



Brooker Creek Headwaters Preserve

General Description

Size: 1,111 acres. This preserve was pieced together from eight separate parcels acquired between 1993 and 1999. The project is the result of a partnership between Hillsborough County (ELAPP) and the Southwest Florida Water Management District, with the two agencies sharing acquisition and management costs, and the County assuming responsibility for site management. The site was originally targeted for acquisition due to the presence of extensive cypress swamp wetlands and protective upland buffer lands that together constitute a significant portion of the headwaters of Brooker Creek, an important tributary of Lake Tarpon in Pinellas County. To this date, the Brooker Creek Headwaters Preserve is the largest tract of preservation land in northwest Hillsborough County.

Location and Access

The preserve is located on the north side of Van Dyke Road and south of Lutz Lake Fern Road, approximately 3 miles west of Dale Mabry Hwy, and just east of Gunn Hwy. Ramblewood Drive cuts across the southeast corner of the preserve. Access points can be found on both sides of Ramblewood Drive and on the east side of Brown Road.

Environmental Significance

As mentioned above, the preserve provides protection for a significant portion of the Brooker Creek watershed. Since the preserve is located in a region with several large public water supply wellfields, it also serves as an important aquifer recharge area. Approximately 60% of the preserve is occupied by wetlands, and the mostly low-lying uplands are poorly drained, becoming saturated with water during the rainy season. A highly varied mosaic of natural plant communities can be found in the preserve, including cypress swamp, pine flatwoods, oak hammock, mixed oak and pine forest, and grasslands. The latter two are the result of natural regeneration of former agricultural lands. Two threatened plant species have been documented in the preserve, hooded pitcher plant (*Sarracenia minor*), and Catesby lily (*Lilium catesbaei*). The large size and diverse composition of habitat support a wide variety of wildlife, including deer, turkey, bobcat, foxes, coyote, gopher tortoise, Florida sandhill crane, Sherman's fox squirrel and Eastern diamondback rattlesnake.

Recreational Opportunities

Due to the presence of protected species, extensive wetlands, and seasonally wet conditions in the uplands, public access is limited to hiking and day use only. An extensive network of woods roads serve as hiking trails, but the County advises that much of the site is inaccessible from late June through October. Nevertheless, when conditions are favorable, this site is highly recommended for wildlife observation and general nature study. Future plans call for routing a section of the Upper Tampa Bay Trail (a paved, multi-use trail), across the northwest section of the preserve. This will provide a critical link in this recreational trail that runs from just north of Hillsborough Avenue at the south end to the Suncoast Parkway at the north end.

Volunteer Opportunities

The County encourages volunteer participation in preserve management activities, including trail maintenance, exotic plant removal, site cleanup, plant and wildlife inventories and more.

Contact Information

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