

The Origin of Local Place Names



An early map of the Ten Thousand Islands

Image Courtesy of Craig Woodward

By Craig Woodward

A number of years ago, I was traveling by boat up the Blackwater River in Collier Seminole State Park and stopped at an island campsite called “Grocery Place.” I wondered how this name came to be given to such a remote location considering it was never a place to get groceries! As it turns out, persistence paid off on my research, as a series of four articles written in January of 1927 for The Koreshan Unity’s newspaper “The American Eagle,” published in Estero, provided the answer: Grocery and Sugar Bays, at the entrance to Palm River, were “named by a mishap to the supplies of a hunting party under the influence of the juice that inebriates.” One could have guessed forever and not have figured out that mystery!

The article “The History of the Ten Thousand Islands” was written by C. Roy Watson who noted, that as research for it, he spent many

hours discussing local history with old timers of the day (1927) such as Captain John F. Horr (Horr’s Island, now Key Marco), C.G. McKinney (from Chokoloskee), James M. Barfield (husband of Tommie Barfield), Judge George Storter (from Everglades City), Captain William D. Collier (from Old Marco), James Daniels (boat builder) and others.

In addition to providing the answer regarding Grocery Place, Roy Watson also provided the sources for many other place names that we usually take for granted without even wondering about their origins. For example, Gordon Pass in Naples was named for Roger Gordon who ran a fish camp nearby in 1874. Henderson Creek was named after John Henderson, the Government Surveyor who surveyed Marco Island in 1876. Roy Watson says that Johnson Bay (northwest of Isles of Capri) was named for Chris Johnson, who lived with his wife on Johnson Island

and cultivated and sold mangoes.

Tom Roberts squatted in Caxambas, southeast of the present day Indian Hill, and was fortunate to have been living there when John Henderson was surveying the Island, so he ended up with a bay named after him – “Roberts Bay,” a prestigious name that survives to this day, even though the squatter and his family moved away shortly afterwards! Meanwhile, Johnny Roberts (Tom’s brother) squatted at Goodland Point, “naming the place for its characteristics.”

Watson mentions that “Caximba” was pronounced “Kahamba” in 1830 and interpreted to be a “place of many wells” by the Spanish who obtained fresh water there, or he says the name could mean, in ancient Spanish, “the torch,” a reference to possible “Indian fires showing from the hill tops.”

Cape Romano was named “Punta

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Photo by Scott H. Shook

Marjory Stoneman Douglas was represented at the dais by a painting and a bouquet of yellow roses, said to be her favorite.

No Other Everglades in the World

By Scott H. Shook

Her words are so powerful that Pedro Ramos, superintendent of the Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks in Florida, opened and closed his message with them: “There are no other Everglades in the World.”

Those words are attributed to the late Marjory Stoneman Douglas, the journalist, author, women’s suffrage advocate, and conservationist known for her staunch defense of the Everglades. Stoneman Douglas, daughter of the first publisher of the Miami Herald, Frank Stoneman, wrote the landmark book The Everglades: River of Grass in 1947. Stoneman Douglas, who lived to 108, played a pivotal

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January 2026						
Sunday, December 28	Monday,December 29	Tuesday, December 30	Wednesday, December 31	Thursday, January 1	Friday, January 2	Saturday, January 3
			Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Happy New Year!	First Friday Social Rod & Gun Club	
Sunday, January 4	Monday, January 5	Tuesday, January 6	Wednesday, January 7	Thursday, January 8	Friday, January 9	Saturday, January 10
		Guided Walking Tour 10:30 AM EC Varsity Basketball vs. TVSN Girls Game 5:30 PM Boys Game 7:00 PM	Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Ladies Coffee – 8:30 AM Lions Club Membership Meeting. 6:00 PM Ivey House EC Varsity Basketball at Marco Island Academy Girls Game 5:30 PM Boys Game 7:00 PM	Everglades Roots Fest Trail Lakes Campground	Art in the Glades McLeod Park 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM Everglades Roots Fest Trail Lakes Campground
Sunday, January 11	Monday, January 12	Tuesday, January 13	Wednesday, January 14	Thursday, January 15	Friday, January 16	Saturday, January 17
Everglades Roots Fest Trail Lakes Campground		Book Club Marlene Sonderfan home at ORA in Chokoloskee EC Varsity Basketball vs. Donahue Catholic Girls Game 5:30 PM Boys Game 7:00 PM	Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Ladies Coffee – 8:30 AM EC Varsity Basketball at Mason Classical Academy Third Thursday 2:00 PM Museum of the Everglades Siphoning the Swamp Boys Game 5:30 PM	EC Varsity Basketball vs. Marco Island Academy Girls Game 5:00 PM Boys Game 6:30 PM	Seafood Boil, Everglades Isles Fly In Pancake Breakfast
Sunday, January 18	Monday, January 19	Tuesday, January 20	Wednesday, January 21	Thursday, January 22	Friday, January 23	Saturday, January 24
		EC Boys Varsity Basketball at Naples Classical Academy Boys Game 4:30 PM	Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Ladies Coffee – 8:30 AM EC Varsity Basketball @ TVSN Girls Game 5:30 PM Boys Game 7:00 PM	Centennial Celebration of the Smallwood Store 11:00 AM - 7:00 PM EC Varsity Basketball at Gateway Charter Boys Game 7:00 PM	Centennial Celebration of the Smallwood Store 11:00 AM – 7:00 PM
Sunday, January 25	Monday, January 26	Tuesday, January 27	Wednesday, January 28	Thursday, January 29	Friday, January 30	Saturday, January 31
			Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Ladies Coffee – 8:30 AM	EC Varsity Basketball vs. Golden Gate Boys Game 5:00 PM	

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Longa” by the Spanish and later renamed “Cape Roman” by the British. Although not mentioned by Watson, it should be noted that the British surveyor engaged to survey this area during the period the British owned Florida was none other than Bernard Romans, who named the Cape after himself! Later, after Florida passed back to Spain, they changed the “s” to an “o,” apparently to make it more “Spanish.”

Morgan’s Pass, just north of Cape Romano, was named from the wreck of the schooner “Morgan” and Round Key just south of there from its shape. Watson says that the naming of “Coon, Rabbit, Tiger, Panther, White Horse Keys came from being infested with the respective animals.” However, today it seems highly unlikely that there were tigers or white horses “infesting” these tropical islands!

Chatham Bend and Chatham River were named by an Englishman who saw a similarity to Chatham, England. The Barnes and Whitney Rivers were named for settlers by those names. Meanwhile, the Blackwater River (in current day Collier-Seminole State Park) was named for the “murky water and the dark colored bottom.” Finding an old Indian field with a large collection of pumpkins resulted in the name “Pumpkin Key” and the adjacent Pumpkin Bay.

A Key that is shown on most old maps, chiefly because of its prominent location off the coast of the Ten Thousand Islands, is Pavilion Key. Watson says its name was derived from “a soldiers’ camp of pavilion tents upon it at one time during the Seminole War.” Turner River (east of Chokoloskee) was named after Dick Turner, a scout who returned after the Seminole Wars to settle there. The Harney River was named after Colonel Harney, who led an expedition up the river to capture and hang an Indian Chief who had previously massacred his troops on the Caloosahatchee River (near the present-day Cape Coral) during the second Seminole War.

Meanwhile, Mormon Key at the entrance to the Chatham River was named by a coastal surveyor named



The sign and cistern at Grocery Place at Collier-Seminole State Park

Hergesheimer, who was “so impressed with the doings of a squatter reputed to have polygamous proclivities” living there that he gave it that name!

Lostman’s River and Lostman’s Key were named because a party of deserting English sailors who, escaping from Key West, chose poorly and paid a local fisherman to help them. He left them deserted on that Key, reportedly telling them, “they would find a town on the other end of the island.” The sailors were found in starving conditions by Mr. William S. Allen (the founder of Everglades City), who took them to Punta Gorda. Lastly, Cape Sable at the south tip of the Florida peninsula is French for “Sandy Cape,” an old name on French maps that survives to this day.

With all his curiosity in how places got their names, it is satisfying to know that Roy Watson also got his name permanently affixed to S.W. Florida. “Watson Road” in the Caxambas area of Marco was named for him. Why this particular street? Because, in April of 1920, Watson purchased all of the property to the north of this road from the Barfields, an area still well known by its elevation and the location of a small freshwater pond. When Barron Collier acquired almost all of Marco Island in 1922, including much of Caxambas, from the Barfields, he did not purchase the property of Roy

Watson who continued to reside there.

Many of our local names have been added since 1927, but it is interesting to explore those that are this old. Obviously, all history buffs owe a debt of gratitude to C. Roy Watson, who put in a lot of work in writing this early history, which includes more than just the history of local place names. I also want to thank Gabriela Cardenas, a former college student at the University of Florida, who took her free time to assist me by going to their library to pull the old microfilm archives from 1927 of the “American Eagle” and sent copies of old forgotten newspapers to me.

Editor’s Note: The Mullet Rapper is pleased to have Craig Woodward as a new columnist writing on local history. His parents camped on Marco’s beach in 1952 when they were in their 20s. During a December 1967 family vacation, while camping at Collier Seminole State Park, his parents decided to move permanently to Florida when one of them got a job here. Craig’s mother, Glenellen, got a job teaching high school in Everglades City, and the family moved in the summer of 1968. She taught here from 1968-70, when she transferred to Naples High.

Craig has been interested in local Florida history. For 20 years, he led “history day,” a tour of historical sites on the Island sponsored by the Marco Chamber of Commerce Leadership Marco; he was very involved in the design and construction of the Marco Historical Museum; he participated in archaeological digs, and he has researched and written a number of articles about local history. Craig and his wife Bonnie have had a residence in Everglades City for 21 years.



A copy of a portion of Surveyor John Henderson’s 1876 Government Survey of Caxambas in the south portion of Marco Island. The location of Tom Robert’s residence can be seen at the bottom right and the Bay named for him at the top of the map.



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“There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth; remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them.”
~ Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Everglades from pg. 1

role in establishing and preserving Everglades National Park.

The project carries a hefty price tag.

“It was \$50 million,” said Allison Gant, chief of communications and public affairs for Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Park. “We weren’t doing a whole lot to advertise that. And it’s for the whole site. I mean, it is what it is, right? It was not just the building. It’s the entire site. We raised the elevation of the whole site so that there won’t be flooding, because why build a parking lot and then have it flood? We expanded the marina and reinforced the marina, the boat basin. And we redid the canoe and kayak launch ramp and put in a building over there for the concession operations for the canoe and kayak rentals. We’ve got great storage downstairs. Upstairs, we’ll have the visitor center area. It’s a small space as far as visitor centers go, but it’s ample. And the idea is the view out to the resource. And we’ve got offices for our interpretive and law enforcement staff to be here. We’ve got two stories, but everything of value really is up on the second level. It’s made of reinforced concrete. It’s built to withstand storm surges and hurricane force winds. It has a lot of the features that make it appropriate to be a building on the coast and last a long time.”

Kate MacGregor, Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, was the key speaker at the ribbon cutting.

“It’s such an honor to be here today and join you in Everglades National Park to celebrate the



The official ribbon cutting. The National Park Service has held 82 ribbon-cuttings since 2019.

reopening and redevelopment of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Visitor Center,” MacGregor said. “This is an extraordinary moment for the Park Service, for the community, and for everyone who cares about today and the future of the Everglades. This project reflects a clear and consistent priority of President Donald Trump and Secretary Doug Burgum and former secretaries who you’ve spoken to in restoring our nation’s beautiful spaces, strengthening our national parks, and investing in resilient and beautiful infrastructure that will stand for generations and make our people proud. Under President Trump’s leadership, we have directed historic levels of funding to restoration and revitalization across the

Everglades. Today’s ribbon cutting is a testament to that commitment.”

Porter Goss, longtime U.S. House of Representatives member (1989-2004) from this district and former Director of Central Intelligence, was in attendance, but didn’t speak. His son, Chauncey Goss, board chairman of the South Florida Water Management District, delivered a strong message.

“Congress recognized that the Everglades needed more than just dedicated land,” Goss said, “it needed restoration, and a comprehensive Everglades restoration plan was authorized. It authorized the Corps of Engineers to work with the State of Florida. And we’re part of that arm of the State of Florida through the South Florida Water Management District to reclaim the Everglades and to get the water right here. My dad had a chance to work on the bill language and more importantly, get a chance to vote yes on that bill. Many governors, many secretaries, colonels, executive directors and governing board members, FWC commissioners, tribal chairmen all worked over these last 25 years in conjunction with our amazing staff to get us where we are today. So 25 years later, maybe we aren’t as far along, dad, as you thought we should be, but I can tell you, the last six years we have seen feverish work on Everglades restoration.”

Governor DeSantis’ first executive order earmarked \$2.5 billion for



Everglades National Park Superintendent Pedro Ramos addresses the crowd.



Everglades City mayor Howie Grimm was a featured speaker.

Everglades restoration over four years. “We actually exceeded that number. We spent closer to \$3.3 billion in a second term,” said Goss.

Gant said there will be plenty for the public to enjoy at the Marjory Stoneman Visitor Center.

“Here at this location for the public, we’ll have canoe and kayak rentals, boat tours, ranger-led talks, maybe a few guided programs,” Gant said. “It’s really an information gateway and a jumping off point to get out into the national park and experience it. We’ve got ample parking here for people driving in for the day, but there’s also parking for those that are going out for overnight expeditions into the backcountry, or into the Marjory Stoneman Douglas wilderness.”

Gant hopes that the center will open by the end of the year. She expects to see a big jump in tourist traffic.

“The rebuild has been a long time coming,” she said. “But we’re so excited to be able to welcome people very soon to the site. We’re really hoping by the end of the month. We’re really excited to have this sustainable, resilient structure that’s built to be here on the coast. This is the only spot in the national park to be able to jump off into the 10,000 Islands area. We’re just looking forward to more people coming and recreating and seeing what the Everglades has to offer. I think it’s going to really increase. We’re expecting to have an influx of visitation. People have been waiting for this. They know it’s coming. And we’re headed right into the winter season, so it’s perfect timing.”

For more photos see pg. 12



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A Start for the New Year

JOIN Our Historical Society Today

By Patty Huff

Now is the time to start the new year off by supporting our community. The Everglades Society for Historic Preservation was established in 2004 with the intention of “saving” City Hall from deterioration. After Hurricane Wilma, FEMA funds were available to restore the original Collier County Courthouse. Over the past 22 years, ESHP has accomplished so much more in the community.

Today our Mission Statement is: Through advocacy, education, and stewardship, ESHP connects the Everglades Area to its rich past, celebrating its diverse heritage, and inspiring future generations by preserving its



shared history, arts, and culture. With our old Welcome Center in Carnestown being damaged in 2017 and the dissolution of our local Chamber of Commerce, thousands of visitors rely on ESHP to direct them to restaurants, hotels, tours, etc.

1. By joining ESHP you will help us continue with our many projects which include:

2. Operating our area’s Welcome Center, providing visitors with information and maps.

3. Supporting our local businesses by referring tourists to them.

Supporting our local artists, providing the space and opportunity to display and sell their crafts.

1. Providing our students with the opportunity of earning volunteer hours.

2. Installing signage at historic sites and homes.

3. Installing banners on lampposts, celebrating our past, our students, and our holidays.

4. Providing newcomers with local information about our community and services.

5. Educating and advocating for preserving our heritage through tours, talks, and events.

6. Saving the 1927 historic Bank of Everglades Building.

Thank you again for your interest in our community and its heritage. ESHP is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization, and your dues may qualify as a tax-deductible contribution.

To donate with a debit/ credit card, visit our website www.eshp.org and click on the Join Us button or mail a check to ESHP, P.O. Box 46, Everglades City, FL 34139.

Sign Up for Guided Walking Tour of EC

By Patty Huff

On the first Tuesday of each month, the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation (ESHP) will have a guided walking tour through the historic district of Everglades City. Reservations are required since space is limited to 12 people. Tour of the inside of one historic home each month will be included. The first tour will start at 10:30 on Tuesday, January 6, at the Everglades Area Welcome Center at 207 West Broadway. This is a fundraising event to support our Bank of Everglades Building project which is currently under construction. The cost of the event is \$150 per person and, in addition to the tour, will include a bag of goodies and lunch at the Rod and Gun Club. For more information and to reserve your spot, contact Patty at 239-719-0020 or email snookcity@gmail.com. ESHP members will receive a 10% discount. Thank you for supporting our local projects.



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 - 7:30-8:30 Fortunate Son - (Creedence Clearwater Revival Tribute)
 - 9:00-10:30 Moonstone Riders
- Gator Nate will emcee the drone light show on Friday

Saturday, Feb.14

- 11:00-12:00 Edison Schetter
- 12:30-1:30 Bandana Brothers
- 2:00-3:00 Jack Shealy Band
- 3:30-4:30 CJ Garton
- 5:00-6:00 Gator Nate
- 7:00-8:30 Tyler Farr (HEADLINER)
- 9:00-10:00 The Stones (Rolling Stones Tribute)

Sunday, February 15th

- 11:00-12:00 Chokolokee Family Church of God
- 1:30-2:30 Wes Shipp
- 3:00-4:00 Charlie Pace Band
- 4:30-6pm Meetloaf (Meatloaf Tribute Band)

Admission to the festival on Friday evening is free with a canned food donation. Saturday and Sunday’s adult admission will be a \$10 minimum cash donation. Beverage and carnival ride tickets will be available for purchase with cash (only), and ATMs will be available onsite.

Online at www.evergladesseafoodfestival.org



Mangroves Transforming Ten Thousand Islands

By Tony Pernas and Mike Barry

Mangroves have always been the defining trees of the Ten Thousand Islands, forming storm-resistant forests that stabilize shorelines and fuel fisheries. But today, these same mangroves are pushing inland at a pace that’s startling residents and reshaping familiar landscapes. What once were prairies, marshes, or open views are now becoming dense mangrove thickets — even inside neighborhoods.

This dramatic expansion isn’t due to mangroves becoming “invasive.” Instead, it’s a direct response to rising water levels, changing climate conditions, and long-term ecological trends that scientists identified years ago. And the fastest changes are happening right now.

Why Mangroves Are Appearing Where They Never Grew Before

Homeowners across Everglades City and nearby islands report the same concerns: narrowing creeks, blocked views, reduced dock access, and root systems spreading into places that were once dry ground. Since Florida law strictly regulates mangrove trimming and removal, managing these trees can be costly and frustrating. But the trees aren’t acting differently — the environment around them is.

Floating red mangrove propagules and the seeds of black and white mangroves are riding storm tides and high-water events into swales, drains, marsh edges, and vacant lots. Without regular mowing or functional tide-control valves on the stormwater system, these propagules and seeds establish quietly for years until they become full-sized trees. Several lots in Everglades City are now completely dominated

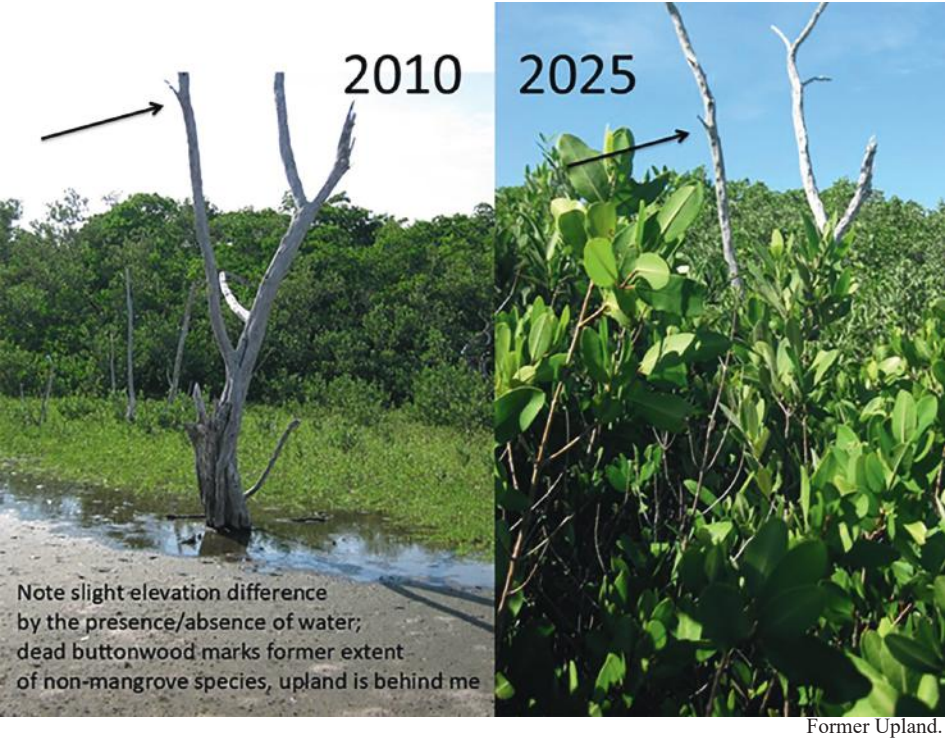
by mangroves, prompting the city to adopt new mowing requirements and initiate efforts to replace tidal backflow valves.

The Real Driver: Water Levels Are Rising Faster Than Most People Realize

Most people think of sea-level rise as bigger storm surges or higher high tides. But in Southwest Florida, the biggest change is actually in the low tides — they simply don’t fall as low as they used to. NOAA tide-gauge data from Naples shows that since around 2010, low tides have gradually risen. Even small increases keep marsh surfaces flooded longer. This shift was predicted more than a decade ago.

A 2011 scientific study: Sea-level rise and landscape change influence mangrove encroachment onto marsh in the Ten Thousand Islands region of Florida, USA | Journal of Coastal Conservation (Krauss et al.) documented that marshes in the Ten Thousand Islands were already experiencing increased flooding in the early 2000s. (Krauss et al): The study showed that as freshwater flow has changed and sea levels have continued to rise, mangroves have steadily moved upstream and inland, taking over habitat that historically supported marsh-dependent birds. This pattern mirrors similar mangrove expansion documented worldwide. Aside from rare, localized freeze events, very little in recent decades has slowed or stopped this inland migration.

The long-term study of the vegetation changes in the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge (TTINWR) (Barry et.al.) show just how dramatic the change has been. By analyzing aerial photographs and maps from 1940 to 2005, researchers tracked mangrove stand boundaries



from the Gulf of Mexico inland to the refuge’s northern edge. Findings from the study:

- Mangrove forest area reached 17998 acres by 2005.
- This represents an increase of 4,640 acres since 1940.
- Overall, mangroves expanded by about 35% on TTINWR over that period.

This large-scale shift confirms that mangroves are not simply expanding along shorelines — they are actively replacing marshes, reshaping habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. This change has accelerated since 2010 due to the substantial jump in low tides since 2010 and a series of storm surges beginning with Irma in 2017.

As a result, today we now see marshes and cabbage palm hammocks disappearing and young mangrove forests establishing in once-open prairies. This is exactly the pattern the researchers stated would happen with rising sea levels.

In places like Shell Island Road in Naples, the evidence is dramatic: standing dead marsh grass, unmoved storm debris, and mangroves now rooting against upland edges that were dry a generation ago.

Mangroves Have the

Advantage — And Prairie Plants Are Losing Ground

Multiple forces are tipping the balance:

- Rising sea levels keep marshes flooded.
- Warmer winters mean fewer killing freezes; the last major freeze was in 2010.
- Reduced freshwater flow raises salinity.
- Less natural fire allows mangrove plants to outcompete grasses.
- Canals, ditches, and airboat trails create pathways that facilitate the movement of mangrove seedlings inland.

The result: coastal prairies and marshes across Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge are disappearing — not from storms, not from development, but from slow drowning.

Before and After: What 15 Years of Change Looks Like

2010 vs. 2025 — Former Upland

Mangroves continued on pg. 11



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EC Students Witness History

By Savannah Oglesby

A few of our Everglades City School students, along with several staff members, got to witness history on Friday, December 12. The National Park Service held a celebration to cut the ribbon at the new Marjory Stoneman Douglas Visitor Center in Everglades City. Hundreds of people from all over the United States came to celebrate this incredibly special event.

Back in 2017, Hurricane Irma’s powerful winds and strong storm surge destroyed nearly everything in our community. One of the many buildings that was destroyed included the Everglades National Park Gulf Coast Visitor Center. Over the course of eight years, the National Park Service planned to design and construct a visitor center that would be both flood-resistant and sustainable. The site itself was also developed with the community and visitors in mind, with enhanced public access and an enlarged marina that includes a launch specifically for

kayaks. One of the most incredible parts about the newly constructed visitor center is that it is named after the one and only Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Just 36 years ago, Congress approved the Everglades National Park and Expansion Act of 1989, which ensured that a visitor center in the Everglades National Park would be named after Marjory Stoneman Douglas to honor her legacy and dedication to protecting our unique environment.

During the ceremony, the Superintendent of Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks, Pedro Ramos, mentioned one of Marjory’s most famous quotes, “There are no other Everglades in the world,” as he stood next to a seat with her picture and a bouquet



of vibrant yellow roses. He noted that they chose yellow roses because yellow was her favorite color.

Our EVG students and staff were thrilled to be able to witness such an exciting event for our community and our Everglades City history.



Photos Courtesy of Savannah Oglesby

ESHP Receives Donation to Historical Library

By Patty Huff

The Everglades Society for Historic Preservation recently received the generous donation of 271 books on fishing from Frances “Frankie” Wolfson. In addition to her weekly visits to Everglades City, Frankie is well known as an avid and passionate fly angler, fishing throughout the world. During these travels, Frankie has collected artifacts and books for decades. She once commented, “Fishing has taught me important lessons in conservation, and it has introduced me to many wonderful people.”


Frankie was one of the founding members of the Advisory Council for the American Museum of Fly Fishing, located in Manchester, Vermont. Her donated collection to EHSP includes many first editions, including George Dawson’s “The Pleasure of Angling” (published in 1876), A.W. Dimock’s “The Book of the Tarpon” (1912), and three of Zane Grey’s first edition books on fishing from 1919-37, in addition to many other notable books.

ESHP is grateful to Frankie for her contribution to the Marya Repko Historical Library, to which the public will have access once the Bank of Everglades Building is complete. Thank you, Frankie, for your interest and support of our community.

To Students and Parents:


“It has been an amazing first half of the school year and hard to believe that 2025 has ended. We have taken field trips to the Keys and virtual Zootopia classes through the Naples Zoo, as well as built catapults and battery-operated Christmas lights! We were blessed to host the Leadership Collier class of 2026 and showcase the uniqueness of our special school.

Our Middle School student, Ayden Smolinski, went all the way to the State Qualifier meet in Lakeland, Florida, for Cross Country and did amazing. We had our volleyball girls go all the way to districts, and it looks like our boys’ basketball is on the way to great things. We may be small, but our students are doing mighty things. We wish a spectacular 2026 from our little school to you! ~ Dr. Cherie Allison



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FISHING THE
EVERGLADES

Capt. Mike Merritt

A New Year of Fishing

It's January already? Time sure flies by here in the Everglades. I hope everyone had a great Christmas with family and hope you all have a prosperous 2026! All I need to make me happy is a healthy fishery and to catch lots of Snook! January can be a great month in the backcountry for these guys. Narrow waterways and tight quarters can make for loads of fun. Shallow waters with a dark bottom that has a shoreline nearby are another great way to find them. When the water is cold, they don't always tuck into the banks to hide. Sometimes they will be 15 to 20 feet out, laying there to absorb some heat. Another thing to remember is they are not moving around as fast as when the water warms up, so slow your action down some and see what the results are. Snook like warm water, but when it is cold everywhere, a slight difference in water temps can make all the difference in the bite. Most days in the winter months the afternoon bite is better. This is because everything has had time to warm up. You may have to work a lot more shoreline to get some

action, but usually when you find one, you will find more in that same area. So, work it over good!

Colder temps mean more of a variety. You might catch the usual Snook, Redfish, and Seatrout, but there are also Sheepshead, Black Drum, Snapper, Mackerel, Bluefish, and others this time of year. If you just want to bend a rod and don't care about species, then flats are a great option in the winter months. A slow worked jig for the Trout, and speed it up for Jacks, Mackerel, and Ladyfish. Lots of fun for the family and bring home enough for a fish fry. Fishing inshore around the Islands you can get the Red Fish, Black Drum, Sheepshead, and Snapper. This can all be done with live shrimp, either on a cork or on the bottom. If you fish in the rivers and fish the deeper spots and rock holes, you will find just about anything, including the Drum, Sheepshead, Goliaths, and Snapper. Fish with a knocker rig in these spots using whatever weight is necessary to hold the bottom. Sometimes a one-quarter ounce and sometimes a one-ounce. It all depends on the current so get ready to adjust, but make sure you reach the bottom or you are wasting your time.

If you get lucky and get a warm spell and some calm winds you can still catch Tarpon. We saw some very large ones today and spent an hour trying to hook up. No luck, but they showed up rolling when the winds lay down and temps were rising. For the juvenile Tarpon,



Submitted Photo

the backcountry is the best. These guys can load up in some of the narrow creeks and back bays. Lots of fun and hard to keep on the hook! But a great challenge.

One thing is consistent here in the winter months and that is live shrimp for bait. Even a novice can catch fish on a live shrimp. And everything eats shrimp! So, if you are taking the family or kids out, make sure to have some live shrimp! The second best thing to use in the winter months is a jig. Make sure to change up the retrieve speed when working your jig. If nothing is happening, slow it down. Sometimes, almost to a crawl along the bottom. Don't be afraid to try some new technique; you may just find the right one and catch more fish.

It's a great time to fish and the weather can be fantastic once you get through that cold morning. Get the family out and enjoy! Great memories are waiting! Good luck fishing!

Captain Mike Merritt was born in Coral Gables, Florida, lived in Australia as a child, and then moved back to Everglades City, Florida, where he graduated from Everglades City High School. He caught his first snook at the age of eight and has been catching them ever since. He is a third-generation fisherman and has been guiding in the Everglades National Park for over 30 years. While the glades are his primary fishing grounds, he also owns The Amazon Prime Ecolodge and has been fishing in Brazil's Amazon for the last 12 years.



Submitted Photo

Lions Foundation Supports Bank Restoration Project

Submitted

In response to a year-end appeal by the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation, Inc. (ESHP),


the Board of the Lions Foundation of Everglades, Inc. voted to make a \$1,000 donation to ESHP. Lions Club and Foundation President Harry Henkel presented the check for \$1,000 to Patty Huff, President of ESHP, in support of the Bank of Everglades Building restoration project. Once fully restored, the Bank Building will become the Everglades Welcome Center and Trail Town Headquarters, a major arts, cultural, and educational resource for area residents, visitors and tourists.



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Help Us Choose a New Logo

By Mullet Rapper Staff

A logo refresh is on the horizon and not only can you be a part of it, but maybe win some cash, too!

Cast your vote for the newly designed logo you like best. Clip the entry form from the paper and send it in to be entered into a drawing

for \$150. The drawing will be held mid-March; the cash winner will be announced in the April edition, along with the unveiling of the new logo.

And remember – if you have an article, photo, letter to the editor, or event you would like to see in the paper, send it in to us at lynn@mulletrapper.com.



Logo #1



Logo #2



Logo #3



Logo #4



Logo #5

MULLET RAPPER LOGO CONTEST

Name: _____
Telephone: _____
I like logo #: _____

Clip this entry form and mail to
Coastal Breeze News
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Contest closes March 31, 2026. Contest winner will be announced April 15, 2026. One entry per person.

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Mary Brown Hamilton standing in front of the second church.

Photos Courtesy of Jesse Wilson



Pastor Thomas J. Wells and his wife, Willie Emma Wells, who built the current church.



STORIES FROM THE HEART

Pastor Jesse Wilson

Looking Back to See Ahead

My wife and I came to Chokoloskee from Brooksville, Florida, in 2019. We came in April of that year and joined our names to over twenty other Pastors before us, to assume the pastorate of Chokoloskee Church of God. We had left a large, thriving Assembly of God church where we had attended for five years, two of which were as their Children’s Pastors.

I had been ordained with the Church of God since 1998 and during that time, my wife and I had started and pastored two previous churches, one with help from a local Church of God, where my wife served as the Worship Leader.

In early 2019, after I had called the state office, I was told of a small church in the Everglades National Park on a small Island, called Chokoloskee. The church had a small congregation at the

time, and the church itself was the third such church to sit on the property. The first one was built and officially opened in 1913. This marked the beginning of over 100 years that a congregation has been meeting on Chokoloskee. It’s currently the third-oldest congregation in the Church of God in Florida. When my wife and I came down to speak in early 2019, it had been two years since Hurricane Irma devastated the area, and especially the little church. Under the leadership of then Pastor Lynette Morris, they were able to remodel the church, thanks to many generous people locally and from afar.

Though the church had suffered bad water damage, the building itself had withstood the Category Five hurricane, as it had many hurricanes before it. The block building was built by Pastor Thomas Jefferson Wells in the late 1950s. It was the third church building to sit on that property.

Pastor Thomas J. Wells had a thriving congregation, and along with his wife, Willie Emma Wells, they had built a beautiful church to serve those who lived in the Ten Thousand Islands. His son Robert Wells, along with his wife Vickie, are faithful members of our church today. Pastor Wells was actually pastoring up the road



The church that Pastor Wells built in the 1950s on the left, with the new church on the right. The new church is the 4th church built since 1913.

in Immokalee, Florida, where he had built another church, when the call came for him to come to Chokoloskee. He and the pastor here on the Island decided to swap churches and that’s how Pastor Wells ended up coming to Chokoloskee. It would turn out to be a great decision.

From its beginnings the little church on the island would have fish dinners for the community, and one tradition that still stands today is that if you want to get baptized, it’s in Chokoloskee Bay, in the same place that hundreds of others have been baptized, at Martha and Craig Daniels’ home on the Western side of the Island. If only those waters could speak, there would be some incredible stories!

When my wife and I settled in on the island, it became apparent in a short period of time that our little 100-seat church needed to be higher off the ground. So, beginning in late 2019 and into 2020, plans were made to build a new church, one that would stand high enough above sea level to not flood anymore. After over three years of designing, planning, and county inspections, Chokoloskee Family Church, the fourth church built on the same land donated in 1913, was finally completed. The new church will officially open

its doors in January of 2026, 113 years after the first church opened. The new 160-seat sanctuary will continue a long tradition of serving the Ten Thousand Islands and the incredible families that live here.

My wife and I are honored to be part of a long history of pastors and members who have prayed, wept, gave, and worked hard to keep the church going strong. Many have asked what will become of the current church building that Pastor Wells built. Well, it will serve as a multipurpose building and renamed The Thomas Jefferson Wells Family Life Center in honor of the pastor who built it. The current church was designed to look like the old church it is replacing, and inside, as you enter through the hallway, will be photos of our rich history, because sometimes, you have to look back to see ahead.

Jesse currently pastors Chokoloskee Family Church on Chokoloskee Island along with his wife, Charity. Their growing congregation keeps them busy with local outreaches and community events. They have two grandkids who live in the area who also attend their church, along with their daughter and son-in-law.



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Your ultimate source for community events, local insights, area news and so much more.

Things To Do | Park Information | Local History

Community News | Business Directory

The Living Flow: The Way of Water

Submitted

Join Clyde and Niki Butcher at their Big Cypress Gallery on Saturday, February 7, 2026, for the opening reception of *The Living Flow: The Way of Water* by Clyde Butcher.

This exhibition traces the path of Florida’s lifeblood, water, as it journeys from the Kissimmee River Basin and Lake Okeechobee, through the Everglades, and out to Florida Bay. Through Clyde’s black-and-white photographs, visitors will experience this journey visually, moving through the gallery in the same order that water flows through the state. The exhibition underscores the essential role of clean water in sustaining Florida’s ecosystems and communities.

An interactive map will let visitors explore Clyde’s photographed locations and their impact on Florida’s freshwater supply while showcasing the global significance of freshwater through his lens.

“The swamp taught me that water is life.”

Highlights include:

- Educational panels featuring insights from the Everglades exhibit.
- Environmental information tables with brochures and resources from Florida conservation groups.
- Interactive map allowing guests to discover where Clyde’s photographs were taken and how these places impact our freshwater

During the event, Clyde and Niki will also be available for a book signing. Guests are invited to wander the Butchers’ thirteen-acre property, where environmental organizations will host interactive displays highlighting why this ecosystem is so unique and fragile.

“Water has always been at



Submitted Photo

the heart of my photography. In Florida, it’s the thread that connects everything: the land, the wildlife, and our own lives. Living Waters is my way of honoring that connection and reminding us that when the water flows freely and cleanly, life itself thrives.” — Clyde Butcher

Mangroves from pg. 6

Areas once dominated by buttonwood and cabbage palms now support carpets of young black and white mangroves. Rings of dead trees mark the old tidal boundary. (See Photo #2: Former Upland)

2010 vs. 2025 — Prairie to Mangrove

Stands of long-dead Sabal palms outline former upland ridges. Their bases are now underwater, filled with mangrove pneumatophores and young mangrove seedlings. (See Photo #3: Prairie to Mangrove).

These scenes aren’t isolated — they’re appearing across the coastal Everglades.

The Takeaway: A Permanent Shift, Not a Temporary Surge

The Ten Thousand Islands

is undergoing one of the most rapid ecological transformations in its history. But it’s not a takeover — it’s nature responding to new conditions.

- Mangroves are expanding because the waters are higher and warmer.
- Marshes are collapsing because they can no longer drain.
- Mangrove forests are becoming the new dominant landscape.

For coastal communities, this change brings both challenges and benefits:

Challenges

- More inland mangrove recruitment.
- More pressure on stormwater systems.
- More need for active mowing and storm drain/tidal-valve management.



Prairie to Mangrove

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • More regulatory complexity. | for fish and wildlife. |
| Benefits | |
| • Stronger storm protection. | • Higher carbon storage. |
| • Rich nursery habitat | • Natural shoreline stabilization. |

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A man in a military uniform and a woman in a baseball cap are smiling and cutting a large cake. The man is wearing a green uniform with a name tag that says "JAMES". The woman is wearing a white baseball cap with "DOT" on it and a dark blue shirt. The cake has a message written on it: "Thank you for your service and dedication to our country." There are also some flowers and a sign in the background.



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Worship

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**Holy Family
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200 Datura St E, Everglades City
Sunday Mass at 10:30

Goodland Baptist Church
Sun: 10 am Worship
Wed: 6 pm Bible Study
410 Mango Ave. Goodland

**Copeland
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908 Church Street, Copeland
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2nd Thursday of the month | 6 pm
September - May
Jinkins Fellowship Hall behind
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Ladies Coffee

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Rotates Everglades City Restaurants
snookcity@gmail.com
(239) 719-0020

Goodland Civic Association
3rd Tuesday of the month | 6:30 pm
Goodland Community Center
417 Mango Ave, Goodland
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EC Visitor Center: (239) 232-0473
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