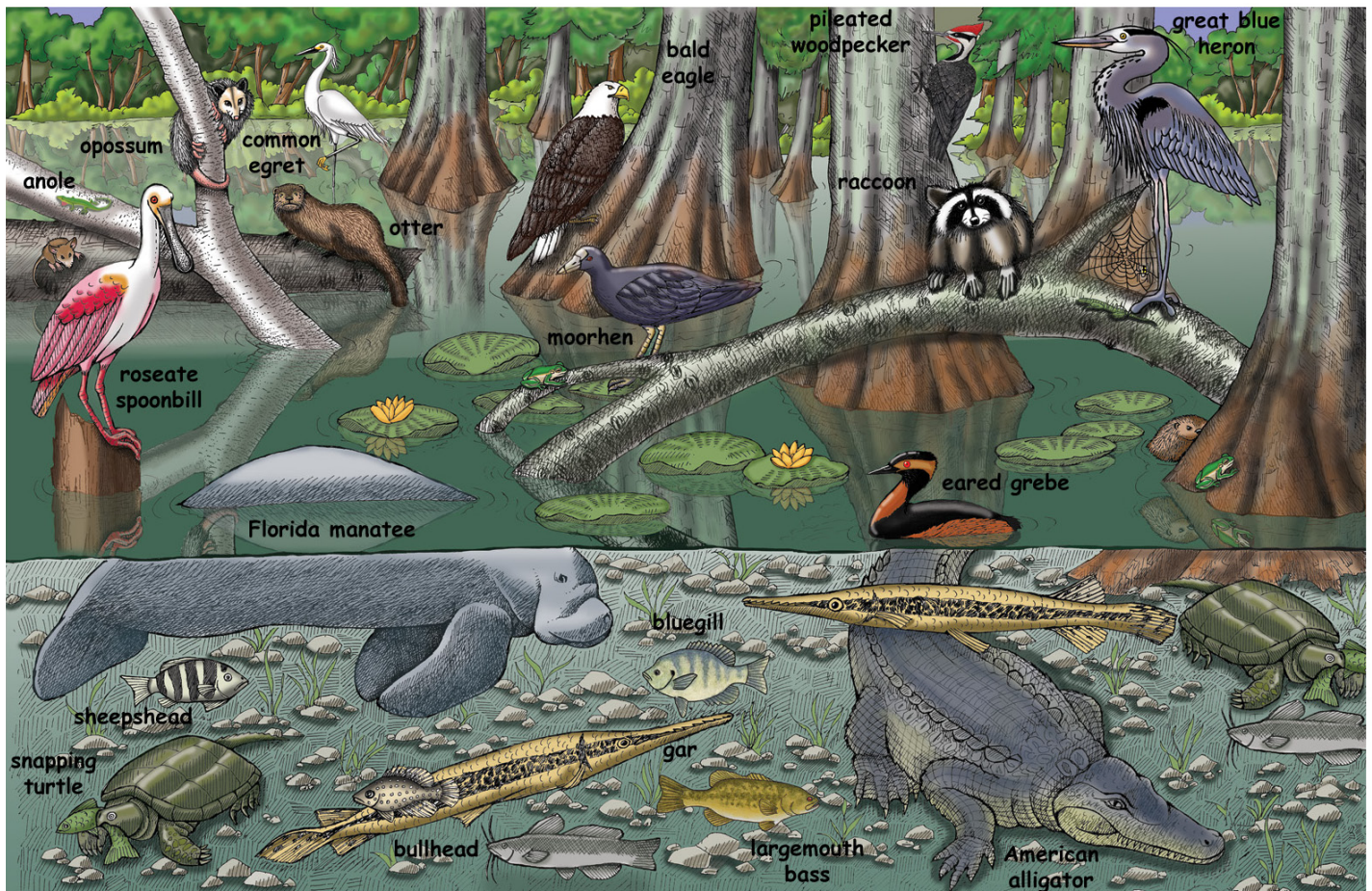


Florida Everglades

The Everglades are found on the southern tip of Florida. A four-million-acre sheet of water flows slowly across a grassy plain, the everglades are also called the “*river of grass*.” The Everglades is home to many water birds like common egrets, great blue herons, eared grebes, moorhens and roseate spoonbills. There are birds of prey, like the bald eagle, osprey and many hawks and woodpeckers like the sizable pileated woodpecker. Water animals, like the Florida manatee, American alligator and river otter do well in the wet habitat, as do scavengers like raccoons and opossums. The water teams with fish such as: brown bullhead, largemouth bass, bluegill, sheepshead, and spotted sunfish providing lots of food for hungry predators like gar and snapping turtles. The wetland ecosystem is a perfect habitat for insects and mosquitoes are plentiful feeding the many green treefrogs, anoles and other lizards. Even the tiny cotton mouse finds plenty to eat in this rich, diverse habitat.

This rich habitat was once thought to be wasted land. Developers began draining it in the 1800s, pulling up mangroves and replacing them with agricultural crops and citrus groves. They built roads, towns and then giant cities, like Miami – all where this massive wetland once flowed. The Everglades dwindled to half its original size. Sewage and other wastes were freely released from the developed areas into the remaining Everglades. Awareness of the importance of wetlands and specifically the Everglades brought an effort to protect what is left of the river of grass. Scientists began to realize that the Everglades was actually filtering and absorbing pollutants from urban areas, like a natural sewage treatment plant. They also noticed that the Everglades absorbed storm surges during Hurricanes, decreasing dangerous flooding. And people came from all over the world to see this unusual habitat and vast array of Everglades wildlife.



Fill in the Blanks About the Florida Everglades

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For Discussion and Critical Thinking:

The Florida Everglades is an important wetland ecosystem.

1. Name two ways the Everglades benefits the communities in Florida.

1. _____

2. _____

2. When and why did people begin to drain the Everglades?

3. Name five animals you might see in the Everglades:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____