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Fine art photographer Clyde Butcher speaks out for nature in his work

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By [Margit Bisztray](#)

Clyde Butcher (clydebutcher.com) has photographed wilderness for 55 years, including Florida's. Large, sweeping and textured, his images reveal the beauty, and teach the vital importance, of nature. An avid conservationist, Butcher still wades barefoot into swamps around his home in Big Cypress National Preserve, despite every imaginable challenge, and even a stroke two years ago. He only wishes his walker were more tolerant of salt water.

Why venture to places most people avoid, like mucky swamps? [Laughs] Actually, the Everglades are probably the coolest place in Florida. When I get tired, I hang my camera on a tree limb and lie down in the water. I've never gotten so much as a tick, and ticks are worse than alligators! Alligators have no interest in people in the wild. If you walk by them slowly, you're like a moving tree.

And you haul along a 20-pound, large-format camera? A big camera captures how the eye really sees, which is by scanning from the log to the bird to the water. Nothing's center in my photographs. The edges are the important parts.

Why black-and-white film in a digital age? Film's more organic, like the rich sound of a needle on vinyl. Black-and-white reveals everything equally. In nature all is equal—the air, water, trees, clouds. Without every element, we wouldn't be here.

Describe the pace of your work. I don't take a lot of photographs. I have to find a spot, then gauge the light and the plant seasons. With exposures two to six minutes long, you can't have any wind movement. For Cigar Orchid Pond, I saw the composition in January 2000, and went back every year. I got the shot in 2009. The trees are covered in resurrection ferns, which only come out a few days after rain. Otherwise, they look dead. It took two hours walking, each way.

It's been said that you give wilderness a voice. Where are you speaking for next? The St. Johns (near Sanford, Fla.) is one of a few rivers that flow north. No one knows about it. Freshwater systems in Florida are being decimated by industry and water bottling. Hopefully this'll encourage people to protect the St. Johns.

Any advice for us? Use less. Get out in nature. Take a swamp walk!

Photography by Clyde Butcher