

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas talks about the first Everglades drainage attempt and growing sugar in Florida:*

Interviewer: What did people think of the Everglades at the time?

MSD: Well they didn't think much of it. Sell the land for farms. They mostly thought there was a lot of fresh water out there and they wanted to get the water off and sell the land for farms and that's about all they knew about it. That was the whole reason behind the drainage, which began in 81 when Governor Bloxham got a man named Disston from Philadelphia to come down and try to drain some of the upper marshes of the Caloosahatchee, between the Caloosahatchee and the Lake. And they said he could have half the land again that he drained and he put in a couple of little canals and dried up a little lake which is called Lake Flirt, up where more or less where LaBelle is now. And I think he put in a canal somewhere at the entrance of the Kissimmee River into the Lake but I'm vague about that. And of course he didn't succeed at all. He'd gotten some land but nobody wanted to buy it so he really didn't carry on with that. It wasn't until 1906 until Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward who ran for Governor on the slogan of draining the Everglades. It wasn't until then that they made a serious effort to drain by starting the first dredge from the North New River Canal in Fort Lauderdale up the North River to the Lake and then the South River Canal and so on. And when they did, they cut down the jungle -- there was a band of jungle trees that had grown up south of the Lake and had laid down in that 7000 years about 30 feet of peaty muck, that is of their leaves and rotting bark and roots. So that people cut down the trees that were on top of that and farmed that peaty muck and when they came in and exposed it to the sun and then people like the sugar people came in and they burned off the leaves every spring. The fires would get down into that muck so now that 30 feet of peaty muck has almost entirely disappeared, there's not 5 feet of peaty muck left. And they are using that up rapidly and then there will be nothing left but the hard rock underneath. So the sugar people are gonna' have to go somewhere else. They may be able to - they are already putting in, I believe there's 10,000 acres of rice up around there somewhere -- shallow plants which I don't understand about rice but I hope it does not interfere with the sheet flow of the water southward which is what we must continue.