



Perspective ✓

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Let's Hear It For The Swamp!

Not everybody, it seems, sees swamps the way I do — frustrated rivers which have lost all motivation to achieve and have grown satisfied with stagnation.

After my column touting the virtues of rivers over swamps, I was severely challenged by Richard Carroll of Sebastian, who, it turns out, is not only a swamp lover — but a swamp owner.

Now that's not too unusual here in Florida. Anyone with a low backyard owns a swamp. Especially when it rains. But that's not the kind of swamp Carroll was talking about. In his letter he was trumpeting the kind of swamps we can't do without. The kind the Corps of Engineers, the builders of airports, the raisers of cattle, the growers of tomatoes, the constructors of subdivisions and other pushers of progress sometimes wish would just dry up and go away.

He's right, however. Despite all I said about rivers getting places because they didn't stop to spread

out — swamps are a very necessary part of our ecology. In fact, most Florida rivers get a very able assist from swamps so they may continue to flow and bring joy to folks like me.

After collecting water from the surrounding land, swamps hold it and slowly nourish the rivers. Not only that, while the rivers rush madly toward the sea to fulfill their singular purpose, swamps linger behind. Instead of taking water from the land — like the rivers — they give to the land. In fact, the very water most of us drink was originally swamp water.

Now that I stop and think about it, I'm a little ashamed I took that swipe at swamps. Sure, they breed a lot of unwanted creatures. But so do cow pastures and public schools. However, along with the snakes and mosquitoes come a lot of really good things.

After I received Richard's letter I followed his suggestion and took a walk through a nearby swamp. It was an absolutely thrilling ex-

perience — as long as I made sure I didn't stick my hand in any holes.

In trying to think why I have this thing against swamps, I remembered a childhood experience. A skinny playmate (who later grew up to be a skinny newspaper editor) and I took an inflatable raft out into a salt water marsh near the Indian River — and promptly got lost. For a while it seemed we would have to spend the rest of our lives — which we estimated would be about 45 minutes after the sun went down — in the swamp. We finally got out, but as I remember back I realize my hate for swamps probably stems from that traumatic experience in childhood.

So, thanks, Richard Carroll, for sticking up for swamps. Now that I've analyzed myself I realize that, like most things we hate or are afraid of, they aren't so bad after all.

Now I can hardly wait until it rains. Hopefully, I'll have a brand new appreciation of my back yard.