

# Alafia River State Park

## General Description

Size: 6,312 acres. This is a new State park that was acquired as a donation in 1996 from Cytec Brewster Phosphates, Inc. The park opened to the public in 1998, and is still undergoing development. The majority of the park has been mined for phosphate, and as a result, does not contain natural communities. The forested floodplain of the South Prong of the Alafia River is still in its original natural condition, and some relatively small areas of natural upland habitat also still exist. Most of the mined portions of the park have undergone reclamation, and are highly varied in character, consisting of man made lakes, open grasslands, and some older, unreclaimed phosphate pits. The highly varied topography and lack of environmentally sensitive resources in the mined areas present some unique opportunities for outdoor recreation and the development of the site has taken good advantage of this situation.

## Location and Access

The park is located on the east side of County Road 39, between County Roads 640 and 672, about 30 miles southeast of Tampa. Access is available at two points, the North Trail Head/Picnic Area just south of Jameson Road, and the new main entrance about 1-1/4 miles further south. Both entrances provide access to the interior trail systems, while the main entrance leads to full service picnicking and camping facilities.

## Environmental Significance

In spite of the extensive phosphate mining, the park does include significant natural resources, including approximately 1,650 acres of forested habitat along the river corridor. An additional 53 acres of xeric hammock and 11 acres of scrub remain as isolated patches of uplands. These small areas are important in spite of their small size due to their ability to support native species that depend on very dry conditions, especially a number of rare plants. The plant list for the park includes three species classified by the State as endangered, that are found only in these xeric habitat types. According to the park's management plan, restoration of natural habitat in the mined areas is a long range objective for the majority of the site.

## Recreational Opportunities

The State Park Service sees the site as a unique opportunity to provide outdoor recreational activities that would ordinarily be limited by concerns over environmental impacts. As a result, the site already contains an extensive system of trails for equestrians and mountain bikers. The mountain bike trails are considered to be among the best in the State, with steep elevation changes and a color-coded marking system to distinguish expert, intermediate and beginner sections. There are currently 14 miles of trail open to bicyclers. Horseback riders can enjoy 20 miles of well-marked trails that wind around lakes, over hills and through forests. Hiking is allowed on all of the existing trails with the exception of the advanced bicycle trails. Small boats capable of being carried to the water can be launched into several of the lakes adjacent to the northern access area, and fishing is allowed. One 30 site campground is open, with facilities for horses, and a picnic area with rest-rooms serves day use visitors. Future plans include more trails, a second, larger campground, lake-side cabins, canoe launches, interpretive center and possibly a swimming area.

## Volunteer Opportunities

The State Parks are highly supportive of volunteerism. Opportunities include campground host, clerical work, maintenance and repair, ranger station assistant, interpreter, resource management, trail maintenance and more. Private clubs are involved in developing and maintaining the trail systems.

## Contact Information

A volunteer coordinator for Alafia River State Park can be reached at (813) 987-6771. Alafia River State Park, 14326 S. County Road 39, Lithia, FL 33547. (813) 672-5320. Southwest Association of Mountain Bike Pedalers (813) 689-5109. ([www.swampclub.org](http://www.swampclub.org)) Triple B Riding Club (Equestrian) P.O. Box 6313, Brandon, FL 33508 (<http://tripleb.flahorse.com>)

