



## Alafia Scrub Preserve

### General Description

Size: 78 acres. This site was purchased by Hillsborough County (ELAPP) in 1998, with joint funding from the Florida Communities Trust. Although relatively small in size, the entire site is heavily wooded, and contains a wide variety of natural features, including xeric oak hammock, mixed upland forest, small freshwater marsh wetlands, a scenic creek corridor, and a tidal marsh along the shoreline of the Alafia River. The site is located in a residential neighborhood and along a major thoroughfare, making it highly accessible to area residents. Under the previous ownership, the property was zoned for high density (multi-family) residential development.

### Location and Access

The site is located on the Alafia River, just east of Interstate 75, on the north side of Gibsonton Drive. An access point is located at the northwest corner of Gibsonton Drive and Hagadorn Road. Park along the wide, grassy strip on the north side of the road, next to a sign marking the start of the hiking trail.

### Environmental Significance

This site's significance comes from its high diversity of natural habitat, which is a result of the changes in elevation and the range of soil conditions that occur as one traverses the site from the southeast to the northwest. At the higher and drier southeast corner, a remnant of scrub habitat can be found. Although the area is dominated by large live oaks, enough open ground exists to enable a colony of the Endangered Florida golden aster to thrive. One or two other Threatened plant species, and numerous gopher tortoises, listed as a Species of Special Concern, are also present. As one travels toward the north and west along the hiking trail, the scenery changes as the elevation slopes gently down toward the river. A mixed forest of mature pine trees, oaks and other hardwoods provides shelter for more common plant and animal species, including songbirds, black racers, box turtles, raccoons and opossum. A small creek flows onto the site near the west boundary, forming a narrow gully before it levels out into the marsh along the river. Several hundred feet of natural shoreline wetlands provide high quality habitat that has been largely eliminated by waterfront development along the lower stretches of the Alafia River.

### Recreational Opportunities

The natural features described above can be experienced first hand thanks to an excellent hiking trail that winds for about two miles through the preserve. The trail features a small wooden platform at the edge of the tidal marsh that provides a low-impact view of the river shoreline. This trail was constructed with the assistance of a team of AmeriCorps workers, as well as volunteers from several groups. A brochure with a trail map is available at the trail head. Future plans call for a small picnic area and parking lot, with handicap access.

### Volunteer Opportunities

The County manages the site by maintaining the trail, removing exotic vegetation, and conducting prescribed burns to improve habitat. Volunteers are needed to provide documented wildlife observations, maintain the hiking trail, help protect and maintain the Florida golden asters and assist with exotic control. The cooperation and support of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods will be critical to the success of the management effort. Anyone interested in acting as a spokesperson or advocate for the preserve should contact County staff for more information.

### Contact Information

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