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
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PARACASE, Fla. — Pay Roue isn’t a violent person—far from it. Rather, she is a gentle, elderly, arthritic widow. But mention Jack Rudloe to Pay Roue and she bristles: “If I were a man, I’d whip him with this walking stick!”

The wrath of the otherwise restrained Mrs. Roue is all the more surprising in that it is aimed at a cherubic-looking, 50-year-old, self-taught scientist whose chief—perhaps uniquely—lies in life is gathering specimens of marine life in the muddy 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 a lot in some 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 filling up voids; sometimes, they end up changing the notion. This is the last of several articles on individuals and their lonely fights to right what they see as wrong.

The Swamps

Enter Jack Rudloe. Mr. Rudloe runs Gulf Specimens Co., a tiny ($721 sales: $80,000) concern incorporated in 1967 that sells to schools and researchers a variety of sea life ranging from $3 snapping anemones (caribbean Americanus) to $150 requiring sharks (where—please!) And to hold inventories, Mr. Rudloe’s wife, Anne, and two other Gulf Specimens employees never the very swampy, that the deer, want to turn into a residential parade.

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 to alk 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 bed of dead ones—the result, he immediately supsised, of the dredging process. But it wasn’t until he was washing the Alligator Harbor lobsters for irrigation 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.

He didn’t single that project out, really,” Mr. Rudloe explains. “I just decided, ‘This is Florida’ and let it go.”

The project has been going on since, although it seems premature to predict exactly whose Florida it will be. For the project has certainly won his first admirer, and the Alligator Harbor project hadn’t bothered to get a dredging permit—subsequent disputes have been much more complicated and time consuming. Involving several legal, areas, such as whether the project is valid under the Endangered Species Act. It is only occasionally covered by a very high tide. is indeed tidal land. So going against Jack Rudloe is public opinion. For instead of cheering him on from the sidelines, many of his 8,000-old friends of the county are openly questioning the motives. “I don’t know how long he’s been doing this, he wouldn’t give a damn,” 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 some land dealers believe Mr. Rudloe is out for his own gain—on their expense. Preserving the Quality Flavor

Jack Rudloe denies such charges. His fight to save the swamp, he says, is primarily motivated by a desire to retain the quality 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 Oconee Island. And his commitment to the reason, he adds, is such that the war to save this swamp has taken at least a third of his time since the first set-to. “In a crisis, 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 as 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 agreed with a plastic bag containing water and live fish. To show the shocking effect of all this, he threw a handful of dirt into the water—"moving the fish before they died, but not columns before they died

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The suit 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 pincers sometimes have little impact, and the wetlands-control bill died in committee. Jack Rudloe, however, has by no means given up on the point 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 Magazine which shows a hammerhead shark attacking the boon of a dragnet. The ad’s headline says: “Most companies make profits; we make trouble.”

Mr. Rudloe lives in a two-room house on a small creek near his home. His house is surrounded by a thriving community of 400 mobile homes on the land strip, but it was in the water off Paradise Village that Mr. Rudloe had died in an accident. And he convinced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to shut down Paradise Village.

Mr. Rudloe effected to “get caught in the middle of all this ecological concern,” says E. C. Allen, president of Mobile Home Industries. “It’s a business that can be done in a more moderate, 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 live all 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.

“I’ve been getting paid out in the first one, and it’s been just good too. I’ve been coming every week to see this thing up, just to keep it running.”

What Mr. Kornegay wants is to extend a culvert to his site. He’s working more “waterfront key,” but Mr. Rudloe is, of course, against this plan. So far, Mr. Kornegay is winning, but the Army Corps of Engineers recently decided to take another look at his plans and started dredging without a permit.

He says his action is legal because he is laying a “plug” consisting of the road across the end of his oil field. New dredging permits (meaning that there isn’t direct access to open waters; if navigable water is involved a permit is involved from the Corps of Engineers.) “I’m just going to go on and dredge and cover up the swamp area. They could mess around for five years.”

“People are just 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.”

Mr. Kornegay’s dislike is reciprocated by Mr. Rudloe. Learning that Mr. Kornegay was Jack at the controls of his dragnet, he fumes over the ineffectiveness of enforcement agents. “There ought to be no police out there right now,” he rages. “They ought to be out there with handcuffs saying, ‘All right, Korne- gay, 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 than they do on inspection and enforcement, and one of my fields would be in the end of the day with dry shoes, I’d fire that man!”

If one were to suppose that Jack Rudloe isn’t exactly Mr. Rudloe’s popularity around Wakulla County, you would be surprised. You would be surprised. It’s probable, however, that the hostility of many local residents is largely created 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, of the local women seem to be on the fact that his wife has a penchant for fostering local convention by indulging in such activities as motorcycling and scuba diving, (the very unusual accidents, like losing a little toe in a mix-up with an outboard motor.

Mr. Rudloe feels that local hostility will fade when he’s gone, and in any case, he’s, “I’m tired of the whole thing,” he claims. “All I want now is to get a well-dug hole and 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. Leon Crum, Mr. Rudloe’s chief collector: “There is one main- 

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