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## Lonely Causes

### Jack Rudloe's Crusade To Save Tidal Swamps Wins Him Few Friends

He Says Dredging Projects Will Ruin Florida Coast; An, Altruist or a 'Nut'?

'Hit Them Below the Belt'

By NEIL MAXWELL

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
PANACEA, Fla.—Fay Rouse isn't a violent person—far from it. Rather, she is a genteel, elderly, arthritic widow. But mention Jack Rudloe to Fay Rouse and she bristles: "If I were a man, I'd whip him with this walking stick."

The wrath of the otherwise restrained Mrs. Rouse is all the more surprising in that it is aimed at a cherubic-looking, 30-year-old, self-taught scientist whose chief pleasure—and vocation—in life is gathering specimens of marine life in the mucky swamps that separate Wakulla County's solid land from the sea. Indeed, all that Mr. Rudloe asks is that he and the swamps be left alone.

That's asking a lot in these parts, however. For this is a land of lush forest, balmy bays—

*Everybody has a favorite cause, but for some people the cause becomes an all-consuming effort. Sometimes, these people are just tilting at windmills; sometimes, they end up changing the nation. This is the last of several articles on individuals and their lonely fights to right what they see as wrongs.*

and a short supply of habitable acreage. The federal government and St. Joe Paper Co. together own well over half the county in which this little sun-baked Florida town is located. The remainder of the habitable waterfront land has recently been snapped up by people seeking vacation and retirement homes. And since many more people want to live here than there is available land, some visionaries (Mrs. Rouse's brother among them) proposed what they thought to be a reasonable solution: Dredging sand into the soggy swamps and turning a wasteland into a wonderland.

#### Scouring the Swamps

Enter Jack Rudloe. Mr. Rudloe runs Gulf Specimens Co., a tiny (1972 sales: \$80,000) concern incorporated in 1967 that sells to schools and researchers a variety of sea life ranging from \$3 sloppy-guts anemones (cerianthus Americanus) to \$150 requiem sharks (carcharias Americanus). And to build inventories, Mr. Rudloe, his wife, Anne, and two other Gulf Specimens employees scour the very swamps that developers want to turn into a residential paradise.

At first, Mr. Rudloe says, he merely viewed the dredging project with distaste. But then one day in late 1970 when he was looking for sea urchins, he cast his net into the waters near Paradise Village, a dredged-up trailer park. The area attracted him because sea urchins had always been plentiful there; but on this particular day, he found his net filled with a haul of dead ones—the result, he immediately surmised, of the dredging process. But it wasn't until he was wading the shores of Alligator Harbor looking for iridescent sea worms and came upon another dredging project (to build a campground, as he later found out), that he decided that the time had come to fight.

"I didn't single that project out, really," Mr. Rudloe explains. "I just decided, 'This is Waterloo' and let it go."

And he's been fighting ever since, although it seems premature to predict exactly whose Waterloo it will be. For while Mr. Rudloe eschews his first skirmish—the landowner in the Alligator Harbor project hadn't bothered to get a dredging permit—subsequent disputes have been much more complicated and time consuming, involving some hazy legal areas, such as whether land that is only occasionally covered by a very high tide is indeed tidal land.

Going against Jack Rudloe is public opinion. For instead of cheering him on from the sidelines, many of his 6,000-odd fellow citizens in the county are openly questioning his motives. "If it wasn't for him making a living out of this, he wouldn't give a dang," says the chairman of the Wakulla County Commission, which tried without success to get the state to revoke Mr. Rudloe's business license. And the chamber of commerce, many businessmen and most land dealers believe Mr. Rudloe is out for his own gain—at their expense.

#### Preserving the Quaint Flavor

Jack Rudloe denies such charges. His fight to save the swamps, he says, is primarily motivated by a desire to retain the quaint flavor of the coastal-bend country for the perpetual enjoyment of visitors and residents, rather than risk having the area turned into a Deep South Coney Island. And his commitment to the rescue, he adds, is such that the war to save the swamps has taken at least a third of his time since the first set-to. "In a crisis, it's 90%," he says.

The crises have been plentiful. Last year, for example, there was the "Wetlands Control Bill," which Mr. Rudloe helped draft and which would have given the state strong powers to prevent development of the tidal swamps. (The state currently owns the land below the mean high-water line—an imprecise category open to numerous inconsistencies.) Gov. Reubin Askew sent the bill to the legislature, and Jack Rudloe immediately began a heavy schedule of what might be termed imaginative lobbying. At one legislative session, he appeared with a plastic bag containing water and live fish. To show the choking effect of silt, he threw a handful of dirt into the water—removing the fish before they died but not before

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## Lonely Causes: Jack Rudloe Fights To Preserve Swampland in Florida

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the stunt had its intended shock effect on the legislature.

"What are you going to do?" Mr. Rudloe asks. "You've got to hit them with something, and I usually hit them below the belt."

But the punches sometimes have little impact, and the wetlands-control bill died in committee. Jack Rudloe, however, has by no means given up and points to the fact that when the legislature convenes again next spring, a similar measure will be up for action, this time with Gov. Askew's "top priority" endorsement. (The bill, which hasn't been written yet, may include tax incentives for not developing tidal land, and it may also empower the state to buy such land to save it.)

Mr. Rudloe has also turned to advertising. For example, he has an ad coming out in Biological Science magazine that shows a hammerhead shark attacking the boom of a dragline. The ad's headline says: "Most companies make profits; we make trouble."

Mobile Home Industries will agree with that assessment. The company operates Paradise Village, three fingers of dredged-up land with canals in between. The company envisioned a thriving community of 400 mobile homes on the land strips; but it was in the water off Paradise Village that Mr. Rudloe hauled in dead sea urchins, and he convinced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to shut down Paradise Village less than midway toward completion. The project now stands with 114 lots developed and occupied mobile homes on 60 of them, and Paradise Village is a loser.

"We got caught in the middle of all this ecological concern," says E. C. Allen, president of Mobile Home Industries. "It's swung beyond all reasonable limits; man is entitled to some consideration, too."

E. C. Allen has never met Jack Rudloe and doesn't want to. ("I might lose my temper.") He does insist, however, that he has no argument with Mr. Rudloe over what he terms "sound" ecology: "Development should be done in moderation, just like eating and drinking. What (Mr. Rudloe) wants would be okay,

if he just didn't interfere with my business. I just think he ought to leave me alone."

Bob Kornegay also wishes Jack Rudloe would leave him alone. Mr. Kornegay owns a housing and mobile-home development down the road from Paradise Village; and he blames Jack Rudloe for the fact that the Corps of Engineers won't give him a dredging permit for his project. "He's just a busybody; just a busybody," Mr. Kornegay says of Mr. Rudloe.

"See that dragline over there? I'm making \$886-a-month payments on it, and it's just been sitting there for over a year," Mr. Kornegay says. "I've been coming down every week to crank it up, just to keep it running."

#### 'It's My Land'

What Mr. Kornegay wants is to extend a canal to develop more "waterfront" lots, but Mr. Rudloe is, of course, against this plan. So far, Mr. Rudloe is winning. But Mr. Kornegay recently decided to take matters into his own hands and started dredging without a permit. He says his action is legal because he is leaving a "plug," consisting of the road across the end of his older canal, between that and his new dredging (meaning that there isn't direct access to open waters; if navigable waterways are involved a permit must be got from the Corps of Engineers). "I'm just going to go on and dredge and cover up the swamp grass," he says. "It's my land. They could mess around for five years."

"People are getting fed up with this crap," Bob Kornegay says. "I'm just as interested in saving fish as Jack Rudloe—I'm just not a nut about it."

Mr. Kornegay's dislike is reciprocated by Mr. Rudloe. Learning that Mr. Kornegay is back at the controls of his dragline, he fumes over the ineffectiveness of enforcement agencies. "There ought to be fuzz (police) out there right now," he rages. "They ought to be out there with handcuffs saying, 'All right, Kornegay, shut that damned thing down.'"

#### Stretching the Rules

It doesn't matter to Jack Rudloe that Bob Kornegay may be within his legal rights: "There are some administrative rules that could be stretched," he says, "and they should be."

Indeed, according to Mr. Rudloe, if he had a say, enforcement officers would spend a lot more of their time and energy on inspection forays. "If I was in charge, and one of my field men came in at the end of the day with dry shoes, I'd fire him," he says.

If one were to surmise that Jack Rudloe isn't exactly Mr. Popularity around Wakulla County, one would be surmising correctly. It's probable, however, that the hostility of many local residents isn't entirely caused by his ecological activities. For one thing, as a product of New York—Brooklyn, to be exact—he stands out sharply from his neighbors. Then, too, some of the local women seem to frown on the fact that his wife has a penchant for flouting local convention by indulging in such activities as motorcycle-riding and scuba diving. (She even has unconventional accidents, like losing a little toe in a mix-up with an outboard motor.)

Mr. Rudloe feels that local hostility will fade with time; and, in any case, he says, he'll be glad when his fight is over. "I'm tired of the whole thing," he claims. "All I want now is to get a wetlands bill passed. Then I can hang it all up."

Meanwhile, however, there are those who don't share Jack Rudloe's equanimity. In fact, some of his associates are convinced that he is in danger of physical harm. Says Leon Crum, Mr. Rudloe's chief collector: "There is one marina that won't even let me tie up to the dock since I came with Rudloe. But they told me they'd pay me if I could get him over there so they could get ahold of him."