



Apollo Beach Nature Park

General Description

Size: 63 acres. This site is very unusual due to the fact that it consists entirely of dredge and fill material at the north end of the Apollo Beach development. When originally nominated by members of the Apollo Beach community, the site failed to qualify for preservation under the ELAP Program's guidelines, due to the lack of natural conditions. The program does allow a project to be considered if a conceptual restoration plan with an identified source of funding is submitted as part of the nomination. The citizens were able to get a commitment from the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) program, enabling the site to qualify for acquisition. Hillsborough County purchased the site in 1996, with joint funding from the Florida Communities Trust. In spite of the fact that the Apollo Beach community is a waterfront development, no allowance was made by the developer for public access to the shoreline. As a result of this purchase, the Apollo Beach community finally gained access for all to the Tampa Bay shoreline.

Location and Access

The site is located at the north end of Surfside Blvd. From US Hwy 41, go west on Apollo Beach Blvd. to the end, then turn right on Surfside Blvd.

Environmental Significance

As stated above, the site consisted entirely of dredged fill material when purchased by the County. A condition of the acquisition was that the majority of the property would undergo habitat restoration. The SWIM program designed a restoration plan that included the removal of over 400,000 cubic yards of fill material, creating a system of dunes, small islands, high marsh, tidal and sub-tidal wetlands in the north and east portions of the property. The excavation phase started in early 2004, and the project should be substantially completed by mid-summer, 2004. The project is expected to provide valuable estuarine habitat in an area of Tampa Bay that has been heavily degraded by past development. A whole host of native species will benefit from the new habitat, including shorebirds, fish, invertebrates, manatees, and especially people who live nearby or visit the site.

Recreational Opportunities

The site is very popular with local residents, who finally have access to the Tampa Bay shoreline in the Apollo Beach community. Birdwatching, picnicking, beach combing, and especially fishing are favorite activities. The warm water outfall from Tampa Electric's Big Bend power plant flows past the north end of the site, making it an unusually good fishing spot during the cooler winter months. The warm water also attracts a large number of West Indian manatees during the winter months.

Volunteer Opportunities

Once the habitat restoration project is completed, it will be very important to record wildlife utilization in the area. Periodic shoreline cleanups are held at the site. Volunteers will also be needed to help the County maintain upland plantings in the area of the park facilities, which are not included in the SWIM restoration project.

Contact Information

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