General Overview Of Everglades National Park

Geological origins

South Florida lies within the Atlantic Coastal Plain province which is divided into seven different sub provinces. The Everglades subprovince forms an elongated, south-dipping, low lying area. It’s series of large wetlands located on southern tip of Florida, meaning that water meets the land in most places. The landscape we see today in the Everglades are results of geological events of the past. 150 million years ago, South Florida was a sea floor. This history established its structure as a deep flat limestone base, formed from the calcium carbonate of the shells of tiny marine creatures over millions of years. The bedrock geology of the park has responded over time to the ongoing processes of weathering, erosion, compaction of organic sediments, unique hydrologic conditions, and the rise and fall of sea levels.

Natural history

Water in south Florida once flowed freely from the Kissimmee River to Lake Okeechobee, southward to Biscayne Bay, and Florida Bay. The water covered about 11,000 square miles, creating ponds, sloughs, sawgrass marshes, hardwood hammock, and forested uplands. Everglades National Park has 2 major biomes. It includes a temperate deciduous forest and a flooded grassland. Flooded grasslands are areas where the vegetation is taken over by grasses. The climate is nice and warm throughout most of the year, but can get cooler during the winter. Average temperature during the winters are a high of 77 degrees fahrenheit and low of 53 degrees. Summers are hot and humid with temperatures around 90 degrees fahrenheit. Hurricanes could affect the area. Rainy season is June-November and the average rainfall is 60 inches per year which could cause flooding in the area.

Ecosystems and endangered species

The Everglades is a subtropical wetland ecosystem spanning across central and south Florida. During the wet season, Lake Okeechobee overflows, releasing water into a river-dominated by sawgrass marsh. The water flows southward, passing through diverse habitats, including cypress swamps, wet prairie, and mangroves, until it reaches the Everglades and eventually into Florida Bay. The Everglades’ most endangered animal is the Florida panther. Less than 100 individuals now survive. The panthers are so critically endangered that it is vulnerable to just about every major threat. Because their population is so small, low genetic diversity is a concern.

Characteristics of area that make it important to preserve

An impressive collection of significant resources is protected within the boundaries of the park. This includes the largest stand of sawgrass prairie in North America, the largest protected mangrove forest in the northern hemisphere, the vast estuary of Florida Bay, and cultural resources chronicling approximately 10,000 years of human history. The park is internationally known for its extraordinary wildlife. More than 360 bird species can be found in the park alone.

It’s known for many wading birds, such as white and glossy ibises, roseate spoonbills, egrets, and herons. Some birds, such as the snail kite, wood stork, and Cape Sable seaside sparrow are threatened or endangered. Everglades is the only subtropical wilderness area in North America; by federal law, people must make no impact on the land and ecosystem.

Effects of human history

The mission of the National Park Service is to conserve the natural and historical objects within the park. The Everglades are filled with Indian culture exhibits that depict the culture of the Seminole and Miccosukee Everglades Indians. The establishment of the park marked the first time federal land was set aside for its abundance of diverse plants and animal species rather than for its scenic views. The Everglades remains one of the largest parks in the country.

Agency responsible to protect

The National Wildlife Federation’s approach to protecting the Everglades includes funding, law enforcement, and affiliate collaboration. Congress passes the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) in 2000, putting in motion the largest ecosystem restoration project in the country. The goal of CERP is to “get water right” by delivering water to natural systems based on historic flows.

Threats to area

Originally the Everglades’ ecosystem had a large diversity of habitats connected by wetlands and water bodies, but since the 1800s, humans have been altering the landscape. Water diversions and flood control structures restrict the flow of water across the sensitive landscape. The size of the everglades has decreased due to agricultural and urban development, which could affect the quality of habitats in the area. Currently, less than 50 percent of the original wetland areas still exist. The number of wading birds have been reduced by a significant amount. Entire populations of animals are about to disappear. Exotic pest plants have invades natural areas and loss of seagrass beds in Florida Bay have been followed by losses of wildlife. The Everglades face many natural stresses including fires, hurricanes, floods, and droughts. The influence of man is increasingly being felt on every acre of the Everglades in the form of human-caused climate change.

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