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## **For this is an Enchanted Land: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and the Florida Environment**

by Florence M. Turcotte

American author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings described her adopted home in north-central Florida as “an enchanted land.” Her love for her surroundings was evident in rich descriptions of the seasons, the forces of nature, and the lives of the people around her. Immediately upon arrival in 1928 at Cross Creek, a tiny hamlet about twenty miles southeast of Gainesville, Rawlings immersed herself in the local hunting and fishing culture. She came to understand and appreciate the lifestyle of the people of the nearby “Big Scrub” country, who depended on the land for their survival. Along with this understanding, Rawlings came to appreciate and sound a call for better stewardship of the environment on the part of its human inhabitants.

Although born in Washington, D.C., Marjorie Kinnan spent most summers and free time at a family farm in Maryland and learned to share her father’s love for living close to the earth. She married University of Wisconsin classmate and fellow writer Charles Rawlings in 1919, and after struggling with their careers in Rochester, New York, the couple decided to purchase a 72-acre citrus grove and modest farmhouse in rural Alachua County in 1928. Once in Florida, Mrs. Rawlings cultivated (and deserved)

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her reputation as a rugged, backwoods hunting and fishing woman. Charles did not take as readily to the place, and they divorced in 1933. As a woman alone in the rural South during the Great Depression, Rawlings overcame great economic and social obstacles to run her own business and thrive as a writer.<sup>1</sup> As she matured, she also became keenly aware of the need to preserve and sustain the earth and its resources for future generations. This awareness manifested itself in her writings and correspondence. This paper will describe the profound sensitivity to and appreciation for the Florida environment that grew in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings even as she struggled to make a living as a writer. The key to the evolution of her creativity was keeping close ties to the land.

Since a sense of place is so strong in her writing, Rawlings has often been characterized as a "regional" writer.<sup>2</sup> However, it is my contention that her fervent attention to descriptive detail of her literary settings appealed to all her readers, not just those from central Florida. The far-reaching appeal that Rawlings had, especially during her lifetime, indicates that her readership could establish their own connection to the natural world through her work, without having experienced life in the Florida woods. In fact, because of the way she communicated her reverence for nature through her literary work, Rawlings deserves to be called an environmental writer more than a regional one.

In her semi-autobiographical *Cross Creek*, Rawlings sums up her perception of humanity's intimate link with nature:

We were bred of earth before we were born of our mothers. Once born, we can live without mother or father, or any other kin, or any friend, or any human love. We cannot live without the earth or apart from it, and something is shriveled in a man's heart when he turns away from it and concerns himself only with the affairs of men.<sup>3</sup>

1. A more exhaustive analysis of Rawlings's ability to manage a household and grove while developing her literary career remains to be done. Gordon Bigelow touched upon the topic in the chapter entitled "The Long Road Up", in *Frontier Eden, The Literary Career of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), 1-22.
2. Rawlings herself addressed this issue in "Regional Literature of the South," *English Journal* XXIX, no. 2 (February 1940): 89-97.
3. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 3.



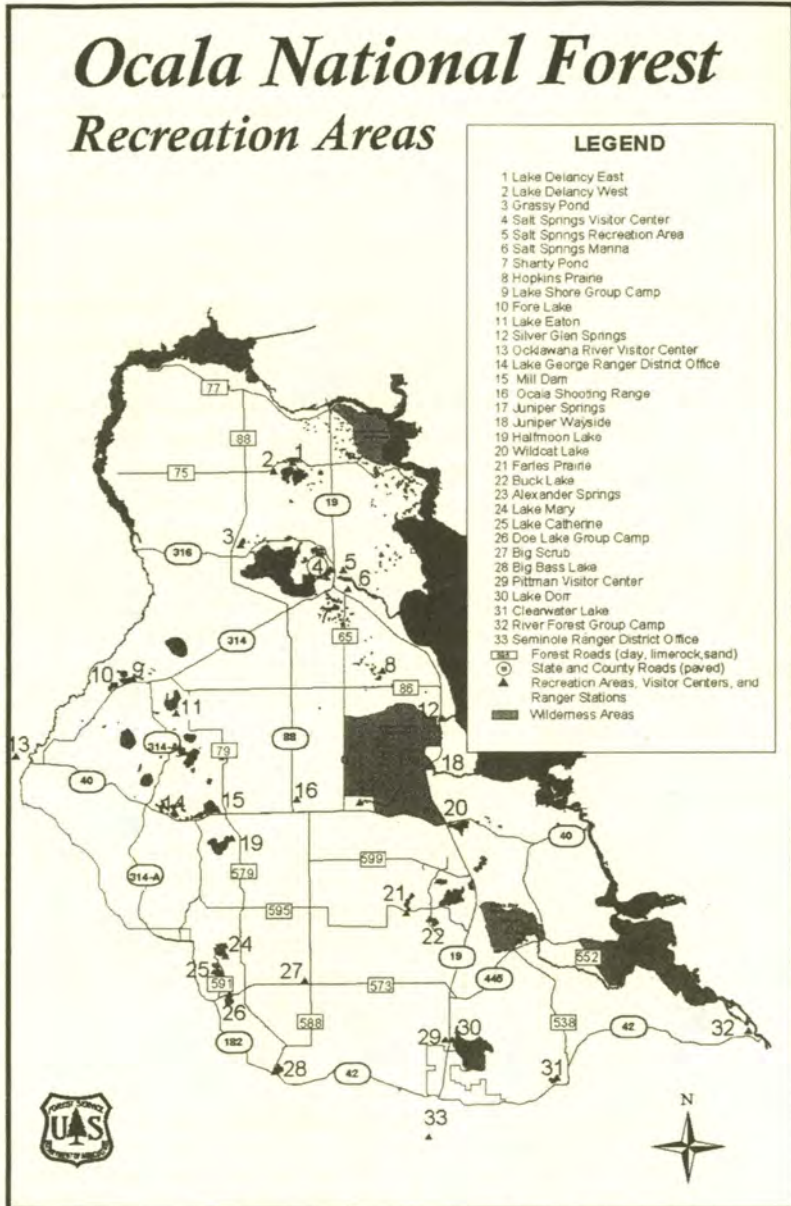


Figure 1. Ocala National Forest map. *Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service.*

Although exposed early in life to an appreciation of the rural lifestyle, Rawlings did not consider her new surroundings to be idyllic. Indeed, she became immediately aware of the harshness of the land, the weather, and the lives of her Florida neighbors. The adversity she faced was described in the 1959 M.A. thesis of Patrick Davis Smith, at the University of Mississippi. Smith outlines how Rawlings immortalized the “Big Scrub” area in the north-central part of Florida.<sup>4</sup> This area is contained primarily within what is now preserved as the Ocala National Forest (Fig. 1). Yet the term *forest* connotes a lushness that is only found in the outer fringe areas of the Scrub. These fringes lie along the banks of the St. Johns River to the east, and the Ocklawaha River to the north and west. Of the Big Scrub, Rawlings wrote in a letter to her editor at Scribner’s, Maxwell Perkins:

There is no human habitation—there never has been and probably never will be—in the scrub itself. As far as I can determine, there is no similar section anywhere in the world. The scrub is a silent stretch enclosed by two rivers, deeply forested with Southern spruce (almost valueless), scrub oak, scrub myrtle, and ti-ti, occasional gall-berry and black-jack and a few specialized shrubs and flowers, with “islands” of long-leaf yellow pine. There is an occasional small lake with its attendant marsh or “prairie”. The only settlement is here or there on these bodies of water, and along the river edges, where the natural hammock growth has been bitten into by the settler’s clearings. It is a fringe of life, following the waterways. The scrub is a vast wall, keeping out the timid and the alien.<sup>5</sup>

As this letter demonstrates, Rawlings took pains to describe the Big Scrub in precise detail in her correspondence and her novels. She wanted to make her readers imagine, hear, smell, even *feel* the place against their skin. In the case of the Big Scrub, she wanted her readers to feel the malevolence of the place toward human intruders. Patrick Smith described it in this way:

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4. Patrick Davis Smith, “A Study of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings” (M.A. Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1959), 2. Patrick Smith later authored the novel, *A Land Remembered* in 1984
  5. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, eds. Gordon E. Bigelow, and Laura V. Monti, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1983), 50.



In all of America there is not a more wild and hostile land. The soil, a sandy loam, is the habitat of bear, deer, panther, razor-sharp Spanish sword capable of ripping the hide from man or beast, rattlesnakes and wolves and everything that nature can use to attempt to destroy the will of man. For miles and miles this country resembles a hell-on-earth which only God could have created to test the fortitude of man and beast.<sup>6</sup>

To Patrick Smith and to Rawlings, the word "scrub" implies an intense friction, a grating, even excoriation. The more forgiving fringe areas were inhabited by a people commonly referred to as the Florida Crackers. Perhaps alluding to the sound made by their cowhide whips as they herded cattle across the state, the term "Florida Cracker" refers to native Floridians or those who came to the state from Georgia, Alabama, or the Carolinas.<sup>7</sup> For Rawlings, this was by no means a pejorative term, implying neither the racism nor ignorance that it does in today's street parlance. Rather, she invariably characterized Crackers as independent, self-sufficient, and straight-forward in their approach to life and its problems.

When she moved to the area just northwest of the Big Scrub, Rawlings immediately endeavored to understand and came to admire the independent pioneer spirit embodied by the Cracker people. "Call me a Yankee at your peril", she warned.<sup>8</sup> In 1932, she spent several months living in the scrub with a widow and her son, Piety and Leonard Fiddia. There she learned the language and lifestyle of the Florida Crackers, and patterned the Lantry

6. Smith, "A Study of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings," 2.

7. A lively discussion of the term "Cracker" and its use can be found in a chapter entitled "Crackers, Wry" in Al Burt, *Al Burt's Florida: Snowbirds, Sand Castles, and Self-Rising Crackers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 103-111. See also: Dana Ste. Claire, *Cracker: The Cracker Culture in Florida History* (Daytona Beach: The Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1998), esp. the Forward by James M. Denham, 9-14, and the chapter entitled "What is a Cracker?," 27-40.

8. Rawlings, *Selected Letters*, 266. In 1943-47, Rawlings was sued for invasion of privacy by Zelma Cason, a Cross Creek neighbor who was deeply offended by Rawlings's characterization of her as profane of speech and resembling "an angry and efficient canary," in the semi-autobiographical *Cross Creek*. During the trial, opposing counsel constantly attempted to characterize Rawlings as a "Yankee outsider" in order to prejudice the jury against her. In this letter to her attorney, Philip S. May, she stated that she had always considered herself a Southerner, belonged to the Dixie Club while at Wisconsin, and even went on to describe her slave-owning ancestors from Kentucky. "My life for a few years in the North was a penance..." she concluded.

family of *South Moon Under* after them. With the Fiddias, she experienced the rugged hand-to-mouth existence of the Scrub people; witnessed the cat-and-mouse games played between the revenuers and moonshiners hidden deep in the cypress swamps, ridden with cottonmouths; and participated in the out-of-season hunting and trapping Cracker families needed to do to keep meat on the table. She even dynamited fish and feasted on roasted limpin.<sup>9</sup> In November of 1931, she wrote again to Max Perkins:

These people are "lawless" by an anomaly. They are living an entirely natural, and very hard, life, disturbing no one. Civilization has no concern with them, except to buy their excellent corn liquor, and to hunt, in season across their territory with an alarming abandon. Yet almost everything they do is illegal. And everything they do is necessary to sustain life in that place. The old clearings have been farmed out and will not "make" good crops any more. The big timber is gone. The trapping is poor. They 'shine, because 'shining is the only business they know that can be carried on in the country they know, and would be unwilling to leave.<sup>10</sup>

The trend towards industrialization in American agriculture during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century left the rural subsistence farmer more and more on the wrong side of the law in his quest for survival. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, hunting and gathering skills had been essential to the vast majority of poor Southerners without ties to plantation life.<sup>11</sup> Depleted soils, restrictions on hunting and fishing, and property rights legislation thwarted the Cracker lifestyle at every turn. While finding justification for the unlawful actions of the poor Crackers, Rawlings had very little sympathy for the commercial plunderers whose greed led them to take more than their fair share. In *South Moon Under*, Rawlings characterizes the rapacious nature of those who had depleted the natural resources of the Big Scrub:

9. Rawlings, *Cross Creek*, 243.

10. Rawlings, *Selected Letters*, 49.

11. Mart Stewart, "If John Muir Had Been an Agrarian: American Environmental History West and South," in *Environmental History and the American South*, eds. Paul S. Sutter and Manganiello (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 196-219; see especially p. 201.



Men had reached into the scrub and along its boundaries, had snatched what they could get and had gone away, uneasy in that vast indifferent place; for a man was nothing, crawling ant-like among the myrtle bushes under the pines. Now they were gone, it was as though they had never been. The silence of the scrub was primordial. The wood-thrush crying across it might have been the first bird in the world—or the last.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1930's, the big timber companies had clear-cut and hauled away much of the long-leaf pine and heritage cypress timber of the area. Beginning in 1891, Henry S. and A.E. Wilson, brothers from Michigan established the Wilson Cypress Company, a major mill operation in Palatka. They continued to maintain the facility until 1944, when the depleted supply of timber necessitated its closing.

In order to facilitate harvesting and transport, lumber workers had cut canals into the swampy areas along the Ocklawaha, and had dredged and widened the narrow channel in other places in order to allow the large rafts of timbers to pass.<sup>13</sup> Logs were transported to the lumber mills in Palatka and around Jacksonville via the northerly flowing rivers, the Ocklawaha and the St. Johns. Many of the trees cut by the Wilson brothers were hundreds of years old, and 80% of the timber was old growth.<sup>14</sup> By Rawlings's time, the local Crackers were left with the devastating results of the lumbering blitz of the preceding four decades. The riverbanks had eroded in many areas, and the scant nutrients in the soil flowed downstream. Without the trees to act as a watershed, the Cracker settlements became more susceptible to drought and flooding.

The logging process itself directly affected the Crackers' livelihood. Some of the logs were lost from the flotillas, or intentionally stored underwater for later retrieval. The Cracker people often resorted to scavenging for deadhead timber, as it was called. Rawlings writes about the practice in *South Moon Under*, wherein her main character Lant Jacklin tries his hand at

12. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *South Moon Under* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 119.

13. Steven Noll, "Steamboats, Cypress and Tourism: Ecological History of the Ocklawaha Valley," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, no.1 (Summer 2004), 21.

14. Frank R. Owen, "Cypress Lumbering on the St. Johns River from 1884 to 1944", term paper, May 20, 1949. Found in P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.



fashioning a raft of logs to take up to Palatka, almost losing his life for his trouble. He decides to return home and to stick to moonshining.

Moonshining, Rawlings wrote to Perkins, is a part of the background, a necessary evil for survival:

It is a part of the whole resistance of the scrub country to the civilizing process. The scrub, as a matter of fact, has defeated civilization. It is one of the few areas where settlements have disappeared and the scanty population is constantly thinning...<sup>15</sup>

For the Cracker people in *South Moon Under*, the main focus of moonshining was not to deceive the revenuers or defy the law. Neither was it to furnish themselves with cheap corn liquor: it was to provide for the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter for their families. They needed to sell moonshine to fend off starvation. Furthermore, Rawlings maintained, moonshining did nothing to harm the land or deplete its natural resources.

In *Cracker Chidlings*, *South Moon Under*, *The Yearling*, and her other works set in the Big Scrub, Rawlings depicts an uneducated but dignified people with a strong tradition of independence from authority and the capacity to survive under the harshest conditions. These people had a deep and intimate relationship with their redoubtable physical surroundings. They were keenly aware of the subtlest changes in the weather, the soil, and the movements of animals. For instance, the expression "south-moon-under" refers to the stirrings of the wild creatures as the moon passes directly under the earth at the nadir of its orbital path. The passage below describes how the young man Lant observes the movements of the moon and the animals while on an overnight hunting trip:

He could understand that the creatures... should feed and frolic at moon-rise, at moon-down and at south-moon-over [the moon at its zenith], for these were all plain marks to go by, direct and visible. He marveled... that the moon was so strong that when it lay on the other side of the earth, the creatures felt it and stirred by the hour it struck. The moon was far away, unseen, and it had power to move them.<sup>16</sup>

15. Rawlings, *Selected Letters*, 49-50.

16. Rawlings, *South Moon Under*, 109-10.

In another passage describing the womenfolk in *South Moon Under*, Rawlings displays a deep appreciation and understanding for the pared-down simplicity of their lives:

If living was uncertain, and the sustaining of breath precarious, why, existence took on an added value and a greater sweetness. The tissues of life were *food and danger* [emphasis mine]. These were the warp and woof, and all else was an incidental pattern, picked out with yarn-colored wools. Love and lust, hate and friendship, grief and frolicking, even birthing and dying, were thin gray and scarlet threads across the sun-browned, thick and sturdy stuff that was life itself. The old women sat together with bare, translucent faces, knowing that the pulse of blood through the veins was a rich, choice thing, and the drawing of a breath was good.<sup>17</sup>

Time and time again, Rawlings links the tenacity of the Crackers to the harshness of their natural surroundings. Lack of food and other threats to their survival mattered more to the women than laws and even family relationships. As inhospitable as it was, the Scrub was the only place they knew, and the only place they could possibly inhabit.

Rawlings also used a north-central Florida setting for her next novel, *Golden Apples*, this time the more fertile hammock and riverine area around present day Palatka. The title refers to the wild oranges that used to grow there before the Great Freeze of 1894-5. In this book, Rawlings explores and describes the folkways of the Florida Cracker through the eyes of an outsider, a "cultivated" Englishman, Richard Tordell. The "furriner" endeavors to harness the economic potential of commercial citriculture. As the cold weather and his own actions betray him, he becomes more and more alienated from his physical surroundings. By contrasting the Crackers' natural intimacy with their environment to the Englishman's alienation, Rawlings emphasizes again the strong identification of the former to the Florida landscape. At the end of the book, as a result of a tragedy, Tordell comes to a new understanding of the Crackers and of his adopted home, and is irrevocably bonded to it.

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17. Rawlings, *South Moon Under*, 305.



Rawlings is best known and celebrated for her next novel, the Pulitzer Prize winner for 1939, *The Yearling*. Again she went to live with Crackers in the Scrub, this time with the Cal Long family, in order to research the setting for this novel. When the movie rights were sold to MGM, Rawlings sent a copy of the 1939 U.S. Forest Service map of the Ocala National Forest to the studio. She painstakingly marked it with the appropriate locations for the different scenes to be filmed (Fig.2) This demonstrates how important authenticity and sense of place was for Rawlings as a creative writer.

Beginning with *The Yearling* and continuing in *Cross Creek*, Rawlings develops a mature appreciation for her surroundings



Figure 2. "Yearling" map. Courtesy Majorie Kinnan Rawlings Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.

and for the vicissitudes of human existence in such a wild and inhospitable place. Like the Lantrys, the Baxters of *The Yearling* were almost constantly working on maintaining their supply of food; the threat of starvation looms throughout the book and drives much of the action. Rawlings herself had known the fear of hunger during the early thirties. Her marriage to Charles Rawlings was floundering, and he was gone much of the time.<sup>18</sup> Her citrus crop had failed, and she had not yet met with success with her writing. She later wrote that she was down to a box of Uneeda crackers and a can of tomato soup in 1933 when the \$500 check for the O. Henry Memorial Award arrived for her short story "Gal Young 'Un."<sup>19</sup>

By the time *Cross Creek* came out in 1942, memories of her own bitter struggle against hunger had faded a bit. She had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize and had achieved literary notoriety. In the *Cross Creek* narrative, Rawlings vacillates between a lyrical, tender hymn of praise to the inexpressible beauty of her adopted home, and the sometimes poignant, sometimes humorous accounts of the struggles and difficulties she encountered while living there. Writing in the *Southern Literary Journal*, Susan Schmidt points out three recurring themes in *Cross Creek*, (which, in fact, can be found in all of Rawlings's novels): the recognition of home, the healing power of nature, and the oneness of creation.<sup>20</sup> Rawlings interweaves the threads of comedy and tragedy into the fabric of her narrative while simultaneously conveying the magical, enchanted quality of her adopted home. At the end of *Cross Creek*, she asks the question who owns Cross Creek?" and replies in this way:

It seems to me the earth may be borrowed but not bought. It may be used, but not owned. It gives itself in response to love and tending, offers its seasonal flowering and fruiting. But we are tenants and not possessors, lovers and not masters. Cross Creek belongs to the wind and the rain, to the sun and the seasons, to the cosmic secrecy of seed, and beyond all, to time.<sup>21</sup>

18. Gordon Bigelow attributes the break-up in part to Marjorie's emotional let-down after the success of her first novel *South Moon Under*. See Bigelow, *Frontier Eden, The Literary Career of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), 16-17.

19. Rawlings, *Selected Letters*, 61.

20. Susan Schmidt, "Finding a Home: Rawlings's Cross Creek" *Southern Literary Journal* 26, no.2 (Spring 1994): 48-58.

21. Rawlings, *Cross Creek*, 368.



It seems that Rawlings's ecological sensibilities evolved and deepened over the course of her career. In her early works, she glamorized the unlawful trapping, fishing and hunting that took place in the wild places of Florida, with the underlying assumption that the earth was the object of human domination. The forces of nature were fearsome and needed to be subdued in order for humans to survive. When she lived in the Big Scrub, she hunted and fished without regard to the gaming laws, and helped operate a moonshine still. As her appreciation for the beauty and fragility of her surroundings and her respect for the preservation of natural areas increased, Rawlings's enthusiasm for hunting and fishing correspondingly declined.<sup>22</sup> This progression can be only partially explained by the fact that Rawlings herself no longer needed to hunt meat for her table. It also reflects her growing ecological sensibilities.

Towards the end of *Cross Creek*, she tells how her old hunting friend Barney Dillard invited her to go on a bear hunt on the east side of the Big Scrub near the banks of the St Johns River. Left at her post atop a half-fallen pine, Rawlings relates:

The perch was comfortable. The sun was setting. Under me was a tight thicket. A light rain fell, like a gauze veil between me and the sun. A redbird and two bluebirds flew to the bay tree beside me and preened their feathers among the bay blossoms in the mist... The thin shower ended and a rainbow arched across the sky. The birds flew leisurely a little distance away. The bay blossoms were nacre, with diamond drops at their centers. I hoped the bear would not come, not in fear, for he would be too easy a shot. I decided that if he came I should shoot high over him and simply face Uncle Barney with the news that I had missed.<sup>23</sup>

In another passage, she remarks on her quail hunting abilities: "The birds I have downed would not make a respectable covey. Some day I shall lay down my arms entirely."<sup>24</sup> Of duck hunting,

22. Unfortunately for her health, Rawlings's appetite for liquor never abated. She suffered from digestive and heart ailments throughout most of her adult life, and these were exacerbated by her drinking. She finally succumbed to a cerebral hemorrhage in December of 1953, at age 57. Bigelow briefly discussed the issue of Rawlings's drinking to counteract the pain of her depression and the death spiral that ensued, but more research needs to be undertaken to understand it. See Bigelow, *Frontier Eden*, 65-67.

23. Rawlings, *Cross Creek*, 291.

24. *Ibid.*, 319.

she opines: "The sport pleased me particularly because, in the great beauty of the surroundings, there was not a chance that I should bring down one of the swift-flying birds."<sup>25</sup>

Endangered or extinct birds were often the subject of Rawlings's musings in *Cross Creek*. In the chapter entitled "Spring at the Creek," Rawlings references the re-establishment of the egret population: "thanks to Federal protection and to women's vanity taking another turn than the wearing of feathers."<sup>26</sup>

A few paragraphs later, she delights in glimpsing a pair of whooping cranes. "The crane was once shot for food and very nearly annihilated, but he too is coming back again."<sup>27</sup>

Rawlings also laments the eradication of the ivory-billed woodpecker, and when she thought she saw one at the Creek, she was "mad with excitement," until she realized it was most likely a pileated woodpecker, known at the creek as "the Lord-God".<sup>28</sup>

In another account from *Cross Creek* about a deer hunt in the Everglades, Rawlings trailed a pair of bucks with her friend all day long, and when she came across a pond among the cypress deep in the sloughs, she lingered and fell behind her companion:

Growing on all the cypresses around the pond were orchids...And I stood and stared and could not believe that I held orchids in my hands. In the evening I took up a lone stand deep under the thicket of low growing young cypresses massed with strange exotic flowering vines. Beside the thicket was a clear pool and to this in the rosy sunset hundreds of egrets and great white herons came to drink and roost in the trees around it. They did not see nor hear me and I forgot that the great phantom bucks might pass my way, and sat and drank my fill of white birds and ferns and flowers and crystal pool.<sup>29</sup>

Like many present-day recreational hunters, she became an advocate for wildlife habitat protection.

By 1942, when she wrote *Cross Creek*, Rawlings had grown to understand the beauty of the natural world around her and the finite nature of the resources available for human consumption.

25. Rawlings, *Cross Creek*, 321.

26. *Ibid.*, 270.

27. *Ibid.*, 271.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 322.



With the advent of World War II, she became aware of the need for sustainable and prudent stewardship of these resources in consideration of future needs. She was asked by the U.S. Forest Service to write an article for *Collier's* magazine alerting citizens about the need to conserve timber, which was quickly being depleted, to keep the armed forces equipped with lumber. Rawlings wrote an article entitled "Trees for Tomorrow" which was published in 1943, in which she railed against the greedy and short-sighted practice of clear-cutting the long-leaf pine forests of the South on the part of the timber companies. This was justified at the time by the need to support the war effort. Her response to clear-cutting read: "We are fighting today for many valuable things. We must fight also at this critical moment to preserve the God-given forests without which we should be helpless atoms on a sterile earth."<sup>30</sup>

Rawlings received a letter of praise for the article from Jay N. "Ding" Darling who had founded the National Wildlife Federation in 1936, and was well known for his conservation and political cartoons (Fig.3). Modern readers may find Darling's postscript a little ironic:

Have been meaning to tell you that you really should try gopher turtle. Not as a stunt but as an Epicurean delicacy—Perhaps you'd better not. It's too popular already for its own good.<sup>31</sup>

During the Great Depression, gopher tortoises were referred to a "Hoover Chickens" in Florida. Today, they are a species of special concern, and their harvest is prohibited.

When the *Collier's* article came out, she was asked by a member of Congress to write more articles about the timber industry. She demurred, but wrote her husband, who was serving abroad in the American Field Service:

I feel if I could be of help in such a critical matter, perhaps I ought to. My literature is painfully likely not to be deathless, but I might go down in history as the gal who saved the nation's trees!<sup>32</sup>

30. Rawlings, "Trees for Tomorrow," *Collier's* 117, May 8, 1943, 25.

31. Jay N. "Ding" Darling, letter to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, May 3, 1943. Readers' Letters Series, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Papers*, Department of Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.

32. Rawlings, *The Private Marjorie: The Love Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings to Norton S. Baskin*, ed. Rodger L. Tarr (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 2004), 112. In 1941, Rawlings married Ocala hotelier Norton Baskin.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings —  
 Out of all the millions of pages  
 that have been written on the subject,  
 yours in this work "Collins, Trees  
 for Tomorrow" seems to me the  
 most eloquent and convincing.  
 Well please! and Ten  
 thousand Thank yous —  
 Jay A. (Ding) Darling  
 (Mouth of Captiva, Florida) —

P.S. Have been meaning to tell you that  
 you really should try gopher tortoise.  
 Not as a stumpt but as an epicurean  
 delicacy — Perhaps you'd better  
 not, it's too popular already for its  
 own good — J.A.D.

On Train  
 May 3 '43

Figure 3. Ding Darling letter. Courtesy Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.

She signed the letter "Maple-tree Maggie." Several years later, she wrote again to her husband, seeing the big picture: "I have been remotely aware of what was happening (even the floods are caused by the denuding of high forests), but I never thought of associating it with over-population, or the wars that follow."<sup>33</sup>

33. Rawlings, *Private Marjorie*, 524.



The Florida she had fallen in love with 20 years earlier was being transformed by a population explosion and human attempts to “improve upon paradise.”

In a 1944 article about Florida for *Transatlantic Magazine*, she concludes:

The future of Florida is perhaps a trifle too rosy from the point of view of the quiet citizen and the nature lover. The climate is too inductive to many forms of industry, the charms of summer in winter too attractive. It remains to be seen whether the Florida of Bartram will survive, or whether the Chambers of Commerce will kill the goose that lays the golden egg.<sup>34</sup>

She had learned to discern the “real” Florida from the more developed, artificial playground for rich Northerners that she felt it was becoming. In an autobiographical essay, Rawlings wrote of her home in north-central Florida:

This is the real Florida. The Gold Coast of the east, the Palm Beaches, the Miami, the Coral Gables, are gaudy excrescences, cheap jewels on the native beauty of a wild state whose interior is part of a vanishing frontier. I imagine that to strangers, even to some extent to tourists, Florida connotes either sea-coast playgrounds, orange groves around the undistinguished Yankee cities, or vague thoughts on the Everglades and alligators. In the heart of the state, off the highways, along roads hub-deep in the ball-bearing sand, over pine-needle carpeted roads through the pine-lands, down mere tracks in the undergrowth through “the scrub,” where a deer stands blinded by your headlights, skirting lakes and rivers knee-deep in lilies and no doubt in moccasins, is virgin Florida, still pioneering, still un-electrified, where mules doze under every shed, half-wild razor-back hogs root through the forests, and the Crackers speak good old Anglo-Saxon, Shakespearean in diction, and starkly simple.<sup>35</sup>

34. Rawlings, “Florida: A Land of Contrasts,” *Transatlantic Magazine* 14 (October 1944), 17.

35. Rawlings, Autobiographical Essay #3, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Papers*, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Rawlings wrote a review in 1947 of her friend Marjory Stoneman Douglas's *The Everglades: River of Grass* (1947) entitled: "About Fabulous Florida: Study of One of the Strangest, Most Fascinating and Blood-Stained Regions of Our Continent." Like the Big Scrub, there was "no other Everglades in the world;" it is a unique, fragile and fearsome environment. Rawlings praised Douglas for:

....sparing neither the cruelty of the terrain nor of the men who have inhabited or impinged upon it... The Seminoles and their Everglades were betrayed, and the betrayal continues to this moment. The Seminole is now harmless. But through the long historic years, the white American has taken without giving. The latter day development of this part of Florida is a story of greed. The railroads, the hotels, the pandering to tourists, the cattle and truck-farming industries, the illicit hunters and fisherman, the mis-begotten drainage of the Glades, the cruel fires in the rich muck-land, are all here indicted. Mrs. Douglas will not be popular with many of her neighbors when her book appears. Yet she offers hope, for it is not too late to save the Everglades, where the saber toothed tiger has been replaced by predatory humans...<sup>36</sup>

Rawlings's ecological sensibilities, like those of her friend Mrs. Douglas, had been transformed from a man vs. nature paradigm to a fight to preserve the Florida she loved from a vast invasion of humanity, in order that future generations may continue to enjoy and celebrate its beauty. Her unabashed admiration for the Cracker people and justification for everything they did to survive the harshness of their chosen home gave way to a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamic: sometimes people need to yield to the needs of nature in order to maintain the land that they love.

36. Rawlings, "About Fabulous Florida: Study of One of the Strangest, Most Fascinating and Blood-Stained Regions of Our Continent," Review of *The Everglades: River of Grass*, by Marjory Stoneman Douglas. *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, November 30, 1947; sec. 7, 4. This review and the article entitled "Florida: Land of Contrasts," are reproduced together with many other short writings of Rawlings in *The Uncollected Writings of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, eds. Rodger L. Tarr and Brent E. Kinser (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007). Of particular interest is the section entitled "Florida 1928-1953," 251-364.