

Section 5: Upper Myakka Lake

At the end of Upper Myakka Lake, Lu finds a weir — a concrete wall across the lower end of the lake. When the river is low, the weir holds water in the lake. When the river is high, water flows over it.

The sides slope and are worn smooth from 70 years of the river washing it. For Lu, it forms a perfect slide. She climbs to the top of one end and, on her belly, she glides into the water. Her sleek body makes no splash.

The Civilian Conservation Corps built the weir to keep the lake from drying up and help control flooding. But the weir caused other changes in the river. As plants drifted down the river, the weir kept them in the lake. They fell to the bottom and rotted, and the once sandy lake bottom turned to muck. The lake started to die. A few years ago, culverts were added, so now water always flows on either side of the weir. It keeps the lake alive.

Common grackles crowd a water oak. Their iridescent plumage sparkles

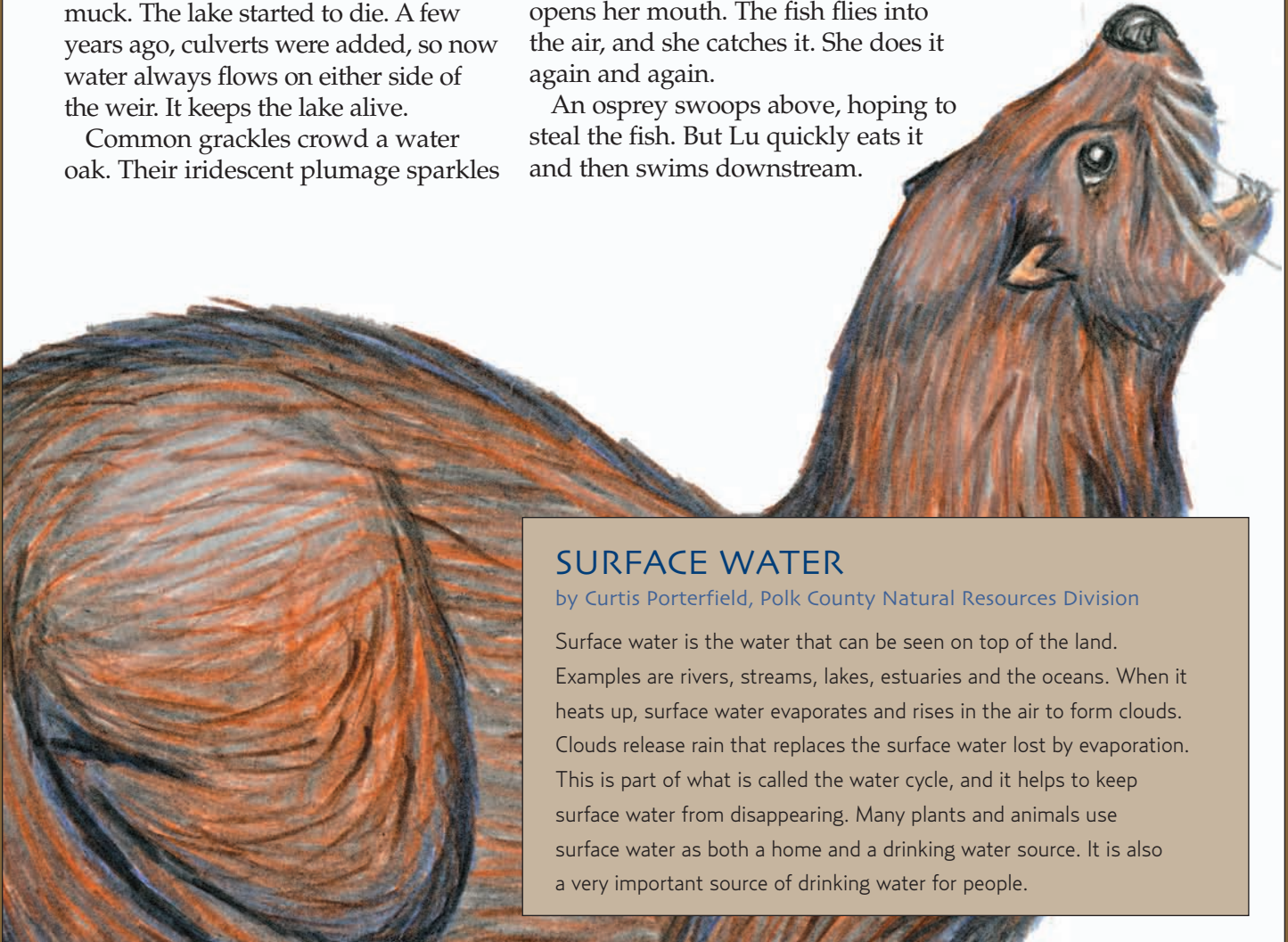
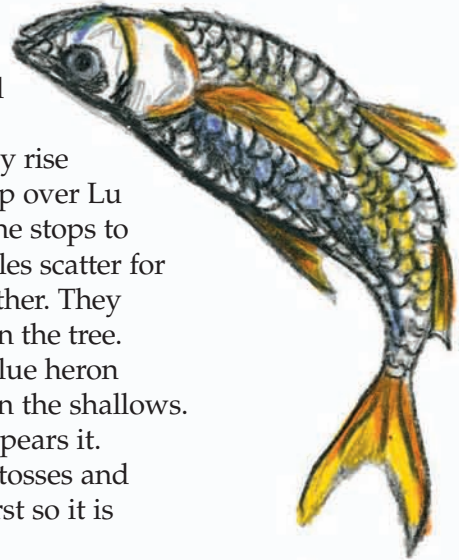
as they chirrup, flutter and change places.

They seem as busy and noisy as a group of children. Suddenly, they rise into the air. They swoop over Lu playing in the water. She stops to watch them. The grackles scatter for a moment and then gather. They circle and settle again in the tree.

Lu watches a great blue heron standing like a statue in the shallows. When it sees a fish, it spears it. Tipping its beak up, it tosses and catches the fish headfirst so it is easier to swallow.

To Lu, this looks like a game. She spies a golden shiner, dives and catches it in her mouth. Crawling up the shore, she flips her head up and opens her mouth. The fish flies into the air, and she catches it. She does it again and again.

An osprey swoops above, hoping to steal the fish. But Lu quickly eats it and then swims downstream.



SURFACE WATER

by Curtis Porterfield, Polk County Natural Resources Division

Surface water is the water that can be seen on top of the land. Examples are rivers, streams, lakes, estuaries and the oceans. When it heats up, surface water evaporates and rises in the air to form clouds. Clouds release rain that replaces the surface water lost by evaporation. This is part of what is called the water cycle, and it helps to keep surface water from disappearing. Many plants and animals use surface water as both a home and a drinking water source. It is also a very important source of drinking water for people.