



## Balm Scrub Preserve

### General Description

Size: 1,592 acres. This preserve was purchased by Hillsborough County through the ELAP Program in 1999. The previous owners are descendants of one of the pioneer cattle ranching families in this part of the State, and a small herd of authentic Florida cracker cattle, descendants of the original cattle imported by the Spanish, have been maintained on the property. Having lived in the wilds of Florida for centuries, these animals are specially adapted to survive in harsh conditions and require less care than “purebred” breeds. Prior to acquisition, the County determined that the management practices being employed to maintain the site as native range for the cattle were consistent with the ELAP Program’s preservation objectives. As a result, a lease agreement was created that allows one of the previous owners to continue to use the site for cracker cattle grazing. In return, the rancher performs management tasks such as road and fence maintenance and repair, site security, exotic control, and prescribed burning.

### Location and Access

The preserve is located on the south side of County Road 672 (Balm Road), two miles east of US Hwy 301. The only public access point is at the south end of McGrady Road. From the intersection of 301 and 672, go east on 672 for 3.25 miles, turn south on McGrady and travel 1.5 miles to a metal gate. Please don’t block the gate. There are no marked trails, but woods roads and cow paths criss-cross the site.

### Environmental Significance

The most important feature of this preserve is the large area of scrub habitat, several hundred acres, that supports a number of threatened and endangered species, including the Florida golden aster (*Chrysopsis floridana*), and gopher tortoises. The preserve also contains scrubby flatwoods, pine flatwoods, dry prairie, freshwater marsh, and forested wetlands along a section of Bullfrog Creek. The upland habitat is in exceptional condition due to the management practices of the previous owner, which included prescribed burning and low intensity cattle grazing. Unfortunately, the middle section of the preserve includes disturbed land that was used for row-crop farming. However, the absence of natural habitat along the north side of the creek corridor has provided an opportunity for the County to create a flood control, stormwater management project that mimics a natural wetland system, improving water quality and protecting property downstream. The unused portions of the vacated row-crop land will eventually be restored to native range and other natural upland habitat types.

### Recreational Opportunities

The preserve is open to foot traffic only during daylight hours only. There are no designated trails, but adventurous types will enjoy open vistas of native rangeland, old growth scrub forest, and habitat restoration in progress. Visitors should expect to encounter cattle on the site, and are advised to avoid disturbing or coming into direct contact. Dogs are not allowed on the site.

### Volunteer Opportunities

Site visitors are asked to contact the County to report wildlife observations, rare and unusual plants or other features. The public is asked to support the County’s and the rancher’s efforts to help preserve the unique bit of Florida history that is represented by the herd of Florida cracker cattle on the preserve.

### Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876.  
Florida Cracker Cattle Association, 3125 Conner Blvd., Tallahassee, FL 32399-0880