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## 1961 THE CROSS FLORIDA BARGE CANAL

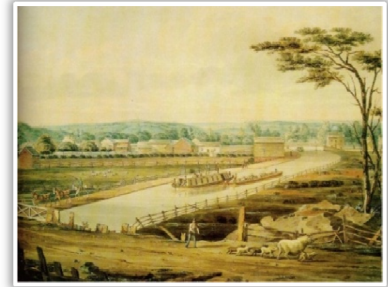
*You get to decide if Florida should build a man-made waterway across the state. It will connect the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. This canal would allow **barges** to move goods and people more quickly and safely.*

*Definition: A **barge** is a flat-bottomed boat that is used for moving cargo or passengers and is usually towed by another boat*

The idea of building a canal across Florida is very old. It is good to know its history before you hear the proposed legislation! So, here is a little background information...

### HISTORY OF THE CROSS-FLORIDA CANAL

**1500s:** Spanish explorers searched and searched for a river that crossed Florida. This was because all around South Florida were dangerous coral reefs that caused many shipwrecks! But, those explorers never found a route across the state...



Painting of the Erie Canal (1829). As you can see in the painting, horses pulled the barges upstream in the Erie Canal's early years. Later, barges used diesel engines to travel through the canal.  
Image from <http://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch2en/conc2en/ericanal.html>

**1800s:** The **Erie Canal** was built in New York in 1825. Many new businesses sprung up along the canal's route. Seeing this, Florida legislators asked the U.S. Congress for money to build a canal across Florida!

*More Information: The **Erie Canal** did wonders for New York. It connected New York City to the Great Lakes, making New York City the #1 port in the country in 1850. Using barges on the canal reduced shipping-times by a factor of 3 and shipping costs of heavy materials by a factor of 20!*

**Mid-1930s:** The idea for a canal was brought up again during the **Great Depression**. It was seen as a good way to provide jobs to Floridians. The plan was to build a 30-foot deep, 250-foot wide ship canal across the state. Some residents worried that a deep canal would allow saltwater to mix with the underground freshwater. This would ruin the water needed for drinking and watering crops. But, the project ran out of money with only 3% of the project finished.



Work done in 1936 on the Florida Ship Canal.  
State Archives of Florida, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/1267>

**Early 1940s:** During World War II, German submarines sunk many U.S. ships near the coast of Florida. The U.S. Congress wanted to give American ships more protection during the war. So, they approved the construction of a canal across the state in 1942. But, there were critics of this plan. They argued that because of the war, there was not enough money, building materials, and men needed to build the canal. Probably for these reasons, Congress never voted to give money to the project...

*Definition: To **appropriate** is to assign or set aside money. This is the term usually used by Congress or a legislature. It describes the amount of money given to a particular department, program, or project.*



The “No Room for that Contraption” cartoon ran in the *Miami Herald* on July 6, 1942. The newspaper sent a copy of the cartoon to every member of Congress. FYI: Claude Pepper (who's flying the plane) was a U.S. Senator from Florida and a supporter of the canal.

1. Based on the cartoon, do you think the *Miami Herald* was in favor or against the canal?
  
2. Why do you think the *Miami Herald* would send the cartoon to U.S. Congressmen?

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Now, in 1961...the Cold War is in full swing.

Cuba is an ally of the United States' enemy, the Soviet Union. Cuba is located only 90-miles south of Florida. With Cuba so close, American shippers and the U.S. Government are worried about these ships' safety as they go around Florida. The new proposal is to build a canal that crosses the state and keeps the 1930s route. But rather than a 30-foot canal, this canal will be only 12-feet deep. This change is because the government engineers studied the saltwater problem. Their study said that this change would keep the region's freshwater safe.

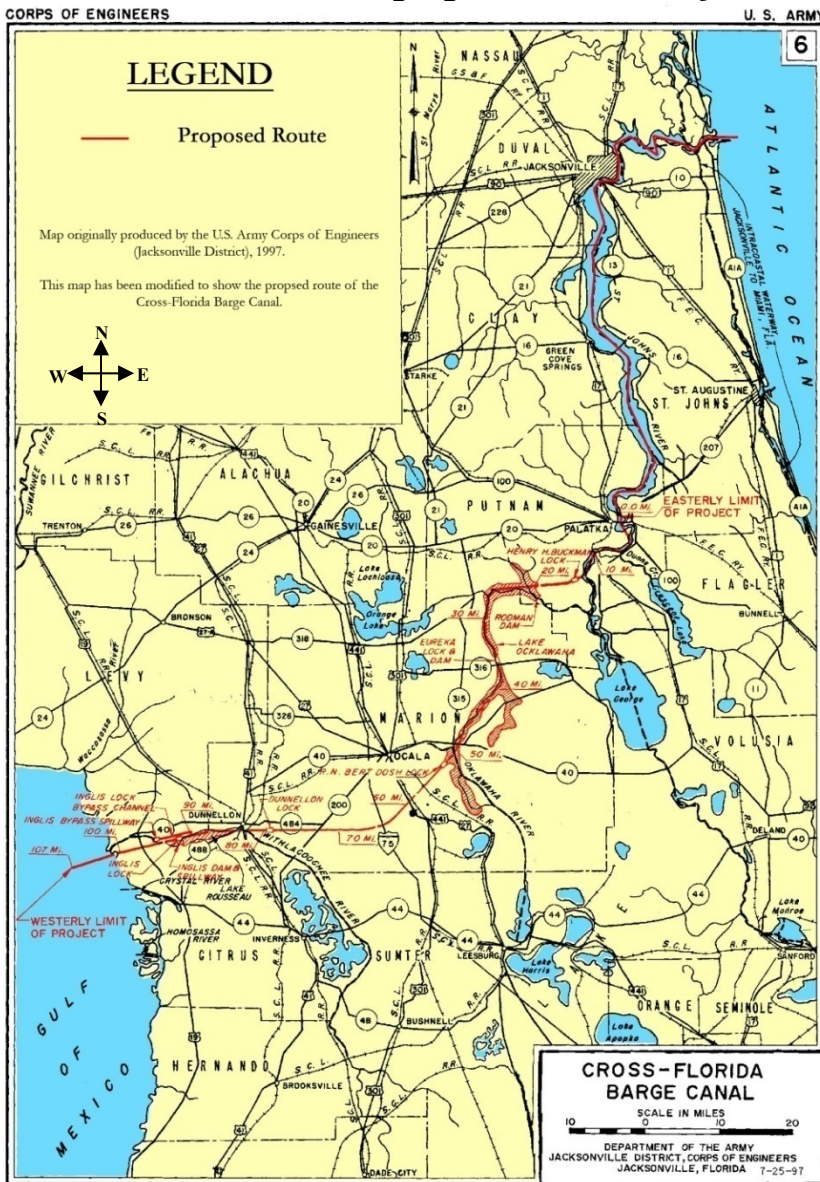
*Definition: The Cold War (1945-1991) consisted of political and military tensions between western countries and communist countries. The West was led by the United States, while the Communists were led by the Soviet Union.*

For several hundred years, people have hoped for a quicker, safer route between the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean. The question state legislators are considering is this: **Should Florida ask the federal government to build a barge canal across Florida?**



1. Think about what you've read and what you see in the map above. Now, imagine it is 1961. You own a mining company that wants to ship a heavy load of limestone from Charleston, South Carolina (green star) to New Orleans, Louisiana (red star). **Why do you think it would be useful to have a barge canal that cuts across Florida? Please give at least TWO reasons and be as specific as possible.**

*Let's take a look at the proposed route and follow the barge canal across the state!*



This map shows the proposed route for the Cross-Florida Barge Canal. Look carefully at the map. Try to notice the cities that will be connected by the canal. Also notice the state's natural features, some of which may be changed during the canal's construction.

This canal route is 171 miles long. It follows as many of the natural waterways as possible. By doing this, costs will be brought down and it will help conserve the environment. But, 32-miles of land would still need to be **dredged** to form the canal and two rivers would have to be **dammed**.

*Definition: To **dredge** is to move underwater dirt to create a path for boats to travel through waterways such as canals, bays, and rivers. Dredging is often done with heavy machines.*

*To **dam** is to block the flow of water in the river. Because of this, a lake forms on one side of the dam. A dam can affect the speed that the river flows at further upstream as well.*

(The map is a modified version of an U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Map)

1. If you were a ship entering the Barge Canal route from the Atlantic Ocean, **what is the first major city you would pass? Then, what river would you follow down to Palatka?**
2. There are several "locks" along the way. Locks allow barges to get past uneven ground levels during their trip. **What is the name of the last lock you would pass through if you were traveling from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico?**
3. Near the center of the map, find "Lake Ocklawaha" along the canal's route. This lake will be created during the construction of the canal by the Rodman Dam, which will dam the Ocklawaha River. **How do you think this dam might affect the rest of Ocklawaha River south of the barge canal?**

*Now you understand the idea behind the canal. But, you might be asking yourself...*

## Why is the government in charge of building a canal?

The government is usually in charge of building canals because projects like these cost a lot of money up front. However, building them can help create new industries, jobs, and better living conditions. Most importantly, these types of projects often offer long-term benefits and use for the general public. Canals and other similar projects are called **public works projects**.

Public works projects cost a lot of money and often affect the environment. The government's goal is to pick projects. If the projects are good, they will provide more benefits to the citizens in the long run than the project will cost them at the beginning. Elected officials must decide if the benefits to the public will outweigh the cost and risk to the environment.

Let's take a look at some other public works projects, so you'll get a better idea of what they are...



*Dams, power plants, parks, highways, hospitals, airports are often public works projects! But there are many more! Think of other examples you might have seen in your neighborhood, city or state.*

1. Write down **THREE** more public works projects you can think of and where you might see an example of each.

1.

2.

3.

National, state, and local governments all provide different public works for its citizens. For the Cross-Florida Barge Canal, the state legislators' job is to listen to all the arguments and then decide if the project is in the best long-term interests of the State of Florida. If they decide it is a good idea, they will send a **memorial** to the U.S. Congress asking for the money to build the canal.

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If the state legislature decides to send this **memorial**, then the U.S. Congress will decide if the canal is in the best interests of the rest of the country, since the federal government will be providing the money for it!

*Let's get follow the Canal memorial through its Committee Meetings to hear the debate on this bill!*

**REMEMBER!** A bill has to make its way through legislative committees that look at the bill from different perspectives important to the state. For instance, committees for the barge canal might study:

- How the canal might help businesses in the state
- How the canal could make the state's transportation system better
- How the canal would have an impact on the local environment and farming
- How the canal would be used by the military

**A QUICK QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION:**

	<b>Question:</b> <i>What happens at a committee meeting again?</i>
	<b>Answer:</b> <i>Committee members call experts and public officials to speak about the merits of a bill. Citizens can also share their opinions with their elected officials and speak at these meetings!</i>

**COMMITTEE MEETING ROUNDUP!**

Next you will read questions that might be posed in the different legislative committees. Representative Pro will answer these questions by giving the main arguments for supporting this memorial. Representative Con will answer the questions by giving the main arguments against it. Then, an Expert Witness will also give his or her input on the proposal!

<b>MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:</b>	
<i>Question: Would the canal help our military, especially if the country had to go to war?</i>	
REPRESENTATIVE PRO	REPRESENTATIVE CON
<b>Rep. Pro:</b> During World War II, many U.S. ships were sunk by enemy submarines. We have the <u>communist</u> country of Cuba threatening our shores. This canal will provide a safe route for the military to move troops and supplies between the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean during any war. Look at the map to see the benefits!	<b>Rep. Con:</b> Sure, the canal would give our military a safer route than the one near Cuba. Is that protection really worth the canal's \$350 million price tag?
<b>EXPERT TESTIMONY—Congressman Overton Brooks:</b>	
"The new Russian menace makes a Florida canal a vital link in the national transportation system."	



*Definition: **Communism** is a type of government. Under communism, resources like factories and farms are not owned by private companies or people. Instead, they are owned by the public or the government. Money is divided among citizens equally. During the 1960s, the United States was fighting a "Cold War" against communist countries worldwide. These countries, including Cuba, were led by the Soviet Union.*

1. Look at the map at the map. Notice how close Cuba is to Florida. **What do you think about Rep. Pro's point after looking at the map?**
2. **Which representative do you think makes a better argument? Please explain why in your own words.**



### COMMERCE & TRADE COMMITTEE:

*Question: Would the canal improve trade and help businesses in Florida and the country?*

<b>REPRESENTATIVE PRO</b> 	<b>REPRESENTATIVE CON</b> 
<b>Rep. Pro:</b> The canal will bring jobs and business to the state. The Army Corps of Engineers estimates that the canal will pay for itself and grow the economy by over \$17 million. Barges will help businesses sell large items across this country and the world.	<b>Rep. Con:</b> Of course, building anything costs money. But this canal will cost the federal government over \$350 million! That is a lot of money to spend when we already have railroads and highways in the state to serve the same purpose as this canal. In my opinion, the help to businesses will be very small and not worth the cost of building.

#### **EXPERT TESTIMONY—President John F. Kennedy:**



“I regard it not only as important to Florida but to the economy of the entire country, which must fully utilize all our national resources if we are to achieve necessary economic expansion.”

*Definition: **Commerce** is the exchange of goods between different countries or different regions within the same country. For example, a lot of orange juice is made in Florida. Then it's shipped and sold to grocery stores all over the United States and other countries. This is commerce.*

**3. Which representative do you think makes a better argument? Please explain why in your own words.**

### AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

*Question: How will the canal affect Florida's natural resources and agriculture?*

<b>REPRESENTATIVE CON</b> 	<b>REPRESENTATIVE PRO</b> 
<b>Rep. Con:</b> Many residents are still worried that the canal might ruin Florida's freshwater supply. They are also worried that saltwater might get into rivers. This would hurt both fishing and wildlife. I would recommend looking more closely at the negative effects this canal might cause to our state's natural wonders. Once built, the canal cannot be undone!	<b>Rep. Pro:</b> We have studied this canal for centuries. The canal will only be 12-feet deep to make sure saltwater does not mix with the drinking water. It will also help control floods and store water in times of drought. This waterway will provide Florida's farmers with a cheaper way to get their crops to markets. On top of all that, this canal will provide new waterways and lakes for fishing, boating, and camping. Let's stop studying the canal. Let's actually build it!

#### **EXPERT TESTIMONY—State Geologist Robert Vernon:**

“The proposed barge canal construction of locks would maintain the groundwater level of the area adjacent to the canal... [It] has none of the inherent dangers present in the formerly proposed sea level ship canal... [and will help Florida's] underground freshwater resources by serving as a conservation and flood-control measure.”

*Definitions: **Natural resources** are items that come from the environment that humans use for their benefit. These include many things, from oil and minerals, to fresh water and air. They even include things like seafood. **Agriculture** is the growing of plants and raising of animals for humans use. It often refers to farming and livestock. But, it can also include lumber, shellfish, and even solar energy.*

**4. Which representative do you think makes a better argument? Please explain why in your own words.**

**TRANSPORTATION & TRAFFIC COMMITTEE:**

*Question: Will the canal improve the state and nation's transportation system?*

**REPRESENTATIVE PRO** 

**REPRESENTATIVE CON** 

**Rep. Pro:** Being able to cheaply and safely move goods builds a strong economy. That is why the government builds roads and canals and manages air traffic. In the 1820s, the Erie Canal connected the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. It made New York City the number one port in the country. New York City is still the U.S.'s biggest city today! If we make a quicker, safer route between the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, think of what it can do for Florida!

**Rep. Con:** A good economy comes from wise decisions. But, this canal will serve the same purpose as the public interstate highways and private railroads. Can you explain to me why our government should spend a lot of money on a canal that is not really needed?

**EXPERT TESTIMONY—Florida Secretary of State Tom Adams:**

“Within four years of its completion, the Cross Florida Canal will carry as much tonnage as is now carried on the Suez Canal.”

5. Look at the map to your right and compare it to the maps of Florida you've seen earlier. Notice the impact the Suez Canal has for ship travel. *FYI: During this time, roughly 58 ships used the canal each day and carried over 270 million tons through the Suez Canal per year.*

**Do you think that the Secretary of State comparison is a good one? Why or why not?**



Image Source: [geography.bowstuffworks.com/africa/the-suez-canal1.htm](http://geography.bowstuffworks.com/africa/the-suez-canal1.htm)

6. **Which representative do you think makes a better argument? Please explain why in your own words.**

