 the BIA's Lucien A. Spencer, after finding a significant decrease in Seminole trade goods, recommended that a wildlife preserve and Indian reservation be established in "the vast area of overflowed land" in southwest Florida. Others supported his sentiments.<sup>5</sup> Responding to conservationists, the Florida legislature in 1917 created a 100,000-acre Seminole Indian Reservation and game preserve. Located on the Monroe County coast northwest of Cape Sable, the reserve's Shark and Lostman's Rivers and its mangrove swamps, with streams and creeks flowing into the maze of Ten Thousand Islands, left virtually no dry land. Most Seminole camps and villages lay northeast in the Everglades and Big Cypress, but as a hunting ground, the new reservation met tribal needs.

The 1920s witnessed yet another Florida land boom. Completion of the Tamiami Canal Highway 41 connecting east and west turned a sleepy little village on the Miami River into the bustling city that ended south Florida's isolation. A free-for-all soon took place in Pa-hay-okee. Timber companies seeking cypress, pine, and mahogany moved into the Big Cypress, new canneries scoured clam beds in the Ten Thousand Islands, and south Florida's tiny commercial fishing fleet exploded into an industry. Sport and commercial hunters decimated alligator and waterfowl in the recently opened Everglades, while professionals joined tourists to collect rare plants and animals, with newborn alligators becoming the item of choice. Rumors of oil strikes resulted in exploration, roads, and the arrival of drilling crews.

Alarmed, conservationists organized to protect the wetlands. Robert T. Morris, a New York physician, and Ernest F. Coe, a landscape architect from Rhode Island, spearheaded the crusade. By the mid-1920s, after they had founded the Tropic Everglades Park Association, Coe launched a letter-writing campaign that would last for two decades. He organized public meetings, gave magic lantern shows, and enlisted his wife to lobby garden clubs. When the Everglades emerged as a national issue, public opinion appeared to favor a park, but local politicians and sport hunters remained skeptical. Coe and Morris,

originally committed to Everglades plant and animal life, also became concerned about the welfare of Seminole Indians.

### The Park Problem

By 1930 the federal government had little to show for trying to improve the Seminoles' condition in Florida. After setting aside two small reserves and an even smaller amount of money, the BIA failed to coax Seminoles out of their interior camps onto reservations. Both the BIA and Florida ignored or failed to understand political factions within the bands, divisions that eventually resulted in formation of the Miccosukee Tribe. With little federal or unclaimed state land available, the option of creating a single large reservation, even if Seminoles could have agreed on one, no longer existed. Wherever the bands occupied state or private land, government officials classified them as squatters. Adding to the quandary, areas that Indians depended on for food might now become a national park.

Ernest Coe claimed that a new park in Florida would benefit Indians. Knowing little about native cultures in general and less about the Seminole in particular, Coe assured fellow conservationists that Indians could find park jobs as canoe guides. Restrictions on hunting and trapping would lead to increased wildlife, which, he predicted, would overflow beyond park boundaries to help Indians who resettled to the north.

Coe had a jump on the NPS. After Congress requested a study in 1929, the service reluctantly became involved with the Everglades. NPS hesitation came from a bias in favor of spectacular western peaks, canyons, and geologic curiosities. A decade earlier, the Everglades ecosystem would have flatly failed NPS scenic criteria, but by 1929 priorities had begun to change. After Horace Albright took a personal interest in the region, the Everglades would become the first national park created for biological reasons.<sup>6</sup> Albright shrewdly realized that a Florida park could provide the NPS a large East Coast site near a growing urban center and a major tourist destination. When he joined Coe's campaign, Albright knew that victory would not come easily: The problems of private land acquisition and sport hunting required solutions, as did the Seminole question. But Albright had been dealing with Indians throughout his career, and, as of 1929, they had not proven a stumbling block.

Active NPS involvement in the Everglades started with a series of field trips.

Albright, Arno Cammerer, and a team of Interior specialists visited Florida in 1930, taking with them a group of prominent conservationists that included Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson, president of the National Audubon Society. Once back in Washington, Albright requested a BIA report on the Monroe County Seminole reservation. When Commissioner Charles Rhoads informed the NPS of federal lands held in trust plus the nearly 100,000-acre state reserve, the director assigned Cammerer to study possible land acquisitions. Probably to his surprise, Cammerer discovered state enabling legislation providing that the Monroe County reserve would "terminate if the Indians cease to reside on the reservation for a period of 18 months, and that, as the Indians have never lived continuously on the reservation, the reservation may be cancelled." Cammerer had found a lever with which to pry loose the Seminole reservation.<sup>7</sup>

Horace Albright was not the only federal official working in south Florida. BIA special commissioner Roy Nash's research led him to conclude that an Everglades park would have a negative effect on Indians, especially if the NPS prohibited hunting. Although Nash did not trust Florida to protect native land, suspecting that the state would reclaim any ground once it became valuable, he hesitated to recommend transfer to the NPS. In his view, the Seminoles had to retain hunting rights in any acceptable trade. Nash's final report included a precise map of permanent Seminole camps, illustrating what he called "the intimate connection between the Indians and the Park."<sup>8</sup>

Further NPS assessment of the Everglades was conducted by conservationist Augustus Houghton in February 1932. Houghton, too, did not relish a Seminole removal; nevertheless he recommended that the state lands be exchanged for a new reservation north of the cross-Florida highway (Tamiami Trail). By now, Ernest Coe also vigorously recommended land exchange to solve the Seminole problem and secure the 100,000-acre reservation for a park.<sup>9</sup> Coe and others realized that a major NPS problem in Florida was the lack of vast unclaimed federal lands that had existed when western parks were carved out of USFS, Land Office, and BIA holdings. Thus when Congress did authorize a future Everglades National Park in 1934, it restricted property acquisition to land donated by the state or by private owners, which meant that the Florida legislature had to be convinced to hand over, not sell, the Monroe County reserve.<sup>10</sup> As unlikely as that might seem, matters soon got worse.

Although park sponsors dreaded the prospect of Seminole removal, sympathy for the Indians waned after plans for oil exploration on the reserve alarmed everyone. Knowing that a boom would halt their plans, park advocates decided

to secure the reservation immediately. Ernest Coe now called for a Seminole removal that would void their hunting and fishing rights in the Everglades. Others pressed for a national park that would give displaced Seminoles an outlet for handicrafts and a new role in the growing tourist economy.<sup>11</sup>

Tourism posed a dilemma. By 1934 the Seminoles had been involved for several decades in what might be called the curiosity trade. Between 1914 and 1918 Henry Coppinger opened Miami's first Indian attraction, "Coppinger's Tropical Garden, Alligator Farm, and Seminole Indian Village." Located in a grove of palm and cypress trees along the Miami River, this exotic menagerie featured alligators, crocodiles, monkeys, and Indians. The village contained several native chickees complete with live families. A rival enterprise, Musa Isle Village, soon opened, and by the 1920s Seminoles had become popular. Guests could wander among Indians in an exotic tropical setting, see native women make clothing on Singer sewing machines, and watch a traditional food called *kuntí* being cooked over open fires. Seminole weddings at Coppinger's and Musa Isle drew hundreds of onlookers. But the most popular attraction, one which still draws tourists to similar villages now operated by the Indians themselves, were the spectacles in which Indian men wrestled with live alligators.<sup>12</sup>

Coppinger's and Musa Isle set the standard for the Seminole tourist village heyday between 1920 and 1940. The attraction provided many Seminoles with seasonal employment and a place to live. Although most Indians had positive memories of Coppinger's and Musa Isle, the BIA, civic leaders, and clergy concluded that such places contributed to native alcoholism, prostitution, and venereal disease. Some reformers campaigned for total elimination of the camps; others preferred sites relocated near the Everglades, where, it was argued, tourists could purchase genuine native arts and crafts, take canoe trips with Seminole guides, and see natives undefiled by Miami vulgarity.<sup>13</sup>

Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes and his Indian commissioner, John Collier, believed that an Everglades park would offer an ideal setting for Seminole gift shops and guides. Ickes and Collier, who had supported protection of the Everglades since the early 1930s, worried about the cultural impact of a park; yet, after visiting two remote Seminole camps, Ickes announced that a park "would contribute . . . to [their] economic and social rehabilitation." Accepting Coe's wildlife overflow theory and considering Indians inherent conservationists, Ickes and Collier concluded that a new reservation north of the park would serve as a game refuge. Unlike others, they also recognized that Indians enjoyed special status: "For a considerable time to come," Ickes declared in



**WRESTLING PIT  
DANGER  
DO NOT SIT ON WALL  
MUSA ISLE INDIAN VILLAGE  
MIAMI, FLA.**



BOBBY TIGER, SEMINOLE INDIAN, PREPARES TO WRESTLE WITH ALLIGATOR AT AN INDIAN VILLAGE. TOURISTS

## TOURIST FLORI

Seminole Bobby Tiger prepares to wrestle with an alligator. Indians were tourist attractions in Miami before Everglades National Park was established. (Courtesy of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society)

1935, "the Seminoles ought to have the right of subsistence hunting and fishing within the proposed park, and they should always have the labor preference."

Ickes's comment on native rights was part of a remarkable NBC radio address on national parks that he delivered on March 30, 1935. Never before had a secretary of the interior spoken directly to the entire nation on principles of Indian-white relations, on Indian ties to the land, or on the thorny question of national parks and historic injustice. During a recent visit to Florida, Ickes explained, he had learned that the Everglades "provided a refuge to the Seminole Indians, to whom it once belonged exclusively." He also discussed the national monument at Fort Marion, including its darker side:

Under American rule Fort Marion was often used as a prison, and one of the most famous of its occupants was valiant Osceola, patriot Chief of the Seminoles, who was treacherously seized, to our everlasting shame, while negotiating a treaty of peace at the time of the Seminole War. Perhaps preservation of the Everglades as a national park, and the establishment of the Seminole reservation adjacent to it on the north, will, in some degree, make up for the sufferings of Osceola and his fellow tribesmen at our hands.<sup>14</sup>

Harold Ickes, the "righteous pilgrim," had made creation of Everglades National Park a moral issue.

### Section 3

The day after his radio address, Ickes and John Collier flew to Florida, where they toured the proposed park, attended a Sun Dance "powwow," visited a remote Seminole village, and accepted a petition from Sam Tommie, Charlie Cypress, Charlie Billie, and other Seminoles. The experience deeply affected both government officials. Ickes promised land, employment preference, and protection of hunting rights.

Collier saw the park as a means to preserve a noble and endangered way of life while protecting wildlife being slaughtered by sport hunters. The Seminole camp existed in "the true wilds [as] an incarnation and victory of the wilderness itself," because Florida Indians had an emotional bond with nature unknown by whites: "They are not cruel hunters or trappers; they even make pets of such creatures as raccoons and otters." Collier recognized that creating a national park, along with the intrusions of his own BIA, could destroy a culture that had

survived several centuries of onslaught: "It is by the spirit that they live. Hence, beyond restoring those equilibriums of the natural environment which the white man has destroyed, and thus making possible a better life [through] their own social structure and their own unhesitant and powerful and sane instinct—beyond that point, we should go with extreme caution in Seminole matters, and perhaps we had better not go at all."<sup>15</sup>

In his determination to protect the Seminoles, John Collier inserted Section 3 into the Everglades National Park Act of 1934: "[Nothing] in this Act shall be construed to lessen any existing rights of the Seminole Indians which are not in conflict with the purposes [of] Everglades National Park." Others in the BIA found Section 3 too vague and anticipated problems. Gene Stirling of the bureau's anthropology division warned Collier that the NPS would never allow hunting and trapping, nor would the Park Service permit Indians "to run cattle, raise hogs and practice agriculture." Stirling doubted that any economic net gain for the Seminoles would occur if they had to depend upon NPS good will.<sup>16</sup>

Stirling, Ickes, and Collier needed to be concerned about more than the NPS. Section 3, even with its ambiguous language, infuriated Ernest Coe. Expressing shock, anger, and dismay, Coe demanded repeal. The provision, he maintained, was unnecessary because "liberal and most favorable provisions have [already] been made in favor of the Seminoles." Not only did Coe attack the clause, he called for immediate removal of all Indian camps and villages from Pa-hay-okee. Seminoles had no right to special privileges not granted to other citizens, and, if they continued to live inside the park, Coe warned, they would compromise "one of the most precious of the national park standards"—namely, the prohibition against hunting. That restriction made national parks a place "where all forms of life cease to fear man," a condition Coe did not want suspended to mollify Indians.<sup>17</sup>

Faced with Ernest Coe's flurry of letters, Arno Cammerer at the NPS waffled. Indian occupancy of the Everglades, he told Coe, was "incidental to the main land acquisition problem, and can be taken up at the proper time." A month later Arthur Demaray summarized NPS policy: "We have no intention of moving the Indians bodily from the areas which they find profitable, we are not ready to say that their hunting privileges would be abrogated."<sup>18</sup> Yet by 1936, a year after Ickes and Collier had spoken with the Seminoles, federal policy shifted. Ickes softened his defense of subsistence hunting, and the BIA assured Coe that Indians had "no special rights or privileges within national parks." Even though the BIA's Florida agent, Francis J. Scott, warned Collier that the park created a

severe disadvantage for the Seminoles and that Indians would protest bitterly against restrictions on hunting, the Washington office informed Ernest Coe that Indians could claim only specific treaty rights in parks.<sup>19</sup>

At this point the Seminoles themselves spoke out. In 1937 Corey Osceola, Josie Billie, and Ingraham Billie informed the press that they refused to leave the Everglades and would continue hunting, the federal government notwithstanding. Ingraham Billie's camp on Lostman's River lay well within park boundaries, as did several other sites.<sup>20</sup> Press coverage of the protest produced a Park Service report, "The Seminole Problem," in which J. J. Cameron blamed the BIA for initiating Seminole removal. The bureau, according to Cameron, in 1931 had suggested that Indians be relocated. He found the original BIA plan "eminently satisfactory" to the Park Service and Congress. Moving the Seminoles from Monroe County to a new reserve north of the proposed park, he advised, enjoyed "the whole-hearted support of the State of Florida."

J. J. Cameron conceded that removal had been pursued quietly to avoid bad publicity. Despite Section 3 of the 1934 legislation, the NPS and BIA had worked together to solve "the Seminole problem." Cameron recommended further cooperation, but he cautioned that "moving of the Indian is apt to be a long-drawn out and controversial matter, and . . . may not be successful."<sup>21</sup>

## Rangers and Rules

Acquiring land for the Everglades National Park proved to be a long, drawn-out affair as well. State and private donations came slowly. After Florida finally relinquished the Monroe County reservation in 1944, Seminoles continued to fish, trap, and hunt there. Despite alarms from Coe, the NPS proceeded with caution.<sup>22</sup>

Following World War II, efforts to establish the park gained momentum as threats to the Everglades mounted. The 1934 legislation had "authorized" a park but did not create one or protect a single blade of grass. In 1947 the Florida legislature, having already donated considerable state land to the federal government, appropriated \$2 million for acquisition of inholdings. To guard the site until the Park Service took over, it was administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a national refuge. Manager Daniel Beard, who had authority to enforce state conservation laws, was instructed to work with BIA agent Kenneth Wilson on a census of Seminoles remaining in the old reserve.

After meetings with the Tamiami Trail bands in the spring of 1947, Beard

reported that at least one permanent village under William McKinley Osceola remained within park boundaries. The Osceola band refused to move. Beard found John Jumper's and Chief Charlie's hunting camps at the headwaters of the Shark River, and a dwelling belonging to Jimmie Temmy deep in the Everglades. Beard described Temmy's and Jumper's places as "the real McCoy," meaning that they were not suitable for tourists. Both families agreed to vacate.<sup>23</sup>

Although Beard opposed bawdy Miami-style attractions in the park, he hoped to protect the Jumper and Temmy camps and especially the hummock gardens that grew a rare species of pumpkin. After the NPS rejected the idea of indigenous guides, Beard suggested training Indians as ranger/interpreters, allowing families to maintain their hummocks while informing park visitors about traditional life in Pa-hay-okee. Archaeology and native history, too, could be included. "Complete avoidance of the Seminole in [our] program," Beard counseled, "seems unwise to me."<sup>24</sup>

Daniel Beard, the future superintendent of Everglades National Park, formed further opinions while drafting his refuge management plan. After World War II, when Seminoles began using airboats and swamp buggies, the day of cypress canoes had ended. Indian camps were changing: Washing machines had arrived, along with the "white man's buildings," where Fords and Chevies sat next to traditional chickees. Seminoles still caught frogs and "fire hunted" alligators in the glades, but acculturation proceeded apace.

From his observations and from discussions with tribal members, Beard developed guidelines for Indian activity in the future park. He decided that all temporary camps a mile or more south of the Tamiami Trail must be abandoned; those within a mile could remain, with no hunting allowed. Swamp buggies, air boats, and other motorized vehicles were confined to immediate camp areas, with no new "white man's buildings" or improvements; such sites must not be sold or exchanged. Fires south of the highway, except for cooking and warmth, would result in fines or jail. Seminoles could fish under state laws, but no frogging would be permitted. Beard's requirements made NPS rules at Canyon de Chelly appear mild.

Although BIA agent Kenneth Marmon had not examined Beard's regulations, he agreed in principle. Marmon anticipated no enforcement problems, nor did he believe that reasonable rules would face opposition.<sup>25</sup> Marmon then explained the future to the Seminoles. He asked Ingraham Billie, Jimmie Billie, and Cory Osceola to inform their councils about the new system. Later, Os-

ceola assured him that the councils agreed "to go ahead and establish the park, and not to worry about the Seminoles."<sup>26</sup>

Pleased that the tribe agreed to its management plan, the NPS remained nervous about Indians residing inside a park. Throughout 1947 the Fish and Wildlife Service and NPS gently urged Seminoles to depart. After William Osceola, John Jumper, and Jim Tiger expressed concern about future hunting and fishing, the service said that taking frogs and garfish could continue. The three Indians promised to move but repeatedly found reasons to delay, keeping a low profile. Thus when President Harry S Truman officially dedicated Everglades National Park on December 6, 1947, he saw no Seminoles. Unlike similar ceremonies at Glacier, Grand Canyon, Navajo National Monument, Canyon de Chelly, and Apostle Islands, Indians had not been invited and none were present. Truman did not mention Indians, yet some still lived in the new park and all expected to use it—in their own way.<sup>27</sup>

### "The Land I Stand on Is My Body"

By 1950 the BIA had established three small Seminole reservations in Florida: Brighton, Big Cypress, and Dania (Hollywood). Some families, mostly Christian, moved to the reserves; others, retaining their native religion, stayed in the traditional camps and villages that dotted the Tamiami Trail. Prior to World War II, state, federal, and private landowners had shown little concern over such Indian occupation. Attitudes quickly changed in the early 1950s as land values skyrocketed after rumors of another oil boom, and when Florida's rising population began seeking new recreational retreats.

Private landowners now called for ousting the few Indians who impeded oil exploration, leisure activity, and agriculture. Events outside Florida further contributed to arousing political activism by the state's Indians. When the Eisenhower administration announced plans to end federal responsibility for certain tribes, the Seminoles were on the list. Meanwhile, a rift widened between the three reservations and the traditional Miccosukee faction, creating a complex situation that affected the national park.

The BIA during the 1950s assisted reservation Seminoles while ignoring Miccosukee demands for official recognition, hoping that the latter would move to a reserve. Traditionalists living along the Tamiami Trail and in the park had no such intention. The NPS, while tolerating its Miccosukee residents, tried

to control their hunting and fishing. By 1954 roughly four hundred "Trail" people led by Ingraham Billie, Buffalo Tiger, George Osceola, and Jimmie Billie had organized a council called the "Mikasuki Tribe of Seminole Indians," seeking recognition as a distinct group. This in turn would separate them from an Indian Claims Commission case involving the 100,000-acre reserve in Monroe County. The Miccosukee rejected the ICC process and government money—they wanted land, lots of it, and the land they wanted included most of south-west Florida.<sup>28</sup>

All this seemed improbable two decades before the Passamyquoddy land claim in Maine alarmed Americans. Nevertheless, even after a reduction to 1,500,000 acres, the Miccosukee still claimed a conservation district, the old Monroe County reservation, and a twelve mile strip along the Tamiami highway. The conservation area lay submerged for most of the year but the Miccosukees wanted more wildlife habitat along with exclusive hunting and fishing rights in the national park, a park that, in their view, had been created as "a homeland for animals" to the exclusion of humans.

With expert legal help and their own persistence, the Miccosukees eventually prevailed. After the federal government granted official recognition in 1962, the band acquired a fifty-year lease from the NPS for a strip five and half miles long and 600 feet deep along Highway 41. The new Forty-Mile Bend Reservation provided space for Miccosukee offices, a school, housing and the Green Corn Dance ceremonies. Most of all, it answered a plea that elderly shaman Sam Jones had made to Ingraham Billie, George Osceola, and Buffalo Tiger a decade earlier: "This land I stand on is my body. I want you to help me keep it."<sup>29</sup>

### "The Park Is Our Home"

By 1990 the Miccosukees and Park Service were again at odds over the Everglades. A Highway 41 special use permit, much like NPS agreements with the Havasupai and the Makah, placed restrictions on tribal development and made new projects subject to NPS review. As the growing band faced a housing shortage, its council platted a forty-five unit subdivision without NPS permission. After the Park Service ordered construction halted, tribal chairman Billy Cypress met with superintendent Robert Chandler to explain that for Miccosukees "the park is our home." They did not lease the land, Cypress said, but rather had given the government over 2,000 square miles in exchange for the 333-acre strip.<sup>30</sup>

The Park Service did not see matters that way. It contended that the bands enjoyed special access to a large area in Big Cypress where they could hunt, log, and operate air-boat tours, an area outside the park to which the NPS hoped the Miccosukee would eventually migrate. The negotiations, especially after the NPS accused the tribe of dumping meliluca-contaminated fill into park wetlands to create mobile home pads, became "a painful, contentious process." Pain and contention also marked futile federal efforts to convict James Billie after the Seminole chief killed an endangered Florida panther in 1983.<sup>31</sup>

The claim that "this land is my body" can be difficult for non-native rangers to accept when Indians build casinos, kill rare panthers, press for oil and gas exploration in nature preserves, introduce exotic species, or zoom through cypress swamps in boats powered by aircraft engines. To park staff, remarked a former Everglades superintendent, "tribes are often seen as problems, as difficulties":

There's the negative perception, and in some cases it's more than a perception, that the tribes really want to get as much as they can from the park. They push an issue to its limits. Our staff see the Miccosukees with a huge bingo parlor, see them working with Shell Oil to slant drill under the Everglades to enhance their financial base. They act on economic imperatives. On the other hand, they talk about traditional ways and sacred land. It creates a lot of resentment, and it's painful for the park manager because you recognize the validity of their claims and history and human needs, yet you have a responsibility to protect the park. It's sometimes very difficult. It's sometimes impossible.<sup>32</sup>

For Miccosukee and Seminoles the park relationship has also been uneasy. Miccosukees feel unwelcome and seldom use the park except for traditional burials; they and the Seminoles prefer Big Cypress where they can hunt, fish, trap and practice traditional ceremonies. Communication with the NPS has been poor—neither the Everglades or Big Cypress has had a tribal liaison. Few Indians have been hired, and as at Olympic, Glacier, Grand Canyon and elsewhere, frequent NPS staff turnover poses a problem. Few attempts to work with the tribes on park interpretation have been made.<sup>33</sup>

In Florida, unlike the Navajo in Arizona or Blackfeet in Montana, small bands living on tiny reserves have filed vast land claims against the nation's third largest park outside of Alaska. The Seminole problem reveals that, set apart though they may be, national parks are not exempt from the anomalies of history.