



## Section 10: Lovers Key State Park

Estero Boulevard bridges Big Carlos Pass and New Pass and goes through Lovers Key State Park. Muggy hears the noise of cars and trucks.

The school of mullet feeds with sea horses and pipefish in the seagrass that grows between Lovers Key and Long Key. Suddenly, Muggy sees a large shape, but he is not afraid. It is a sea turtle.

The mullet swim into the shade of an observation platform. Four legs and feet dangle in the water, two large and two small. Muggy hears the talking of the people on the platform.

"I can't believe how many turtle nests we saw on the beach," a girl says.

"Sea turtles like this beach," her mother says.

"This place is so beautiful," the girl says.

"And if it hadn't been saved from development, it would look just like Fort Myers Beach," her mother explains.

"It seems built up enough, with the parking lot, roads, picnic tables, shelter and restrooms," the girl says. She moves her legs back and forth in the water, and Muggy plays in the currents that she makes.

Her mother says, "I wish it had become a park before the developer dug those canals in Black Island, where we hiked."

The girl asks, "What's wrong with canals?"

Her mother replies, "Black Island was mangrove wetlands. As workers dredged the canals, they piled the spoil beside them. It made the land higher, and now it is uplands where mangroves can't grow. That higher land is home to plants and animals that never lived there. The ones that used to live there, like the mangroves, had to find other places."

"Does that include people?" The girl rests, and Muggy circles her legs.

Her mother says, "There are artesian wells where fresh water flows from the ground without being pumped. People used to live here in fish camps."

"I wish I could have seen it before the changes!" The girl kicks both feet up. Water flies across the surface and falls like raindrops. She plunges her feet back into the water with a splash. Muggy and the mullet scatter for a moment, but they gather again. Maybe Muggy has found a home with them.

Her mother says, "The story's the same throughout the Charlotte Harbor estuary. Somehow we have to find a place for everyone — even the plants and animals — to live."

