

# *AN UNFLINCHING LOOK*

**OUR CHANGING CLIMATE**



**PHOTOGRAPHS BY BENJAMIN DIMMITT**



Blue Run 2, 1988

## **CONTENTS OF PROPOSAL**

About The Project	4
The Proposal	5
Selected Images	6
The Traveling Exhibition	44
Related Educational Programming	47
Accompanying Publication	48
Professional History	49
Installation Photographs	51
Contact Information	55

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Climate change is perhaps the most profound challenge of our time. My photographs, made in one small place over forty-four years, tell the story of coastal inundation and our changing climate.

This exhibition of contemporary landscape photography chronicles the impact of climate change and sea level rise on a remote spring-fed estuary on Florida's Gulf Coast, 70 miles north of Tampa. Rising seas caused by global warming have pushed saltwater up into the fresh water creeks there, killing trees and leaving behind massive ghost forests. Excessive pumping from Florida's aquifer has allowed the rising seas to move into the wetlands faster. What had been lush, verdant, semi-tropical forest is now predominantly a plain of grasses relieved by palms and dead hardwood trees. Palms are the most salt-tolerant trees in this ecosystem and are the last to expire. This coastal inundation is widespread along the Big Bend section of Florida's Gulf Coast and serves as a bellwether for low-lying coasts around the world.

I am the son of an artist and a native Floridian. When I was given a camera as a boy, the wetlands and woods near our home were my first subjects. I bonded with the Florida landscape then and have a deep love for it still. The wetlands in the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge were a sublime example of my native landscape and were a favorite photographic subject of mine dating back to the 1980's.

I first noticed the thinning of forests and the increasing amount of dead trees in 2014. I hadn't been to the Chassahowitzka in two years and the damage from the encroaching saltwater horrified me. The large scale environmental ruin was heartbreaking to behold. This eight year project, focusing on a pristine outlying area that I know well, began on that day in December, 2014.

This exhibit is appropriate for anyone old enough to understand the basics of climate change and sea level rise. Viewers will see the direct impact of melting glaciers on these flat wetlands and, crucially, the effect of the saltwater intrusion into Florida's freshwater aquifer. The images should help broaden the understanding of critically important subjects that affect us all and that will only become more relevant in the immediate future. Photography can often be a better medium than scientific studies for helping audiences understand and, perhaps more importantly, care about complex environmental issues.

# TRAVELING EXHIBITION PROPOSAL

*An Unflinching Look: Our Changing Climate* by Benjamin Dimmitt

Through my photographs and related materials, this exhibition offers audiences of all ages a glimpse of what climate change looks like, providing a path to understanding and acknowledging that these changes are occurring now and have been occurring for years.

By viewing photographs made over forty-five years in these wetlands, audiences will be able to observe the decline of pristine fresh water creeks and dense forests into a wasteland of fallen trees and stumps as a result of saltwater inundation. This deforestation is an indicator of irreversible flooding and ecosystem loss to come.

The exhibition consists of three components:

## 1) **The Unspoiled Wetlands**

Prints from my archive, 1977– early 2000's: The first prints show the pristine wetlands and hardwood forests before the coastal inundation began.

## 2) **The Growing Impact of Saltwater Intrusion**

The second group contains side-by-side rephotographic diptychs showing the effects of saltwater intrusion on the same landscape over periods of time ranging from 5 years to 34 years.

## 3) **The Estuary Today**

This final component offers photographs made between 2012 and 2022 depicting what remains of this once lush and fecund estuary.

**"This is climate change made manifest. The details and specifics, which photography preserves like no other medium, make each isolated frame a microcosmic lens by which we may view our planet as a whole."**

Alison Nordström, Ph.D., *An Unflinching Look: Elegy For Wetlands*, 2023

## THE UNSPOILED WETLANDS



Palms & Fallen Trees, 2009



Bridge Tree, 2004



Upper Blue Run  
Creekside, 2004



Horizontal Palms &  
Creek, 2004





Blue Run Steeple, 2008



Mouth of Tidal Creek,  
2009



Eel Grass, 2004



Swamp Lilies &  
Wetlands Forest, 2008



Leaning Palm, 2011



Grasses & Island, 2004



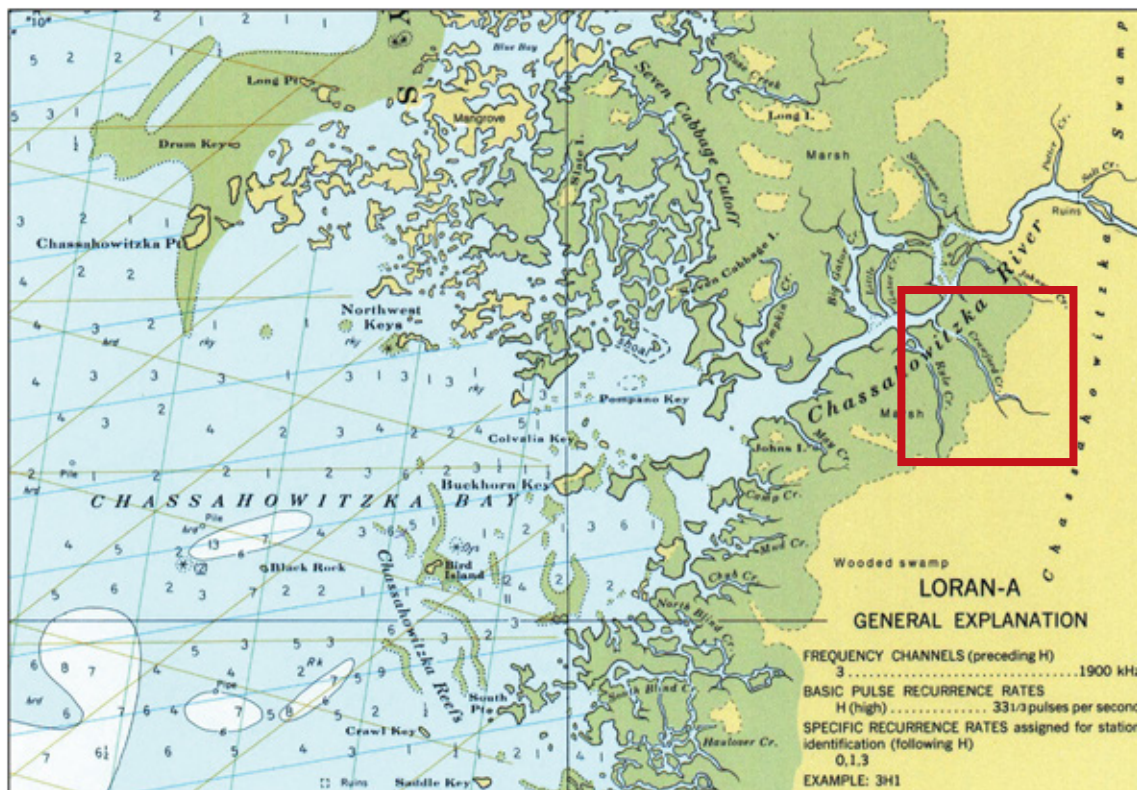
Chassahowitzka Bay  
at Dusk, 2004



Chassahowitzka River & Logging Train Trestle, 1977



Map showing the location of the Chassahowitzka River and National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast of Florida, 70 miles north of Tampa.



Primary Area of Photography

**“Photographs lend themselves to side-by-side comparisons that cannot occur in real life, especially of then and now, as these do. Such an approach implies a further set of images made some years from now; they force us to consider the future of this beautiful place, as we should and must.”**

Alison Nordström, Ph.D.,  
*Journal of Florida Studies, 2017*

## THE GROWING IMPACT OF SALTWATER INTRUSION



Downriver, 1986



Downriver, 2020



Lower Crawford Creek, 1988



Lower Crawford Creek, 2014





Cabin, 1987



Cabin, 2021



Cabin & Canoe, 1988



Cabin & Canoe, 2020



Creekside, 2011



Creekside, 2021



View Downstream, 2004



View Downstream, 2022



View Upstream, 2004



View Upstream, 2022



Upriver, 1987



Upriver, 2021



Upper Crawford Creek, 1988



Upper Crawford Creek, 2022



Kitchen, 2004



Kitchen, 2018



Roof View, 2006



Roof View, 2022



Savanna & Creek, 2015



Savanna & Creek, 2021



Jerry's Prairie, 2014



Jerry's Prairie, 2022



Tidal Creek & Fallen Cedar, 2015



Tidal Creek & Fallen Cedar, 2021

**“In a landscape photograph, both the mind and heart need to find their proper place. Before the landscape we look for an invitation to stand without premeditation. It is always, in some sense, our home. At times, we may also look for an architecture of light and a poetry of atmosphere which welcomes the eye into a landscape of natural process. It may also be the map—the evidence of the thing itself: may it also, always be a vision of the double world—the world of appearances and the invisible world all at once. Even when the landscape is greatly disfigured or brutalized, it is always deeply animated from within. When one really sees an awesome, vast, and terrible place, we tremble at the feelings we experience as our sense of wholeness is reorganized by what we see. The heart seems to withdraw and the body seems always to diminish. At such a moment, our feelings reach for an understanding.**

**This is the gift of a landscape photograph, that the heart finds a place to stand.”**

Emmet Gowin, *Changing The Earth* Exhibition Catalogue,  
Yale University Art Gallery, 2002



## THE ESTUARY TODAY



Brent's Savanna, 2015



Toppled Palms & Spanish Bayonets, 2014



Ruined Forest, 2015



Palms in Creek, 2015



Colonnade, 2012



Skip's Canopy, 2015



Wendell's Fog, 2018



Diagonal Trees in Creek, 2021





Upper Blue Run, 2014



Embrace, 2019



Blue Run Still Life 2, 2020



Ruined Landscape, 2019



Three Palm Stumps, 2017



Creek Bend & Dead Trees, 2018



Stump & Dead Trees, 2015



Blue Run, Late Sun, 2020



Blue Run Shore, 2014



Impassable Creek, 2022



Collapsed Oak &  
Sawgrass Prairie, 2016



Dead Tree Hosting  
Orchid & Air Plant, 2015





Expired Palm Sapling, 2019



Fallen Palm & Fog, 2015

**“We rely, I think, on landscape photography to make intelligible to us what we already know.”**

Robert Adams, *Beauty In Photography*, Aperture Books, 1996



**“Benjamin’s black and white captures of the coastal waterways of Florida are stunning in their composition and silver gelatin printing. I have witnessed his passion for his craft in the wet darkroom and also his commitment to using his photographs to document the changing landscape of the Gulf Coast waterways as the intrusion of saltwater continues to destroy the native flora and fauna.”**

Aline Smithson, *Lenscratch, An Unflinching Look*, 5/31/16

# THE TRAVELING EXHIBITION

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION PRINTS

All of my exhibition photographs were made using black & white film. My exhibition prints are limited edition, selenium-toned, archivally processed gelatin silver prints. They are all made by hand by me in my wet darkroom. This has been my process for over fifty years and is reflective of the landscape photography tradition in which I work.

The Unspoiled Wetlands square images are printed 14"x14" on 16"x20" paper.

The Unspoiled Wetlands horizontal images are printed 12"x18" on 16"x20" paper.

The Growing Impact of Saltwater Intrusion images are printed on 8"x10" paper and shown side by side in a single frame.

The Estuary Today images are all square and are printed 14"x14" on 16"x20" paper.

Please see installation photographs on pages 51-53.

All prints are matted, faced with plexiglas to protect the print surface and framed in 20"x24" black frames. Square images are framed vertically, ie: 20"(W) x 24"(H). Horizontal images and all diptychs are framed horizontally, ie: 24"(W) x 20"(H).

There are 14 Unspoiled Wetlands photographs, 14 The Growing Impact of Saltwater Intrusion diptychs, and 22 The Estuary Today photographs offered.

Framed prints are shipped with backs ready to install.

All photographs in the traveling exhibition and many more are included in an accompanying publication, *An Unflinching Look: Elegy For Wetlands*, available in the fall of 2023. See page 48.

## EXHIBITION SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Up to 90 linear feet.

Up to 50 matted and framed black & white photographs backed & ready to install.

Matted and framed prints are transported in a box, each photograph wrapped with bubble pack.

Bookings are being accepted for late 2023-2028.

Booking Period: 4-12 weeks

## ADDITIONAL EXHIBITION ELEMENTS

### DIGITAL IMAGE MURALS

- Two four-image digital murals which document the progress of sea level rise caused by global warming are available to augment the exhibition at each venue;

*Note: Print-ready digital image files, scaled to install in your specific venue, can be provided for local production.*

“Roof View” offers the same view of wetlands from a boat-shed roof from 2006 to 2021. “Creek Bend” depicts a scene that I paddled past frequently and photographed on multiple occasions between 2015 and 2020.



Roof View 4 Image Mural, 2006, 2014, 2016, 2022



Creek Bend 4 Image Mural, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2020

## MAPS AND OTHER VISUALS CAN BE VIEWED AND DOWNLOADED BY CLICKING [HERE](#)

### MAPS

- Map of Florida showing the location of the Chassahowitzka River and National Wildlife Refuge, 70 miles north of Tampa (page 14).
- Navigational map of Chassahowitzka Bay and Chassahowitzka River showing the primary area of photography. (page 14).

### COASTAL INUNDATION

- One sea level rise graph illustrating the increase in the rate of coastal inundation from 1938–2020.

### DEFORESTATION

- Two satellite photographs depicting the deforestation along the Gulf coast and a one page Deforestation Study Overview.

### SALTWATER INTRUSION

- Five pairs of side-by-side, before & after aerial photographs produced by the State of Florida portraying the damage caused by saltwater intrusion with notes and dates.



### VIDEO: EFFECTS OF RISING SEA LEVELS

- One MP4 video showing the same view photographed five times between 2006 and 2022 that dramatically portrays the effects of rising sea levels. Viewers will see the thinning of a dense, thriving swamp forest and its slow conversion to a landscape of dead trees, sparse palms and salt-tolerant grasses.

[Click Here to view MP4 video.](#)

## RELATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Rising Sea Levels in Florida, Global Warming and The Photographic Project

I offer a variety of educational components in conjunction with this exhibition:

- Gallery talks by the artist: on this specific project, on rising sea levels in Florida as well as providing a discussion and/or panel discussion on global warming in collaboration with regionally-based artists, scholars and scientists.
- Other potential topics include the process of photographing this long term project, beauty in photography, the history of landscape photography, advocacy in landscape photography and landscape photography in general.
- Additionally, I enjoy sharing my many decades of experience photographing the landscape in photographic workshops and in analog printing workshops.



Darkroom Instruction, Landscape Photography Workshop, Penland School of Craft, 2022

## ACCOMPANYING PUBLICATION AVAILABLE FALL, 2023

The University of Georgia Press will publish a book of this work titled *An Unflinching Look: Elegy For Wetlands*. In addition to my photography and writing, the book will include contributions from distinguished photographer, Emmet Gowin; naturalist and activist, Susan Cerulean; research scientist and native Floridian, Dr. Matthew McCarthy; photography scholar and curator, Dr. Alison Nordström; and Alexa Dilworth, a native Floridian and publishing director at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies.

The publication is a deep, peer-reviewed examination of the impact of climate change on the wetlands at the Chassahowitzka and contains a total of 86 photographs. All photographs in the traveling exhibition are included in the book.

I am available for book signings during the exhibition's schedule.

The publisher, the University of Georgia Press, will work with your gift shop to consign books.

Additionally, I offer a list of related titles and additional resources.



**"Dimmitt's work has a feeling similar to classical paintings—poised, with sharp contrasts of tone, and dramatic emphasis on shape and line. The dying palm trees, slowly slumping over and falling are reminiscent of wounded soldiers depicted in classical works chronicling the fall of Rome. The fallen trees read more like cadavers on the battlefield, picked clean by bugs and scavengers"**

James F. Pearson, Past Director,  
Southeast Museum of Photography,  
Daytona Beach, FL. *Lenscratch, This Is  
Climate Change*, 9/24/19



## PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

**Benjamin Dimmitt** was born and raised on the Gulf Coast of Florida. He graduated from Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL where he studied photography and printmaking. He also studied printmaking at Santa Reparata Graphic Arts Centre in Florence, Italy and City and Guild Arts School in London, England. Dimmitt moved to New York City in 1976 and continued his studies in photography at both the International Center of Photography in NYC, NY and Santa Fe Photographic Workshop in Santa Fe, NM.

From 2001–2013, he held an adjunct professor position at the International Center of Photography teaching black & white photography and landscape photography.

His photography investigates interdependence, competition, survival and mortality in the natural environment. He is most curious about the places where land and water merge and landscapes with animated and layered growth that exhibit the instinct for survival and the persistence of life.

Dimmitt's photographs have been exhibited in museums, galleries and festivals internationally and are held in multiple major museums and private collections.

He lives and works in Asheville, NC.

Full résumé can be downloaded [here](#).



## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 "Cherish What Remains", The Do Good Fund, Columbus GA
- 2021 "Public Domain", Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC
- 2021 "Sea to Shining Sea", Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, Tampa, FL
- 2020 "Primitive Florida", Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, FL
- 2020 "Work Outside-Alumni Invitational Exhibit", Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL
- 2019 "This is Climate Change", Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, FL
- 2018 "DocuFlorida II", Pensacola Museum of Art, Pensacola, FL
- 2018 "Abstraction", Griffin Museum, Boston, MA
- 2018 "Environmental Conservation, Peace and Development", Naiman International Photography Festival, Mongolia
- 2018 "An Unflinching Look", Photo + Sphere Festival, Asheville, NC
- 2017 "Paradise. Lost.", Southeast Center for Photography, Greenville, SC
- 2016 "Currents 2016: Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, LA
- 2012 "Photo Forum 2012", Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, TX
- 2009 "My Florida Home", Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, Tampa, FL
- 2008 "About This: The ICP Faculty Exhibition", International Center of Photography, New York, NY

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- An Unflinching Look: Elegy for Wetlands*, University of Georgia Press, 2023
- Snapshot: Climate, Southern Cultures*, UNC Center for the Study of the American South, 2023
- Colossal: "An Unflinching Look"*, 10/8/19

*All About Photo*: Benjamin Dimmitt, February, 2019

*Lenscratch*: "This Is Climate Change", September 24, 2019

*Journal of Florida Studies*: "An Unflinching Look", Volume 1, Issue 6, 2017

*Oxford American: Eyes On The South*, "National Treasure", September 20, 2016

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2022 Penland School of Craft, Penland, NC
- 2019 Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, FL
- 2018 Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, NC
- 2016 Dunedin Fine Art Center, Dunedin, FL
- 2013–15, The Bascom Art Center, Highlands, NC
- 2001–13, International Center of Photography, New York, NY

## AWARDS

- 2021 Lenscratch Art & Science Award
- 2020 Lange-Taylor Prize, Semi-finalist, Center for Documentary Studies
- 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, Photolucida's Critical Mass Top 200 Award
- 2014, 2015, New Orleans Photo Alliance's Clarence John Laughlin Award Finalist





The Do Good Fund Gallery, 2022



Southeast Museum of Photography, 2019



Photo + Sphere Festival, 2018



Southeast Center for Photography, 2017



Ogden Museum of Southern Art, 2016



Clayton Gallery, 2016



Paddling Home at Dusk, 2011

**"... the care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope."**

*Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Common Place:  
The Agrarian Essays**

## CONTACT INFORMATION

To discuss bringing this exhibition to your community, please contact me at:

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Images and Text:

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