



Bullfrog Creek Scrub Preserve

General Description

Size: 1,620 acres. Although the entire tract was purchased by Hillsborough County in 1996, this preserve is actually composed of two separately managed parcels, both of which are managed as mitigation areas. The western half is a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Gopher Tortoise Mitigation Park. The State reimbursed the County's acquisition costs with funds generated by permitting fees paid by developers. This is one of many such sites located throughout Florida, under a program designed to ensure the long term survival of gopher tortoises and other native wildlife species that are dependent on the high, dry scrub and sandhill habitats that are rapidly disappearing due to development. The site contains scrubby flatwoods, sand pine scrub, xeric oak hammock, pine flatwoods, cypress swamp wetlands, and forested wetlands within the floodplain of Bullfrog Creek.

The eastern half of the site is managed by Hillsborough County, and has been designated as a mitigation bank site through the upland habitat protection provisions of the County's Land Development Code. Under the ordinance, developers may purchase "credits" in order to obtain permits to clear land designated as "Significant Wildlife Habitat", in situations where on site preservation is considered to be unfeasible. The funds generated by the mitigation bank are being used to restore native habitats on the site's uplands, which were used for improved pasture and row crop farming under the previous ownership. Approximately 50% of the County-owned area contains wetlands associated with Bullfrog Creek and its tributaries.

Location and Access

The site is located on the west side of U.S. Highway 301, approximately three miles south of Big Bend Road, and three miles north of Sun City Center. The site is not currently open to the public because of the ongoing habitat restoration effort in the County-owned portion. Eventually, public access will be available at an entrance gate next to the Forestry fire tower at the north end of the site. A long access road (~ 1 mile) will lead to the Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Park, where a small parking area and interpretive kiosk mark the start of a hiking trail.

Environmental Significance

In addition to the large population of gopher tortoises, the western half of the site contains excellent examples of both upland and wetland native habitats. The scrubby flatwoods and xeric oak hammock section contains a population of the endangered Florida golden aster (*Chrysopsis floridana*). The entire preserve is large enough to offer a refuge for wide ranging species including Eastern indigo snake, bobcat, grey fox, Sherman's fox squirrel, and wild turkey. An active Southern bald eagle nest is located on the county-owned portion, in a stand of pine trees on the north side of the creek. The wetlands within the floodplain of Bullfrog Creek are extensive and provide important flood control, water quality and habitat benefits for the watershed. Restoration of upland habitat here will help offset the loss of natural habitat elsewhere in the County.

Recreational Opportunities

Although currently not open to the public, in the future, this site will offer low to moderate recreational opportunities, consisting of hiking, picnicking, birdwatching and nature study, primarily on the western half of the property.

Volunteer Opportunities

Currently, the only volunteer opportunities available would be for work days scheduled by the County in conjunction with habitat restoration.

Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation, Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569 (813) 672-7876.
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Mitigation Park Program. (407) 846-5300.