

Brooker Creek Complex

Anchored by the Brooker Creek Preserve in Pinellas County, this system extends well into both northwest Hillsborough County and Pasco County. The majority of the protected natural resources are in Pinellas County, where over 8,000 acres have been permanently protected as the Brooker Creek Preserve. A 400 acre tract in Hillsborough County was acquired to provide a protective buffer, preventing otherwise inevitable development on the preserve boundary and along the creek corridor. Another 1,100 acres has been acquired much farther upstream. That tract, the Brooker Creek Headwaters Preserve, has protected a significant portion of the creek system's headwaters from development. Additional lands in both Hillsborough and Pasco County have been targeted for preservation, and if acquired, would extend the protected area to the east and northeast, potentially creating a habitat corridor that could ultimately reach the Starkey Wilderness Park, an area of over 30,000 acres.

Owing to a large tax base and relatively small inventory of protected lands, Pinellas County has been able to focus considerable resources on the Brooker Creek Preserve, in terms of habitat management, recreational facilities development, and environmental education. The result is a model program that is the envy of public land management programs everywhere. Habitat inventories and monitoring, management planning, research, staff levels, funding support and educational programming are all exceptional. The challenges faced by land managers in Pinellas are unusual as well, with development encroaching on all sides causing adverse impacts and creating constraints on efforts such as prescribed burning and exotic control. But this situation results in opportunities as well, in the form of a large volunteer base and strong advocacy.

Much of Brooker Creek itself has been impacted by development and groundwater pumping. The narrow creek corridor remains dry for months at a time, and adjacent lands are predominantly low density residential. The creek system is interrupted by several lakes, most of which are rimmed by shoreline development. These factors make it impossible for the creek system to function as a natural habitat corridor for wildlife, unlike many of the other riparian systems elsewhere in the region.

