

## Why the State of the Caloosahatchee River Matters to the Refuge

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Lake Okeechobee is often criticized as a source of the pollution that periodically surrounds the Refuge. While that criticism is justified, it sometimes overshadows the role played by the Caloosahatchee River. The Caloosahatchee is one of the most polluted rivers in the nation. In 2006 the Caloosahatchee was recognized as one of the ten most endangered rivers in the United States. The bottom line is that in a typical year, runoff from the Caloosahatchee River contributes roughly half of the pollutants that surround the Refuge. See [more](#).

Historically the Caloosahatchee was a small meandering river that was not connected to Lake O. Starting in the late 19th century, a series of projects to dredge and channelize the river removed the bends in the river, referred to as oxbows, and connected the river to Lake O. As a result, water that used to flow south from Lake O to the Everglades, now flows to the Refuge on its way to the Gulf of Mexico.

Some of the projects to dredge and channelize the Caloosahatchee were driven by the desire to make money by turning wetlands into property suitable for housing and agriculture. Other drivers included the need to provide flood control, to provide fresh water to Lee County, and to prevent salt water intrusion into upstream aquifers.

Creating a balance between protecting natural resources and the needs of a growing population is at the heart of virtually all the conservation efforts in Southwest Florida. In addition to the work being done to improve the Caloosahatchee, those efforts also include the Army Corps' project to reexamine the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule. See [more](#).

An excellent way to better appreciate what the Caloosahatchee was and what it has become is to take the Caloosahatchee Oxbow & Riverlore Cruise See [more](#).

**In case you missed it:** Improving water quality is not just a South Florida issue. Every citizen in Florida lives within 20 miles of an impaired waterway. See [more](#).

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