

## Section 9: DeSoto Park and Morgan Park

Missy swims into a hollow log. It is full of water and open on one side. A sound louder than a hundred cicadas startles a mottled duck. As it starts to fly, it seems to run across the water on its webbed feet. The humming echoes from either side of the river. Missy watches a flat-bottomed green boat skim by. Its wake rocks the log. The water sloshes inside. Missy can smell the exhaust fumes and the drips of oil from the boat engine.

Before the waves calm, the noise stops. Then Missy hears another throbbing. A truck with a trailer backs down the DeSoto Park boat ramp. Someone pushes and pulls the boat and winches it onto the trailer. As the truck drives up the ramp, water pours from the engine and boat.



Missy leaves her hiding place. She swims along the east shore. She can hear the thumping of feet. People and dogs jog and walk the trail in Morgan Park. Then she passes under the wide concrete piers for the old bridge and new bridges of S.R. 70. Cars and trucks drive to and from Arcadia.

Thick pine forests once grew on the banks. They were cut for lumber. Many trees in the Peace River Valley have been harvested or cleared away for development. In the warm shallows, Missy hunts for food. She swallows some frog eggs floating in the grasses. Then she feels movement. Cows amble into the river. As one grazes near Missy, a grasshopper flies up. Missy lunges to catch it. The cow looks at Missy and keeps eating.

Missy hears a noise like a trumpet. A sandhill crane calls. Another glides with it, and they land in the grass. Their long bills find insects to eat in the ground.

Cattle egrets also feed with the cows. They snap up bugs that the cows frighten. An egret perches on the back of a cow to eat bugs. Cow manure falls on the sand and in the water, and Missy swims away.

In places, the riverbank is steep and high. In others, the ground slopes to the water. In the early twentieth century, phosphate rock was dug from the riverbed. The sand leftover from the mining changed the shape of the banks.

Missy rests on the slope of a sandbar under a willow tree. Ridges in the sand mark the waves of water. She feels a humming, and then she hears it. An airboat skims by. It throws a spray of wind and water. It feels like rain. It chases a school of minnows toward her. Missy snaps up one, two, three!

### BEEF CATTLE

by Kayton Nedza, Hardee County Outdoor Classroom

In the 1500s, Spaniards brought beef cattle to Florida. By the late 1700s, the Seminole Indians had the largest herds. During the Civil War, in the 1860s, the Peace River Valley supplied beef cattle to the Confederate Army. During the 1890s, cowmen fought "range wars" for cattle ownership and

those times were wilder than the "wild west." Today, Florida is one of the top 12 states that supply cattle for beef. Many ranches fence cows from swamps and riverbanks, and they burn the grasslands as part of a natural cycle of fire. Many acres of ranches are native Florida lands, which serve as wildlife habitat.