

## Section 6: Lower Myakka Lake

Flooding has closed Myakka River State Park. The river is full of floating water hyacinths and hydrilla.

Lu can't swim through the plants piled up beneath the S.R. 72 bridge. She climbs the bank and scampers across the road. Before a car drives by, she dives into the river.

The land south of the highway is Myakka River State Park Wilderness Preserve. People must have a permit to explore any part of these 7,600 acres, but not Lu. She swims in and out of tree branches and trunks that used to stand and hang over the water. When she leaps over one, she looks as graceful as a dolphin.

Leaves, sticks and many other things float in the river. Where the water is too murky, Lu's whiskers find the way. When they brush a crayfish, she catches and crunches it.

She climbs onto a large oak limb. Resurrection ferns grow like fur along it. Spanish moss dangles above and a tree frog

hangs in it. Its tongue snaps a mosquito. Lu lunges for the frog, but it jumps into the water. Then a water snake strikes from beneath the branch and swallows the frog.

What seems to be a log veers at the snake, but Lu sees an alligator.

She turns. On a branch beyond her is a limpkin. It dips its beak into a groove of the oak's bark, plucks out an apple snail and eats it. Above, a butterfly orchid grows on the bark of the oak.

Lu dives into the river. It soon widens into Lower Myakka Lake. At the southern end of the lake, she feels the bottom drop away. She is swimming above a natural sinkhole now filled with water. It is called Deep Hole. When the river is low, the lake dries up except here. Deep Hole is home for the alligators.

### LAND STEWARDSHIP

by Curtis Porterfield, Polk County Natural Resources Division

Land stewardship means caring for the land we live around.

This can be done in many ways. One way is to keep our cities and towns clean and free of pollutants. Another way is being responsible with chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers that can harm natural systems. A third way is

to preserve and protect natural land and the plants and animals that live there.

Properly caring for the land helps to keep surface and ground water clean because any harmful substances placed on the land will be washed into surface and ground water by the rain.

