Grassroots Resistance

Marjorie Harris Carr, Ecology, and the Battle to Stop the Cross Florida Barge Canal

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In the 1960s the U.S. government began construction of a long-held dream—creating a watery transportation canal across north Florida to shorten treacherous trade routes. The project promised an infusion of federal dollars and new jobs in this mostly rural area and was considered a "done deal." That is, until Marjorie Harris Carr (1915–1997) led Florida's first major grassroots crusade to stop the project from harming the state's fragile environment. Using facts and the science of ecology, and by engaging the media, Carr and company achieved the seemingly impossible—stopping a major federal public works project in its tracks and setting the stage for future environmental skirmishes across the state and nation. They proved that a skeptical citizenry well-armed with data and determination could overcome the questionable promises of politicians and bureaucrats, leading to a court decision and presidential edict that supported their contention that the potential for environmental damage needs to be assessed before boondoggle projects are undertaken.

Since the early days of Spanish occupation in Florida, settlers shared a dream of building a canal across the peninsula to link the Gulf of Mexico with the Atlantic Ocean. This canal would greatly improve the passage of the Spanish treasure fleets that might avoid the treacherous Straits of Florida to the south, an area of shallows, coral reefs, hurricanes, pirates, and "wreckers." Canal fever continued into the ensuing centuries, and the first U.S. study for

such a canal was approved as early as 1826 with 28 possible routes studied thereafter. Actual construction, with federal funding, of an 87-mile shipping canal began in 1935 and was lauded because it would put people to work during the Great Depression. Construction halted a year later for fiscal and political reasons with only three percent built—but also with the lingering concern that it would have cut deep into the Floridan Aquifer, the underground drinking water reservoir for 90 percent of Florida.[1]

The advent of World War II and the realization that Nazi submarines were lurking along the state's coast revived the canal concept. But this time it would be shallower (and supporters argued, would not damage the aquifer) and would be used for passage of cargo barges. Canal campaigners in the 1950s moved to economic arguments in favor of the project, noting that barge tonnage was increasing. The Florida canal, they believed, would become part of a "national integrated system of inland waterways." In 1958 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (hereafter referred to as the Corps) completed a study that gave boosters what they wanted, determining that the project would have a positive benefit–cost ratio, albeit a slim one. No consideration was made for the environmental damage that would occur to the St. Johns, Withlacoochee, and Ocklawaha rivers that would be used for the canal's path.[2]

By 1960, Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba brought the Cold War closer to Florida's shoreline, furthering concerns about dangerous enemies near the state's coast. And, as historian Lee Irby notes, so did Florida's rising population and its electoral votes—a fact that helped make presidential candidate John F. Kennedy a "staunch canal advocate. One pro-Kennedy advertisement announced: 'A Vote for Kennedy is a Vote for the

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[1] Leslie Kemp Poole, "Florida: Paradise Redefined: The rise of environmentalism in a state of growth." (master's thesis, Rollins College, 1991), 83–87.

[2] Steven Noll and David Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams: The Cross Florida Barge Canal and the Struggle for Florida's Future.* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 132–133, 151; Lee Irby, "'The Big Ditch': The Rise and Fall of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal." In *Paradise Lost? The Environmental History of Florida*, eds. Jack E. Davis and Raymond Arsenault. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 386. Note: spelling of Ocklawaha has varied but this version will be used for this article with the exception of direct quotes.

cross-Florida Canal!'" Once elected, Kennedy "lived up to his word and pushed for actual construction funds" which were approved in 1962 by the U.S. House of Representatives. President Lyndon Johnson, inheriting Kennedy's project, pushed for it and on February 27, 1964, he celebrated the birth of the Cross Florida Barge Canal with the explosion of 150 pounds of dynamite.[3]

For Johnson it was a perfect mesh of politics and conservation, the latter of which meant scientific utilization and manipulation of natural resources for human benefit.[4] At the rainy ceremony, Johnson stated:

> God was good to this country. He endowed it with resources unsurpassed in their variety and their abundance. But in His wisdom the Creator left something for men to do for themselves. He gave us great rivers, but He left them to run wild in the flood, and sometimes to go dry in the drought—and sometimes to rain when we have a celebration. But He left it to us to control these carriers of commerce.

Johnson added:

> The challenge of a modern society is to make the resources of nature useful and beneficial to the community. So this is the passkey to economic growth, to sensible and to valid prosperity; to create a value where none existed before is to enlarge the hoard of Nature's bounty and to make it serve all of our citizens.[5]

Johnson was clear—to his thinking and to that of state boosters, there was no value in nature unless it was doing

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[3] Irby, "'The Big Ditch,'" 386–387; Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 142–143.

[4] The term conservation in the early twentieth century referred to the Progressive Era movement that stressed scientific "wise use" of resources for the benefit of humans. Today the term is used interchangeably with environmentalism and indicates preservation and safeguarding of resources.

[5] Lyndon B. Johnson, "198 - Remarks at the Ground-Breaking Ceremony for the Florida Cross-State Barge Canal." The American Presidency Project. Accessed Feb. 10, 2018 at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26085

humankind's bidding. But pro-canal supporters soon met their match in a grassroots group of academics and nature lovers, led by Marjorie Harris Carr, who believed that a beautiful, functioning ecosystem was of inestimable value. Carr, write historians Steven Noll and David Tegeder,

> embodied the economic, environmental, and scientific opposition that would eventually prove the canal's undoing. Representing a new environmental ethos, Carr would fuse sentimental attachment to the preservation of wild land with a scientific understanding of the fragile nature of ecological systems.[6]

Carr fell in love with the outdoors during her childhood in southwest Florida. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on March 26, 1915, Marjorie Harris moved at the age of 3 to the Bonita Springs area of southwest Florida with her parents. She credited her New England heritage and its "sense of stewardship" with inspiring her later environmental activism. Her father, a teacher, and mother collected insects and loved the luxuriant Florida outdoors. "I grew up…out in the woods, on the Imperial River," she recalled in a 1990 interview. "We used to be on the river nearly every day in a canoe." Sadly, no birds or animals populated the river's banks because "it was the custom for men to come down, hire a boat, take a gun and stand up in the front of the boat and shoot anything that made a moving target. Alligator, red bird, heron, what have you. Anything that moved was the sport."[7]

Marjorie Harris Carr. 19--. Black & white photoprint. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. Accessed 21 Dec. 2018. *https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/144623*.

[6] Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 146–147.

[7] Marjorie Harris Carr oral history interview with author. Gainesville, Florida, on Oct. 18, 1990, 1–2, 6. In possession of author.

As a result of such wanton wildlife destruction, particularly of wading birds whose plumes were used to adorn hats, Audubon societies developed across the United States to protect birds and lobby for laws to save them. The Florida Audubon Society was established in 1900 to do just that, with the recognition that the state was ground zero for much of the slaughter. Audubon societies were among the few groups that welcomed both male and female members, and their influence would broaden throughout the coming century.

Carr's love of the natural world took her to Tallahassee and the Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University), where she graduated in 1936 with a bachelor's degree in zoology. Carr, an honors graduate and Phi Beta Kappa member, soon found that her applications to graduate programs in zoology and ornithology were turned down because of her gender.[8] And jobs in science also were hard to find; as Carr's biographer Peggy Macdonald notes, many female would-be scientists were "funneled into the 'feminine' field of home economics" which in the early twentieth century "was the only academic field in which women could be promoted to full professor, department chair, or dean." The new graduate's options for "full-time employment in the sciences were limited," however she did land a job at the federal Welaka Fish Hatchery, located on Florida's St. Johns River. There she would come to love the nearby Ocklawaha River and would be inspired to study large-mouthed black bass. The job also made her the nation's first female wildlife technician.[9]

Importantly, Carr's education and early work experience opened her eyes to a relatively new concept in academia: ecology. This study of the relationships between living creatures, plants, and their habitats was largely confined in the early twentieth century to academic circles studying soil science and plant adaptation in the United States. It burst into public discourse with the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson. In this groundbreaking book, Carson, the author of best-selling books about the seashore, shook Americans awake about the dangers of uncontrolled human-made chemicals and pesticides in the

[8] Leslie Kemp Poole, *Saving Florida: Women's Fight for the Environment in the Twentieth Century.* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 86.

[9] Peggy Macdonald, *Marjorie Harris Carr: Defender of Florida's Environment.* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 33, 36–37.

environment—she called them "biocides"—that could cause the death of all bird life, leading to a season with no avian trilling.

While working at the Welaka hatchery, Carr began traveling to the University of Florida (UF) in nearby Gainesville to use its laboratory equipment. There she met Archie Carr, who went on to a career as a world-renowned herpetologist. It was "love at first sight," and they married in 1937. It was a marriage, Macdonald writes, that would help Carr "develop professionally, beginning with her acceptance into UF's graduate program in zoology" in 1937. Carr earned her master's degree in zoology in 1942, five years before the university officially reintroduced coeducation.[10]

Ecology was central to Carr's life and activism. The University of Florida, she recalled, was "one of the centers of the study of ecology in the United States" at a time when "people were just beginning to realize the significance of ecosystems." The UF Zoology Department, where Archie Carr also studied, "stressed that any study of any animal had to be based on not only a description of its features but its interaction with its environment as well. An ecological study. And that's very, very important."[11]

Land clearing on the Oklawaha - Eureka, Florida. 196-. Black & white photoprint. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. Accessed 21 Dec. 2018. *https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/1308*.

[10] Macdonald, *Marjorie Harris Carr*, 37–39, 61–62, 65, 69. Note: for the purposes of this paper, Carr will refer to Marjorie Harris Carr.

[11] Carr interview, 9-10.

After their marriage, the Carrs worked together in summer research at Harvard University and field studies in Mexico and Honduras—the latter of which was home for four years. But Carr's activism didn't arise until the couple and their four children moved in 1949 to the hamlet of Micanopy, Florida, near Gainesville where Archie taught at UF. With her fifth child born in 1952, Carr was immersed in family activities but, as with many women before her, eventually became involved in the wider community. She also aided in efforts to protect local resources, including preserving a prairie, saving a lake from road construction, and stopping Micanopy from removing ancient live oaks.[12]

Such "municipal housekeeping" emerged during the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as women, given the role as the "center of home life," moved their interests into the wellbeing of the larger community, writes historian Anne Firor Scott. The term, Scott writes,

> conferred an air of respectability upon what might otherwise have been considered unseemly public or political activity, but behind that innocuous label lay a considerable measure of 'discontent with existing political and social conditions' on the part of people who were not yet voters—first expressed in systematic efforts to improve village, town, or city life."[13]

These middle- and upper-class white women mostly acted through all-female groups, including women's clubs and garden clubs, exerting pressure on town fathers (women couldn't vote until 1920) to enhance their communities.

Carr was well aware of this history of female influence; she gained activism experience through her role as conservation chair for the Gainesville Garden Club, which worked to save nearby Paynes Prairie, a large savannah. "For a good many years the garden clubs in Florida were very powerful in conservation," she recalled, adding that there weren't any specialized environmental organizations in the Gainesville area in the mid-twentieth century. Carr also got involved in the Alachua Audubon Society, centered

[12] Macdonald, *Marjorie Harris Carr*, 80, 93; Poole, *Saving Florida*, 90, 99.

[13] Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 142.

in Gainesville, where she was co-chair of programs with David Anthony.[14]

In 1962, the same year as *Silent Spring* was roiling the public's environmental consciousness, Carr received a telephone call from a Jacksonville woman who was a Florida Audubon Society board member and active in the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs (FFGC). The woman had been to a hearing about a proposed barge canal and alerted Carr that it might impact the Ocklawaha River. "You know, I think really you ought to look into it," the woman told Carr. The FFGC, Carr remembered, up to this point was the only group that questioned the canal's route.[15]

The warning put Carr on high alert. Since her days at the Welaka Fishery she had been entranced by the Ocklawaha River, long extolled for its exquisite beauty. In 1875 poet Sidney Lanier, riding a steamship up the narrow, serpentine river from the St. Johns to Silver Springs, described it as the "sweetest water-lane in the world, a lane which runs for more than a hundred and fifty miles of pure delight betwixt hedgerows of oaks and cypresses and palms and bays and magnolias and mosses and manifold vine-growth." Lanier described the wildlife and humans that depended on the river and his amazement with the spring, remarking on the variations in color to be found in the plant life under its ethereal waters.[16]

The first time Carr went up the river, she thought it was "dreamlike. It was a canopy river. It was spring-fed and swift," she recalled in a newspaper interview. "Why fight for the Ocklawaha?" she remarked:

> I was concerned about the environment worldwide. What could I do about the African plains? What could I do about India? How could I affect things in Alaska or the Grand Canyon? But here, by God, was a piece of Florida. A lovely natural area, right in my back yard, that was being threatened for *no good reason*.

[14] Carr interview, 6–7.

[15] Ibid, 8–9.

[16] Sydney Lanier, *Florida: Its Scenery, Climate, and History*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, Bicentennial Floridiana Facsimile Series, 1875, 1973), 20, 36–38.

Carr decided that the barge canal project was a scandal. "I said: If we can't save the Ocklawaha, we can't save any lovely piece of this Earth."[17]

Working through the Alachua Audubon Society and then through a local group calling itself Citizens for the Conservation of Florida's Natural and Economic Resources in 1963, Carr and others, many associated with the University of Florida, began to question the canal project, demanding information and, eventually, campaigning to reroute the project away from the river's path.[18] Theirs was a grassroots campaign made up of passionate volunteers—the kind engendered by rising 1960s citizen unrest and distrust of government.

Historian Cody Ferguson notes that "one of the outgrowths of the 1960s was the popular call for participatory democracy." Social movements, including civil rights, Black Power, the women's movement, and environmental rights, led to the emergence of a "populist-driven regulatory revolution" that was played out mostly within governmental institutions. Participants in the emerging environmental movement "argued for more access to information and public involvement in decisions affecting the environment and public health."[19] Carr and company joined in those demands and were emblematic of the evolving environmental activism of the era. Women no longer were relegated to all-female groups; now they combined talents with men and, as with Carr, some assumed leadership positions. Groups such as the Audubon Society also began to espouse ecological views that had infused the public conversation and consciousness.

"We started in 1963 and, again, being pragmatists, we knew that politically support was 100 percent for the barge canal," Carr said. "Our thought, therefore, was at best we would divert the route away from the Ocklawaha."[20] So it was disheartening in 1966 when the Corps began clearing land and starting construction of the Rodman Dam in the Ocklawaha's path, which included destroying 5,000 acres of riverine forest. The dam was completed

[17] Julie Hauserman, "Sand in her shoes, river in her blood." *St. Petersburg Times,* Nov. 18, 1996, 1, 19.

[18] Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 148–149.

[19] Cody Ferguson. *This is Our Land: Grassroots Environmentalism in the Late Twentieth Century*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 7–8.

[20] Carr interview, 12.

two years later, flooding part of the river and preventing any navigation to the St. Johns River except through a lock system.

As the grassroots opposition grew, many people offered their expertise, talents, and time to the cause. Retired U.S. Army Col. F. W. "Wally" Hodge, a new Gainesville resident, helped lead the Citizens group. John Couse, who ran a successful air-conditioning business, had relocated from Palm Beach County to the Ocklawaha; now he worked with anti-canal forces to save the river and was an important fundraiser for the cause. Couse's daughter Margie Bielling, a biologist and science teacher in Marion County, "became an important catalyst in the early stages of the opposition movement," note Noll and Tegeder.[21] An environmental group, Florida Bi-Partisans, headed by Ken and Helen Morrison, activists from Polk County, also joined in the battle. They called on activists to oppose the canal and counseled about how to generate publicity against the canal project.[22] David Anthony, Carr's Audubon co-chair, recalled that Helen Morrison, whom he described as "everybody's idea of a lady…dignified, beautifully coiffed, and dressed" acted as the group's spokesperson at an early canal hearing where, unexpectedly, the "canal attorney physically tried to shout her down." That lack of respect for Morrison—a sign of things to come—still angered Anthony three decades later.[23]

A central event that galvanized the anti-canal grassroots volunteers came in 1966 at a hearing at the state's capitol. Construction of the canal was well under way, with eight miles finished on its eastern leg and a firm $10 million annual appropriation from Congress. Learning that the public had no standing, Carr and company had pressed any government official they could find to hold a hearing on the canal, still hoping to change the route. Finally, in December 1965, U.S. Senator George Smathers (D-Florida) agreed that the Annual Water Resources Development Meeting before the Florida Board of Conservation in Tallahassee would be an appropriate forum for that debate. When the hearing was set for January 25, 1966, anti-canal forces contacted environmental organizations from across the state, asking them to attend the meeting. "To our surprise and we had no idea what would happen—we weren't well organized—but over

[21] Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 149–150, 200.

[22] Ibid., 169–204, 240–241.

[23] David Anthony oral interview with author. Gainesville, Florida, on Feb. 4, 1991, 4–5. In possession of author.

Lyndon B. Johnson at the groundbreaking for the Cross Florida Barge Canal. 1964. Black & white photoprint. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. Accessed 21 Dec. 2018. *https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/153282.*

350 people arrived. It was ASTOUNDING," Carr recalled. Pro-canal interests also came in force. The event was the largest "of its kind to be held on a Florida conservation issue at that time."[24]

Nathaniel Reed, then living in Hobe Sound, Florida, but with a budding interest in the environment that would later result in his consulting with two presidents and six Florida governors, decided to attend. "Announcements had been made all over the state that this thing was going to happen—that it was rigged," Reed recalled. "That if you really cared about the future of your state you had to be there. I said, 'By God, I'm going to go.'" He rented an airplane, which landed in heavy fog with a near miss of the capitol dome and made it to the chambers in time to observe a morning hearing in which only canal supporters spoke, followed by a "huge luncheon the proponents had for themselves which I went to." At the luncheon, Reed complained to Florida Gov. W. Haydon Burns that "as a citizen who's here for the first time of my life in Tallahassee I don't think this is the way a public works project should be presented and a lot of us have come a long, long way and

[24] Carr Interview, 13; *Environmental Impact of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal with Special Emphasis on the Oklawaha Regional Ecosystem*, (Gainesville: Florida Defenders of the Environment, 1970), 55.

it doesn't look like we're going to be able to speak in opposition to this project in any meaningful way." Reed was then escorted from the room. "That was the end of my luncheon."[25]

Burns and cabinet members didn't attend the afternoon hearing, only Secretary of State Tom Adams, a staunch canal supporter whose behavior was described by some as hostile and bullying. From afternoon into the night, testimony was given from both sides, according to Carr. Bielling, Anthony, and Carr were among those asking the state to change the canal's path, contending that the barge channel and resulting reservoirs would damage the river, kill trees, and encourage growth of aquatic weeds. When the hearing ended around 9 p.m., the activists headed home, "feeling quite smug," Carr said; they thought their testimony had been eloquent and strong. On their return travels, however, they learned from a radio broadcast that the state committee had met in the morning and had voted to continue the barge canal on the original route. "They had made the decision before they had met with us," Carr realized. "So here we were congratulating ourselves, feeling so good, and all for naught. Not really for naught, because that was a watershed meeting. And people recognized it."[26]

"When we realized on the way home—heard it over the radio and that sort of thing, we got angrier by the mile," Anthony recalled. "People went up there hesitant, apologetic, and came back apostles. They were John Browns. It was a catalyst." It was the 1960s and Americans already were questioning the establishment and this fit into that mood, he noted. "The reason we were so angry was that we were really lied to. That this was a perversion of democratic government." The next day, activists from across the state contacted their local newspapers to complain, Anthony said. The capitol press corps, which had not attended the hearing—Anthony said they were playing cards instead—realized they had missed the entire meeting and awoke to the anger of the activists.[27]

Soon Carr's grassroots coalition gave up its "Save the Ocklawaha" rerouting campaign and decided to battle the entire

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[25] Nathaniel Reed oral interview with author. Hobe Sound, Florida, on Jan. 14, 1991, 2–3. In possession of author.

[26] Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 175; Carr interview, 14; *Environmental Impact of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal with Special Emphasis on the Oklawaha Regional Ecosystem*, 55.

[27] Anthony interview, 6–7.

project. Carr, working with Bill Partington, on leave from the Florida Audubon Society to focus on the project, built up a busy public relations effort for the group. Her kitchen became a central command post, with a steadily buzzing copy machine. She found experts and scientists to offer opinions about different aspects of the canal project—from economics to hydrology. Then Partington would write a press release and distribute information to the media, producing two or three releases a week. "Bill was superb," Carr recalled. "He was innovative, thorough, and untiring. He led us to victory." The experts gave the anti-canal group credibility with the press, which started to rethink its previous endorsements of the canal project.[28]

With Carr as its main media figure, the group contacted news outlets across the state and the country, trying to gain supporters.[29] Carr's son, Chuck, believes his mother's scientific training and emphasis on facts converted the news media from boosters of the project into skeptics. The media quickly learned that the anti-canal group's "position on a given facet of the canal story was basically irrefutable. The best minds in the state were behind these position papers. What was an editor to do?"[30]

Ironically, many news outlets depicted Carr as a "Micanopy housewife" doing battle with the federal government. "The group, with Carr's cooperation, 'sold' the story to the media about Carr as a 'little old lady in tennis shoes' or a Florida homemaker (which she was) fighting against all odds." JoAnn Myer Valenti, who spent a year as an unpaid employee helping Carr's media efforts, said Carr "probably relished that because it made her less threatening." Although the group played off Carr's femininity, her gender never hindered her cause. She would tolerate chauvinistic stereotypes, often leveled at her during hearings by male bureaucrats, but then would eviscerate her opponents with facts, using her command of science. In working with others, Valenti recalled, "Marjorie Carr had the utmost respect of any man who walked into the office, pro or con our position. Marjorie was a

[28] Poole, "Florida: Paradise Redefined," 119–121.

[29] Poole, *Saving Florida*, 92–93.

[30] Archie "Chuck" Carr III, "Re: Great Event." Email to author Jan. 25, 2016.

formidable woman." She also was a calm, determined force in the maelstrom, uttering her motto: "This too shall pass."[31]

Carr "earned a reputation among businesses, citizens' groups, and government agencies for her ability to promote understanding, engender scientifically informed decisions, and motivate change," writes Mary Joy Breton, adding that Carr "besieged members of Congress, state representatives, and agency heads, educating them with the facts" while also pioneering "innovative training seminars for grassroots activists, teaching them negotiating skills." Breton describes Carr as a "Florida environmental matriarch."[32]

In her study of female grassroots leaders, Temma Kaplan notes that the term *grassroots* "generally implies being widespread and common, in the sense of being universal. The term also suggests being outside the control of any state, church, union, or political party." Although women in these roles "generally recognize their seeming powerlessness against corporate and governmental opponents, they also assert their moral superiority, their right to be responsible citizens, not according to official laws, but on their own terms." Kaplan notes that one theory of leadership depends on the idea of charisma—of leaders having "magical qualities of authority that justify their ethical mission." But the women Kaplan highlights in *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements* were unlike "leaders who stand aloof, acting as stars, participating only in the most publicized meetings"—instead "these women pay as much attention to the nitty-gritty of daily organizing as to making points that register at the national level. In doing so they create new political cultures."[33]

Carr carried that banner and fit that new mold. Anthony, a descendent of suffragist Susan B. Anthony, who worked with Carr and traveled tirelessly to speak to civic organizations, said he was never certain that the group's efforts would prevail, but Carr was certain. "That's where Marjorie played a role—she gave us backbone," he said. "She was never daunted, never. And she kept saying, 'Well, we're right. We're right.'"[34]

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[31] Poole, *Saving Florida*, 93, 206–207, 209; William "Bill" Partington interview with author, Oct. 11, 1990, Winter Park, Florida, 19.

[32] Mary Joy Breton, *Women Pioneers for the Environment* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 245, 247, 249.

[33] Temma Kaplan, *Crazy For Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1–4.

[34] Poole, "Florida: Paradise Redefined," 112–113.

Slowly, the group's work paid off, aided by attention from news media, including publications such as *Time*, *National Geographic*, and *Newsweek*. Importantly, *Reader's Digest* ran a January 1970 article entitled "Rape on the Oklawaha," which described the project as a "boondoggle." This widely read national magazine likened the project to a felony crime and put a spotlight on the issue, providing priceless attention. Partington, at the suggestion of Ken Morrison, followed up a month later with a letter to the president signed by 150 environmental specialists from around the world who requested a moratorium on canal construction. "That got a little attention," Partington recalled.[35]

Thwarted at every turn by politicians and the Corps, Carr and company began developing new arguments—that the economic calculations by the Corps were incorrect and that environmental damage should be considered in a project of this magnitude. They eventually adopted the name Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE) and in March 1970 published a 115-page report called the *Environmental Impact of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal*. The report argued that the canal would destroy important animal habitats, damage the aquifer, and would not be able to handle trans-Gulf barges.[36]

The report lists 99 people as editors, collaborators, and assistants for its content, with specific chapters on geology, hydrology, water quality, aquatic plant problems, vegetation, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, economics, and human impacts written by academics. The nine-page economic analysis, written by UF Assistant Professor of Economics Paul E. Roberts, Jr., indicted the Corps' financial projections with an eye to the national picture. "The Cross-Florida Barge Canal project is a classic example of a long standing national disgrace—pork barrel legislation," Roberts wrote. "This Florida project is one of many water-resource projects, scattered throughout the nation, in which the taxpayers' natural and economic resources are recklessly wasted," Roberts wrote.[37]

Recalling the prevailing governmental thinking of the era, Carr in a 1991 speech noted that it

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[35] *Environmental Impact of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal with Special Emphasis on the Oklawaha Regional Ecosystem,* 56*;* Partington interview, 12–13.

[36] Irby, "'The Big Ditch,'" 390.

[37] *Environmental Impact of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal with Special Emphasis on the Oklawaha Regional Ecosystem,* vii-ix, 14.

> was widely believed that the water flowing in a river, if not used for transportation or sewage disposal, was wasted if it reached the sea. A river as a complete entity—as an ecosystem—from its head waters to its estuary was an alien concept…Here in Florida, the Oklawaha River and its mile-wide floodplain valley, if dammed, would make a fine highway for barges. The Corps of Engineers in their benefit/cost calculations did not put one thin dime down as a cost of destroying 36 miles of this swift-flowing famous canopied river.[38]

On Sept. 15, 1969, the Environmental Defense Fund, a national legal group working with FDE, filed a federal lawsuit against the Corps to end the canal project. Among the lawsuit's charges: that the Corps had misrepresented cost and benefit data, "often 'grossly' underestimating project costs, especially with regard to maintenance." The project also would hurt recreation and navigation on the river and failed to determine the value of the river and its valley and ecosystem. The lawsuit was amended in February 1970, to ask that the project be in compliance with federal statutes and executive orders pertaining to the environment.[39]

The National Audubon Society helped the cause by collecting donations to pay the legal fees through its Rachel Carson Fund, including one check from Richard Fisher, a Massachusetts boat manufacturer. In a 1969 letter, Fisher said he had planned to write a "somewhat vitriolic" letter about the Corps' project. Instead, he offered a contribution to the legal campaign.[40] From this vantage, Carson, who died in 1964 from cancer, long before the anti-barge canal fight coalesced, had some small role in its outcome.

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[38] Marjorie Harris Carr, "Second Keynote Address Third Annual Conference for the Society for Ecological Restoration." May 20, 1991., 4–5. In possession of author.

[39] Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 226-228. *Environmental Impact of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal with Special Emphasis on the Oklawaha Regional Ecosystem*, 56.

[40] R.T. Fisher letter to Mrs. Helen F. Jackson, Oct. 7, 1969. Florida Defenders of the Environment Accession II, Box 45, "Rachel Carson Fund Donors 1969" folder. Special and Area Studies Collection, University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries.

The FDE legal case was boosted by passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), a federal law signed by President Richard M. Nixon that created the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and required that large federal projects consider environmental costs through environmental impact statements of the kind that FDE created.[41]

Nixon, recognizing rising public support for environmentalism, embraced the movement which had evolved to successfully fight dams in the Grand Canyon and pollution of bays and rivers. In his 1970 State of the Union Address, Nixon said:

> The great question of the seventies is, shall we surrender to our surroundings, or shall we make our peace with nature and begin to make reparations for the damage we have done to our air, to our land, and to our water? Restoring nature to its natural state is a cause beyond party and beyond factions. It has become a common cause of all the people of this country.[42]

Following the enactment of NEPA and a federal judge's injunction against the canal because there was no NEPA-required environmental impact statement, Nixon on Jan. 19, 1971, halted the project by executive order.

The decision to end the canal project was a milestone in national and Florida environmental history. In stopping a project so far along—the sunk cost was estimated at $71 to $77 million—Nixon "was challenging the established practices and attitudes of the Corps of Engineers, the public works committees in Congress, and of state agencies such as the Florida Cabinet and Department of Natural Resources," writes historian Luther J. Carter.

> More specifically, whether the President fully realized it or not, he was challenging their make-believe economics, their single-minded concern for economic development and token regard for the

[41] Ibid., 234–235.

[42] Richard M. Nixon, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union." Jan. 22, 1970. The American Presidency Project. Accessed Feb. 11, 2018 at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2921

> esthetic values and biological diversity, and their habit of catering to narrow economic interests.[43]

The demise of the Cross Florida Barge Canal was a huge win for grassroots environmental interests in the state, but it did not mean a restored Ocklawaha. The Rodman Dam continues to impound river water in a large, desolate reservoir that prevents the migration of ten fish species, including striped bass and American shad that once left the Atlantic Ocean to spawn in the river's upper reaches. And the locks that allow boat passage occasionally have killed endangered manatees caught in its metal gates. Carr went to her grave in 1997 fighting to have the dam removed and the river restored but local political and business interests have fought such action, claiming that the reservoir provides bass fishing that helps the local economy. However, the work of Carr and other passionate volunteers at FDE have inspired subsequent Florida activism, including later fights to restore the Everglades, to improve water and air quality, and to save endangered species and lands. Further, Carr's work stands as profound proof to Floridians worried about their declining quality of life that large government boondoggles can be stopped through the determined efforts of grassroots campaigns and resolute leadership.

[43] Luther J. Carter, *The Florida Experience: Land and Water Policy in a Growth State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 299, 301.