



Section 7: Carlton Reserve

South of Deep Hole is another weir. Beyond it is a dam. Lu swims over both of them. To the west of the river is the T. Mabry Carlton Jr. Memorial Reserve. A water plant there treats millions of gallons a day for people in Sarasota County. The water does not come from the river. It is pumped from the aquifer, an underground river.

The reserve is 24,500 acres, but 200 acres are used for a public park with picnic tables, restrooms and trails. The rest is wilderness area, and people must have a backcountry permit to hike, bike or ride horses there.

Lu has traveled the river, and people can too. Or, they can walk. The Myakka-Carlton trail starts at the north entrance of Myakka River State Park, crosses the Myakka Prairie and ends in the Carlton Reserve.

Lu sees a black bear in a tree, where the trunk grows into three wide branches. One limb curves into the water. Dead palm fronds, sticks

and leaves are trapped there. So is a bass. The bear leans into the water and grabs it. Water drips from its fur as it eats the fish.

Downriver, Lu explores a willow thicket. Caught on the twigs are fern fronds, pasture grasses, Spanish moss and a piece of window screen. The current pulls it against the branches, forming a net. A redear sunfish struggles inside.

Lu pushes her head into the net and grabs the fish. Then she can't move because the current pushes her into the net. Her sharp teeth and claws rip at the screen. It breaks from the branches on one side, freeing her to eat the fish.



GROUND WATER

by Curtis Porterfield, Polk County Natural Resources Division

Ground water is water contained underground in aquifers. When surface water sits on top of the land, some of it leaks into the soil and deep into the ground. This ground water also moves upwards in the ground and refills surface waters. In Florida, ground water and surface water are very

much connected because the bedrock (the rock beneath the soil) has many holes in it. The holes let water travel from the surface to the ground and from the ground up to the surface. Ground water is especially important to people who live in Florida because it is our main source of drinking water.