

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas discusses threats to the Big Cypress: oil and the jetport*

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: Now then, we have the problem of the Big Cypress. The Big Cypress extends to the western border of the Everglades. I wouldn't know how far the Big Cypress goes to the north, except that there's an area immediately to the south of the Caloosahatchee, that we call the Devil's Garden. There's a dome of rock under it, so it's higher. And, it was always very dry and the Big Cypress begins south of that and extends all the way down to Cape Sable, through the Ten Thousand...to the backgrounds of the Ten Thousand Islands. That is a true swamp. It is based on the same old jagged oolitic limestone that the Everglades is, but the limestone is right there. When you walk into the Big Cypress there will be standing water comes up above your ankle, but your foot immediately finds the roughness of the rock below it. It doesn't have very much soil. But the great cypress have come in, it's called the Big Cypress not because it's big but because the cypress are. There are two kinds of cypress: the big cypress and the dwarf cypress. The dwarf cypress is in there, but the big cypress... The big cypress you see particularly and I hope you all have gone to Corkscrew, which belongs to the Audubon Society now, and is a primeval cypress forest; perfectly beautiful and beautifully preserved. Well, the Big Cypress has its problems. Years ago in '69 and '70, the lower part of Florida was threatened by the Miami-Dade County Port Authority wanting to put a jetport, which would be north of the Everglades National Park on the edge of the Big Cypress, and we managed to stop it, by getting the federal government to acquire much of the land of the Big Cypress as a wildlife and water preserve. And we got the State to give them a lot more land as a buffer state. So that has been a water and wildlife preserve ever since, well '69 and '70, no that's, well anyway, in there somewhere. But we were not able, yeah, sixty-nine and seventy, but we were not able to buy the mineral rights right under the soil, and that's when the oil people bought the mineral rights and came into the Big Cypress. Now, you cannot take a person's property away from him without due process of law. That's in the Constitution of the United States. The only way we could control the mineral, the oil people in the Big Cypress would be to control the access roads. But if you denied them all access, there would be a large question as to whether that would be what you call a taking process, that is depriving a man of use of his property, which is illegal. However, I don't know if they, I don't know whether they could have claimed that because they could have brought the things out by air, perhaps, but anyway they didn't. So we have

the oil people in there. Now the kind of oil that they've been getting out of their early oil wells has been a very low grade crude. The first oil wells went in many years ago on the Immokalee Road up from the Trail. Number two Sunniland came in many many years ago; I remember going over to see it. They never got anything but crude; so low and so high in sulfur, that the oil itself is not much more than liquid asphalt. And they didn't get much more than a hundred and six barrels a day, which is nothing. So they didn't get much out of the first oil wells in the Big Cypress, but recently they've been doing some experimental drilling and they found, what they call the area, the Bear Lake and the Raccoon Point oil fields have brought in more oil, but it's the same kind of crude and with the situation, as it is, with oil and the expensive refinery, they have no excuse for drilling, now, or getting it, they simply want to insure it, but there's no reason why they should. We don't need that oil. They can hardly afford it themselves. So, we have to tolerate this nuisance. I would like to see a moratorium on oil drilling, until the prices go up or some other reason. Now, whether the State could impose a moratorium is another question. If we got enough public opinion, I bet we could.