

(The following is from p. 41; do not have first part of story.)

..... Above the tidal area, too, development projects planned along the coast*face trouble from Matthews, for he argues that most of this land is in the public domain. He bases his contentions on the official surveys of the 1870s, when Government surveyors assigned to chart the lands being transferred to state control often just drew the coastal boundaries by eye rather than trudging through the swamps. The result was that they often did not see high ground lying out to seaward from the mangroves and mistakenly designated many areas as tidal land. That error, Matthews has successfully argued, leaves these lands in the federal domain.

To locate these areas, Matthews himself often slogs through the swamps. Then he files claim to the high land as a tax-liable "trustee for the people (yearly tax: 99¢). When a developer tries to acquire the land for building sites, he may get a nasty surprise: Matthews was there first and has a provable legal interest in defending the land. Although he talks of "personally walking the entire coastline of West Florida," Matthews usually just compares the old maps with current project lines. When they do not coincide, he first investigates and then goes to court.

Although his antagonists denounce Matthews as a "lawsuit-happy crackpot," his lonely crusade has won him admirers too. The St. Petersburg Times spoke with a certain awe of "his mind-boggling legal assaults [that] name every public official below the rank of President of the U.S." Actually, Matthews last year challenged the President too. On hearing that the Corps of Engineers planned to improve security around Nixon's Biscayne Bay house by dredging and filling in 2,000 cu. yds. of sand in nearby tidal waters, he made one of his rare forays to the east coast and threatened to sue. Others joined in opposition, and the White House dropped the project.

.....
*of Florida?