

## VISIBLE POLLUTION

by Anita Forester, DeSoto County Outdoor Classroom

Sometimes you can see pollution in a river, such as plastic bags, fishing lines, soda cans, glass bottles, tires or old tools. Some animals may think that pollution is food, but when they try to eat it, they get sick. Other pollution can trap animals or plants so they can't move

or grow, and pollution can also kill animals and plants. Many people who use the river collect litter that they find. Local communities also host "river cleanup" days to help the river, and everyone can pick up litter in the river and on the land.

## SALINITY

by Curtis Porterfield, Polk County Natural Resources Division

Salinity measures the saltiness of water. Many chemicals can be salts, but the most familiar one is the salt used on foods known as sodium chloride. All water has some salt, because as water moves, it picks up salt from the ground.

Rivers, lakes and streams are fresh water, which is not very salty. Estuaries are where fresh water meets the sea. Their waters are often called brackish, which is saltier than fresh water. The sea is salt water and has a lot of salt in it.

The saltiness of the water affects where aquatic plants and animals live. Some animals and plants like salty water, so they live in the sea or estuaries. Others don't like salty water, so they only live in fresh water.

## Section 10: Lettuce Lake

Before dawn, mist swirls above the river. Near Horse Creek, Missy hides. Moonflower vines cover the trees and bushes. Across the river, two bald eagles perch in a dead tree. As Missy wriggles through a fallen branch, she stops. A deer wades into the water to drink. When it walks away, she swims on.

Where C.R. 761 bridges the river, she swims underwater. The rumbling of traffic is not so loud. South of the bridge is an island. The lights of the Peace River Water Treatment Plant shine on one side. Taking water from the river and then treating it, the plant provides water to people in DeSoto, Charlotte and Sarasota counties.

Downstream of the bridge, the river curves and widens here. Buoys mark crab traps. Near lunchtime, Missy floats close to the shore. From one fern, she grabs a green anole. A large alligator crawls onto the shore. A boat full of people turns toward them. The loud speaker echoes across the water: "Alligator to your left."

A man says, "Wow! That's the biggest one we've seen today."

Standing beside him, another says, "I'd say a good 12 feet."

Many people hold cameras. As the boat nudges the shore, the alligator slides into the river.

"There he goes, folks, straight to the bottom. I hope you got a good shot of him," the loudspeaker says. The engine clunks into reverse. The boat shudders again and turns upriver.

Missy stays away from the big alligator and the boats. She swims south along the shore. Crowding out the large ferns and river grasses are Brazilian pepper trees. Above them, a red-shouldered hawk perches in a dead tree. Missy ducks beneath some water lily pads. They only grow here when the river's flow keeps the salt water in the harbor.

Then her foot catches a plastic shopping bag. She pulls, but it is stuck. She tries swimming deeper into the water. Air caught inside the bag keeps it floating. She rips at the bag with her teeth and slips free.

The channel splits again, and she takes the east branch of the river known as Lettuce Lake, named for the plants that look like heads of lettuce. Many houseboats cluster near the boat ramp. Missy dives away from them.

She swims along the bottom of the river. She feels something large — more than one — above her. She hides near a sunken log, and manatees pass above her.

