

## Section 10: Myakka State Forest

Several miles downstream, Lu sees another picnic table in the Myakka State Forest. The state forest is 8,590 acres within the City of North Port.

A grill near the table is full of water, and Lu sees a small turtle swimming inside. She catches it and sits on top of the grill to eat it. She hears grunting and digging under the oaks. A family of wild hogs pushes through to the edge of the water. The mother drinks, as the piglets splash around her. They are descendants of pigs that the Spanish brought to Florida 500 years ago. From her perch, Lu sees how the pigs have rooted up the soil and plants.

A Florida scrub-jay glides by. Lu watches it land on a saw palmetto. The trunk is black where a fire burned. A black beetle crawling there is almost hidden, but the jay catches and eats the bug. Once called the Florida jay, it lives only in this state. The jay needs scrub oaks and scrub pines to live, and fire helps them survive. Many trees have been cleared away for roads, houses and orange groves. Winchester Boulevard passes through this forest, so a sign there warns "Scrub-Jay Crossing."

At the edge of the Myakka State Forest, the river widens. Lu misses the oaks and palms that grew on its banks upstream. She sees an island covered with mangroves in this wide part of the river. It is a rookery for wood storks.

Lu swims to the island. A stork is watching. It flaps its wings and sounds an alarm. Other birds see the otter.

The birds know that otters eat bird eggs and baby birds. Several storks soar above, and others perch on the low branches of mangroves. They don't want Lu near their rookery, and they swoop toward her. She turns away from their sharp beaks and dives deep into the river.

### FIRE

by Carol Mahler

Sand hills, pine flatwoods, scrub and marsh need fire to live. Without fire, these areas change into another kind of habitat. For years, people have stopped natural fires started by lightning. Now, managers of wild lands start fires, called "prescribed fires" or "controlled burnings," to protect wilderness without hurting people or their property.

### ENDANGERED SPECIES, THREATENED SPECIES, SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN

by Carol Mahler

Endangered species are groups of animals that may not survive because there are so few alive. Some endangered species are sea turtles, wood storks, Florida manatees and Florida panthers. People have hunted some, and pollution has killed others. Many are in danger because people have destroyed their habitats to build homes, roads, businesses, churches, schools, farms and groves. Threatened species and species of special concern are groups with more members, but their survival is also at risk for the same reasons. Some threatened species are the southern bald eagle, Florida sandhill crane, Florida scrub-jay, fox squirrel, gopher tortoise and Florida black bear. Some species of special concern are the American alligator, eastern brown pelican, reddish egret, little blue heron, tricolored heron, roseate spoonbill and limpkin.

