



Alafia River Reserve

General Description

Size: 334 acres. This property was jointly purchased by Polk County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District in 1998. Polk County established its Environmental Land Acquisition and Management Program with a public referendum in 1994 in order to “acquire, preserve, protect, manage, and restore endangered and environmentally-sensitive lands, water resources, and important wildlife habitat”. The County and the Water Management District share management responsibilities for this site.

Location and Access

The site is located on the North Prong of the Alafia River, just east of the Hillsborough County line. From State Road 60 turn south onto Turner Road and follow the left fork of Turner Rd. to Indian Oak Blvd., go left on Indian Oak Blvd. to Indian Oak Drive, then right on Indian Oak Drive about 200 yards to an unpaved parking area on the left.

Environmental Significance

The preserve contains hardwood hammock, hardwood swamp and cabbage palm hammock habitat within the floodplain of the Alafia River and Poley Creek, including the confluence of the two waterways. Protection of this property allows public access and management to a portion of a natural habitat corridor that runs continuously along the Alafia River system as far west as Bell Shoals Road in Hillsborough County and as far south as the Alafia River State Park on the river’s South Prong, linking together over 10,000 acres of public preserve lands along the way.

Recreational Opportunities

The site contains a small picnic area adjacent to the parking area, with three shelters, picnic tables and grills. A pathway leads from the picnic area to the river, with a loop trail running to the west, or downstream, providing a hike of 45 minutes to an hour. This trail is best visited during the dry season, since it travels through the river floodplain. A compass is also recommended, since the pathway and directional markings are often hard to follow.

Volunteer Opportunities

Wildlife observations and native plant identification need to be documented and reported. The loop trail needs regular maintenance. Occasional exotic plant control will be needed to control species such as skunk vine and climbing fern.

Contact Information

Polk County Environmental Lands Program, Natural Resources Division, 4177 Ben Durrance Road, Bartow, FL 33830, (863) 534-7377.