



Alderman's Ford Preserve

General Description

Size: 971 acres. This site is named after the adjacent County park, since it lies immediately downstream and is interconnected by not only the river and forests, but also by the Alafia River Canoe Trail and a hiking trail that loops for over seven miles through the preserve, crossing the river at one of the wooden bridges in the park. The preserve was acquired by the County in three separate purchases between 1990 and 1995, and has been recently conveyed to the State of Florida through the Florida Forever Program. The County will continue to manage the site through a lease agreement. Although the majority of the preserve contains much of the same natural habitat types as are found in the adjacent park, there are also significant areas that have been altered by past human activities. The far northwestern section contains several hundred acres of former pasture, now undergoing restoration to pine flatwoods, sandhills and forested wetlands. Portions of the site along the southern boundary were also cleared years ago and appear to have been used to grow trees and plants intended for landscaping, but these areas have been regenerating naturally for several decades.

Location and Access

The preserve and hiking trail can be accessed at several points. Hikers can park at the Alderman's Ford Park Canoe Launch area, off of Thompson Road, just south of the Highway 39 bridge, and pick up the trail at either end of the wooden footbridge by following the pedestrian/bicycle path in a clockwise direction from the parking area. A separate access point with an unpaved parking area is located on Turkey Creek Road, approximately 1/2 mile south of Durant High School. Additional gates can be found on Pitt Road, south of Keysville Road, and on Thompson Road, between the canoe launch and Bryant Road.

Environmental Significance

The site contains highly diverse and high quality habitat along a major riverine wildlife corridor that runs for over 30 miles through southern Hillsborough County and into western Polk County. Together with the other contiguous protected areas, it encompasses enough natural habitat to support viable populations of native species that require large amounts of territory to survive and reproduce. The site contains significant populations of protected species such as the gopher tortoise, Sherman's fox squirrel, Eastern indigo snake and Florida sandhill crane as well as healthy and diverse populations of many more common native species. The former pasture area that is undergoing restoration is located at a point where the habitat corridor is critically narrow in width, making habitat restoration in this area crucial to maintaining the integrity of the wildlife corridor.

Recreational Opportunities

The site contains a stretch of the State designated Alafia River Canoe Trail, which is accessed from the adjacent Alderman's Ford County Park. There is also a hiking trail over seven miles in length that provides a moderately strenuous 4 to 6 hour hike through the preserve and a portion of the adjacent park. The trail crosses the river twice, using an existing footbridge in the park, but requiring hikers to wade across the river at the lower crossing. This fact, together with conditions such as high water, flooding in low lying areas, and hoards of mosquitoes, make the trail virtually unusable in the summer months (July through September). It is highly recommended that hikers obtain a trail guide brochure, see contact info below. The site also contains a relatively short horseback riding trail, located in the southwestern section, and accessed off of Thompson Road. This trail is less than five miles in length, and no parking is available on-site for vehicles with trailers.

Volunteer Opportunities

The hiking trail requires frequent maintenance due to seasonal flooding and heavy undergrowth. Volunteers are also needed for ongoing habitat restoration and exotic plant removal efforts, recording and reporting of wildlife observations and plant species.

Contact Information

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