

Section 9: Estero Bay Preserve State Park

Muggy sees two kayaks and hears the dipping of the paddles. The paddles stop, and the kayaks drift near the mangroves. Muggy hears the girl say, "I've never seen a river like Estero."

Her uncle says, "And it's been used by people for a long time."

She says, "It sure doesn't look like it."

"What did you think about that Koreshan community?" her uncle asks.

She says, "They had some funny ideas! I can't believe they planted melaleuca trees because they wanted to dry up the Everglades!"

"I know." The man drinks from a water bottle. "Melaleuca also keeps any other plants from growing, and animals and birds need those plants to live."

From underwater, Muggy watches a crab crawling on the prop roots.

The girl says, "I saw a bunch of dead melaleuca trees along Interstate 75."

He says, "It's a lot of work to kill them. Workers have to inject them with a chemical,

a little at a time, so the trees die slowly. If the tree thinks it's dying, it releases a million seeds, and each one will grow a new tree."

"What a mess!" she says. Her kayak rocks as she shifts her weight. In the shade of the kayaks, Muggy sees comb jellies and sea horses in the seagrass.

The girl says, "I'm a mess too. My arms hurt already, and we haven't gone very far on the blueway."

He says, "I love these blueway trails because it's a nature trail for canoes and kayaks. It's the best way to enjoy Estero Bay and the other estuaries."

She asks, "Didn't you say Estero Bay was the only aquatic preserve in Florida?"

He says, "It isn't the only one, but it was the first."

Muggy sees a needlefish. The school dives deeper into the mangrove roots.

The girl asks, "Can we paddle all of the blueway trails?"

Her uncle says, "We will, but not today. Let's go."

Their paddles dip into the water, and Muggy shifts with the movement.



FLORIDA AQUATIC PRESERVES AND STATE BUFFER PRESERVES

by Carol Mahler

In 1966, residents and legislators worked to mark special natural areas of fresh water, salt water and a mix of the two. The six areas around Charlotte Harbor are Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserve, Cape Haze Aquatic Preserve, Gasparilla Sound/Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve, Pine Island Sound Aquatic Preserve, Matlacha Pass Aquatic Preserve and Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. The boundaries are the high tide lines of the named bodies of water and their tributaries upstream as far as the tide reaches. Most of the open water in Charlotte Harbor estuary is included in the six preserves. Also, since the 1970s, more wetlands and uplands near the shores have been protected and are now part of the Charlotte Harbor and Estero Bay buffer preserve state parks.

