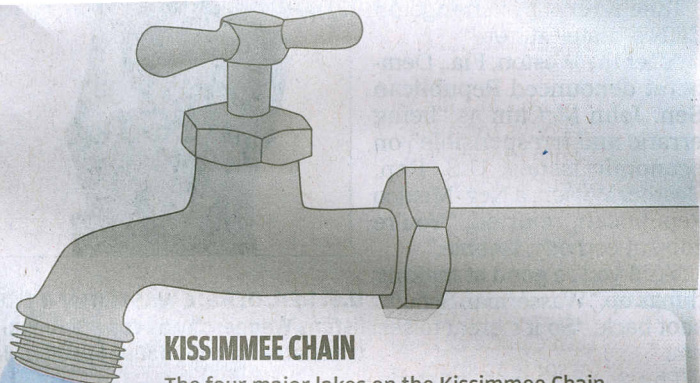


As the Water Flows

Covering 5,500 square miles and 3.45 million acres, the Lake Okeechobee watershed stretches south from Orlando over a broad swath down the middle of Florida to converge on the 730-square mile lake. From East Lake Tohopekaliga, a couple of miles south of Orlando International Airport, and the Conway and Butler chains in Orlando, the vast watershed includes the Kissimmee Chain and the Kissimmee River, as well as Lake Istokpoga near Lake Placid.



KISSIMMEE CHAIN

The four major lakes on the Kissimmee Chain – Toho, Hatchineha, Cypress and Kissimmee – and the Kissimmee River are vital to the health of Lake Okeechobee. Repeated drawdown projects on Lake Toho and Lake Kissimmee were deemed necessary because of the negative impacts of flood control that stack the water up rather than expanding and contracting with a natural flood plain. “Those lakes are acting as a buffer system. If they start to degrade, they will contribute to the degrading of Lake Okeechobee,” said Susan Gray of the South Florida Water Management District.

THROUGH POLK

In Polk County, Lake Marion, Lake Pierce, Lake Walk-in-the-Water, Crooked Lake, Lake Reedy and Lake Arbuckle also contribute to the drainage of the watershed. Arbuckle Creek flows into Lake Istokpoga, which then connects to the Kissimmee River and Lake Okeechobee through creeks, canals and a drainage basin.

DRAINAGE

The major drainage basins immediately north of the lake – Fisheating Creek, Indian Prairie and Taylor Creek/Nubbin Slough – play a large role in the watershed by contributing 35 percent of the phosphorus load flowing south into Okeechobee.

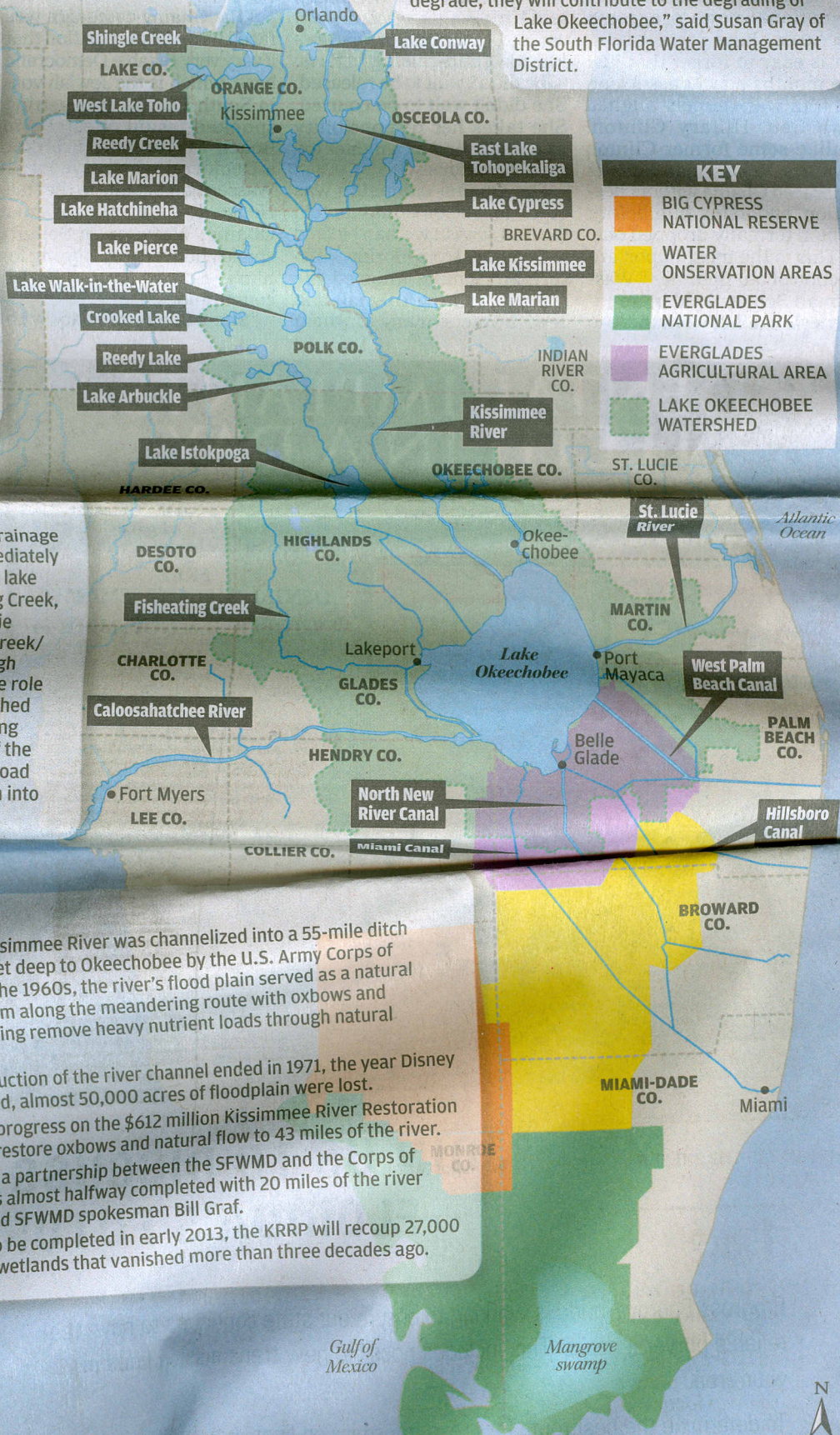
WETLANDS

Before the Kissimmee River was channelized into a 55-mile ditch running 30 feet deep to Okeechobee by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1960s, the river’s flood plain served as a natural filtering system along the meandering route with oxbows and marshes helping remove heavy nutrient loads through natural filtration.

When construction of the river channel ended in 1971, the year Disney World opened, almost 50,000 acres of floodplain were lost. But work in progress on the \$612 million Kissimmee River Restoration Project will restore oxbows and natural flow to 43 miles of the river.

The project, a partnership between the SFWMD and the Corps of Engineers, is almost halfway completed with 20 miles of the river restored, said SFWMD spokesman Bill Graf.

Scheduled to be completed in early 2013, the KRRP will recoup 27,000 acres of the wetlands that vanished more than three decades ago.



KEY	
	BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL RESERVE
	WATER OBSERVATION AREAS
	EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK
	EVERGLADES AGRICULTURAL AREA
	LAKE OKEECHOBEE WATERSHED

Gulf of Mexico

Mangrove swamp

