A System of State Parks

Miss Elizabeth Skinner, Dunedin

Mr. President and Members of the Horticultural Society:

Before speaking of the parks, I just want to refer to the talk I gave last night on the Recommendations of the Children’s Code Commission, and call your attention to the fact that copies of that report to the Governor and the Legislature can be had in the lobby of the church, and I hope each one will take one, and if you feel in sympathy with these recommendations that you will write to the Governor and to the members of the Legislature and express your opinion.

It’s always a great pleasure to speak on the Royal Palm State Park. I have had the pleasure of being present at the Federation of Woman’s Club, and therefore am quite closely connected with it. The first experience I ever had was at the dedication of that park in 1916. Then there were no good roads to speak of, and the road leading to the park was an eye-opener to what we could have, if we went after it, and the women and the men of that part of the country that laid that road, that made it possible for us to dedicate the park, deserved all the credit we could give them at that time. They labored hard to make the park a possibility, reaching over the Everglades that were covered with water, and over the corduroy roads that they had laid.

I am going to take you 48 miles south of Miami. The park consists of 4,000 acres; 300 acres of the 4,000 are called Paradise Key. That is the heart of the park. It is the part that is reserved for science, and people of the State, because of its tropical nature. There are only one or two other places, and one of those has been sub-divided.

The nature of the park, lying right in the Everglades that have been covered with water until recent days, is full of Royal Palms, looming up above the lower growth, of all kinds of tropical trees. I hesitate to speak of this before scientists, because I don’t know the scientific names, but to any scientist going down there, there is a world of interest and information. I have met in my various visits to the park, scientists from different universities and from different research stations, studying myriads of insects, and they apparently find treasures. Everything in the way of any insects, butterflies, bird, tree or plant, or anything else, is preserved there for those who are interested.

The Royal Palms loom up above the rest of the tropical growth and the magnificent appearance of those palms make you feel that the park is well named. We say it with a great deal of reverence.

Mr. Blacksley, the well-known naturalist, (and Dr. Simpson tells me he is one of the most renowned naturalists) is making a research of all the life of the
park, of everything that he can find there. With the help of other scientists he is going to give us information on each one of these phases of life in the park. This we feel will be very valuable for the people of Florida. He says his study will cover a period of at least seven years. This is his second year, and he is visiting the park and making records of all he sees and can find out about the park.

The park is ever in danger of fire. In the early days the Everglades were covered with plenty of water, which surrounded this key, and protected it. Once burned over the plant life you find on any key, is never the same, so it is up to the people of Florida to protect the park from fire.

We have started a fund of $25,000 to construct a mote around the 300 acres that we consider the heart of the park, Paradise Key. There is a protection from the lily-pad slough, that is very beautiful, and this can be continued around the park, with a driveway making it wide enough so it will protect the park from fire. We feel that this, too, will protect it from mauroaders, insects, and different kinds of enemies of plant life, that are being brought into the park continually, because it is the main highway to Cape Sable, and they seem to think there are no speed limits that far from Miami.

Mr. David Fairchild has been very much interested in the protection of the park, and he asked an artist friend to design a medal. He proposed that we offer this medal to anyone that contributed to the park, to protect it from fire. The medal is very decorative, and is a token that our friends of the park have contributed. If anyone of you wish to contribute, the medal is yours, and if you secure a large donation, you can have a hundred of them, but that has to be a real donation.

We have had 800 visitors to the park in one day. One month last year we had over 10,000 registered. That's not counting all the visitors that see the park and do not register, but it shows the popularity of a place like that. There is a delight here that you don't find anywhere else in the United States. It's just as the park naturally is. We are very grateful to the Legislature who have given us $2,500 each year, and by growing palms from seed, by serving lunch, by renting our rooms and some of our land, we have managed to raise enough money to carry on and make a few improvements each year. We had hoped this year that the federation would ask for a larger appropriation, but they are afraid they might loose what they have given, so we are keeping still, but we need a larger appropriation.

Any plantings we make about the park have to be protected. Because we have been so glad to have people come to Florida, they seem to think everything is theirs, and we cannot grow orchids and palms fast enough, so we have got to put the lid on and ask them to buy from the park instead of to help themselves.

We women who have grouped ourselves together desire very much to have a park on the Suwanee River, on some historic site. I think there are possibilities out by Chattahoochee, but that's when we cease to have any need for a hospital for the insane. Perhaps some day we can
take over Chattahoochee; the St. Johns River and our lake regions and many other sections offer opportunities. Many of our counties have beautiful spots and natural places of interest, which because of their unusual beauty should be preserved now and dedicated to park purposes, so we can enjoy the beauties of nature that have been given the State of Florida. Glacier Park has nothing on Florida. There are beauties of a different kind in our State.