

Alafia River Corridor Preserve

General Description

Size: 3,868 acres. This site lies adjacent to Alderman's Ford County Park and encompasses portions of both the North and South Prongs of the Alafia River. The preserve was pieced together from no less than seven separate parcels of land purchased by Hillsborough County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District between 1994 and 1999. Acquisition efforts are continuing in an attempt to purchase enough land to provide a continuous protected habitat corridor along the South Prong as far as the Alafia River State Park and along the North Prong as far as the Polk County line. Visitors to this preserve will be surprised by the tremendous variety of conditions they encounter, in part due to the fact that large sections were mined for phosphate as many as sixty years ago, leaving behind a landscape of steep hills and deep water filled basins that have since become reforested with large oak and pine trees.

Location and Access

The site is located east of Highway 39, from the CSX railroad tracks north of the Alafia River on the northern boundary, to as far south as Jameson Road on the south boundary. Access to the hiking trail is off of HWY 39, at the northwest corner of the grass parking area adjacent to the Pinecrest Little League Complex next to Alderman's Ford Park. Access to the horseback riding trail is at the dead end of Old Welcome Road. Turn east from Highway 39 onto Old Welcome Road, one mile south of Lithia Pinecrest Road. A separate access for group camping only is on Keysville Road. See contact info below for directions and to request a camping permit.

Environmental Significance

Although portions of this site have been disturbed by phosphate mining and other activities such as clearing for pasture grazing and orange groves, the majority of the site by far is in its original natural state. Most of the disturbed areas have had many decades to recover through natural succession, and are now occupied by native plants and wildlife species. One of the lakes found in the mined area supports a significant nesting colony of waterbirds, including a growing number of Endangered wood storks. The higher portions of the old mined area provide habitat for gopher tortoises, some of which were relocated to the site by the previous owner from lands undergoing development. Among the unaltered habitats found elsewhere on the preserve are pine flatwoods, sandhills, hardwood forest, and hardwood swamp, including vast stretches of bottomland hardwood forest in the Alafia River floodplain. The single greatest challenge in protecting and managing this preserve is the control of invasive exotic plants such as cogon grass and Japanese climbing fern.

Recreational Opportunities

The preserve contains separate trails for hiking and horseback riding, and an area designated for group camping. The hiking trail is a total of nine miles in length, but numerous interconnecting loops make it possible to follow shorter routes. A single access point is located adjacent to the Little League complex on Highway 39. Look for the trail head sign at the northwest corner of the complex. The horseback riding trail is located near the south end of the preserve, south of Lithia-Pinecrest Road. A parking area for vehicles with horse trailers is at the end of Old Welcome Road. This facility is scheduled to be upgraded in the near future. The trail is about seven miles in length, and may be interconnected with the trail system in the Alafia River State Park in the future. The group camping area is located at the northeast corner of the preserve, adjacent to several man-made lakes. There are no facilities, and access is by reservation only.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers are needed for trail maintenance, exotic plant control, habitat restoration, and monitoring and recording site conditions and wildlife observations.

Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876.

