

## Balm-Boyette Scrub Preserve/Triple Creek Greenway

### General Description

Size: 5,723 acres. The Balm-Boyette Scrub Preserve was purchased by Hillsborough County in 1992, through the ELAP Program. The majority of the site was later conveyed to the State under the CARL Program, with the County retaining ownership of approximately 1,200 acres, most of which had been impacted by phosphate mining. The Triple Creek Greenway was added in 2000, and was jointly funded by the County and the Florida Communities Trust. The County manages both preservation areas.

### Location and Access

The preserve is located in southeastern Hillsborough County, approximately 5 miles south of the Alafia River, and 4 miles east of I-75. The main entrance is on the east side of Balm-Boyette Road, approximately 1.2 miles north of County Road 672 (Balm Road). Look for a small shell parking area surrounded by a wooden fence. Other access points are available at metal gates located farther north on Balm-Boyette Road, and on Balm-Riverview Road at the west end of the preserve, but no marked trails exist at those locations.

### Environmental Significance

In terms of size, habitat diversity, rarity of habitat, and number of State and federally protected species documented, this preserve is the most significant tract of land in the Tampa Bay region. Its most important asset is the over 800 acres of intact scrub habitat, which occurs in eight separate and distinct locations throughout the preserve. This habitat type supports more protected species of plants and animals than any other in the State, some of which cannot survive in any other kind of habitat. Since these scrub areas are separated from one another by other habitat types, at least one scrub dependent species, the Florida golden aster (*Chrysopsis floridana*), is considered by some scientists to be represented in up to five distinct populations on this single preserve. Another special quality of the preserve is the abundance of gopher tortoises, a keystone species whose presence is essential for survival of a number of other rare species that depend on tortoise burrows. Eastern indigo snakes, gopher frogs, and Florida mice are examples of listed species found in the preserve that require tortoise burrows for survival. Other habitats present include pine flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, hardwood hammock, grasslands, bottomland hardwood forest, freshwater marsh, cypress swamp, bay swamp, and freshwater lakes. The preserve also protects portions of the headwaters of two different Alafia River tributaries, Bell Creek and Fish Hawk Creek, providing flood protection and water quality enhancement for downstream areas. The Triple Creek Greenway protects the habitat corridor along Bell Creek, providing a critical link to Fish Hawk Creek Preserve and the Alafia River Corridor.

### Recreational Opportunities

The preserve offers an excellent natural setting for hiking and mountain biking, and over a dozen man-made lakes are open to fishing in the mined area. A hiking trail of approximately 3.5 miles, and over 18 miles of mountain biking trails, start from the parking area. The hiking trail will be extended onto the Triple Creek Greenway in the near future. Trail maps are available.

### Volunteer Opportunities

The SWAMP Club is an all volunteer mountain biking club whose members work with land managers to develop and maintain trails at several parks and preserves in the area. The Tampa Audubon Society maintains over forty nest boxes for Eastern bluebirds and Southeastern American kestrels, in the open grasslands of the mined area. An annual maintenance event is held each winter. The County needs volunteers to assist with trail maintenance and a variety of site management tasks including habitat monitoring and exotic control, and to report unauthorized activities.

### Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876.  
Southwest Association of Mountain Bike Pedalers (813) 689-5109. ([www.swampclub.org](http://www.swampclub.org))  
Tampa Audubon Society, P.O. Box 320025, Tampa, FL 33679. ([www.tampaaudubon.com](http://www.tampaaudubon.com))

