



## Cockroach Bay Preserve

### General Description

Size: 1,027 acres. This preserve consists of a group of islands stretching from the mouth of Cockroach Bay to the northeast into the Little Manatee River as far as the Hwy 41 bridge, as well as the adjacent shoreline both north and south of Cockroach Bay Road. The Cockroach Bay Islands were purchased by Hillsborough County (ELAPP) in 1989 and later conveyed to the State under the CARL Program. The adjacent parcels, including an extensive mangrove shoreline and uplands containing mostly shell pits and crop land, were purchased by the County in 1991, and have been undergoing large scale habitat restoration. The islands are part of the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, and are managed jointly by the State and County, while the upland portions of the preserve are being restored through a multi-agency partnership coordinated by the Water Management District's SWIM Department.

### Location and Access

The preserve is located along both sides of Cockroach Bay Road, west of the Hawaiian Isles Mobile Home Park and Gulf City Road. To reach the Preserve, go south on US 41 from Ruskin to Cockroach Bay Road, approximately 2 miles south of the Little Manatee River bridge, and turn west on Cockroach Bay Road. Go straight ahead to the end of the road to reach the boat ramp, or turn north on Gulf City Road to reach the preserve management office.

### Environmental Significance

Cockroach Bay is unquestionably the most beautiful and unspoiled section of Tampa Bay north of the Skyway Bridge. Mangrove islands stretch for 5 miles from the south edge of the mouth of Cockroach Bay to the US 41 bridge on the Little Manatee River. Thick seagrass beds cover the bay bottom out to a depth of about 6 feet offshore. This shallow water nearshore habitat, found in estuaries throughout the world, is a natural nursery for marine life. The landward sections of the preserve are also important components of the overall system, providing freshwater runoff and habitat for many species that use the estuary for feeding and breeding. Just beyond the high tide mark, lies coastal hammock, an upland community composed of salt tolerant species such as live oak and red cedar. The land beyond was once coastal pine flatwoods, but has been converted to agriculture, and in some areas the fields were mined for shell, leaving large, water filled pits. These old fields and pits are being converted to native upland forest and tidal wetlands, in order to provide a natural transition from coastal wetlands to uplands habitat. This will result in more protection for the Cockroach Bay ecosystem, and provide a home for a healthy and diverse wildlife population.

### Recreational Opportunities

This is an extremely popular fishing destination, and parking at the boat ramp is at a premium during the peak spring season. A canoe and kayak launching site near the boat ramp provides access to two marked trails through the mangroves. A brochure map is available from the County. The Cockroach Bay area is also very popular for birdwatching and general nature appreciation. In the future, once habitat restoration areas have become more well established, hiking trails will provide access to the upland sections of the preserve.

### Volunteer Opportunities

Habitat restoration, exotic plant control, native plant nursery work, office staffing, habitat monitoring and more opportunities are available. A special early response team in the advent of an oil spill on the bay is based at this site. The headquarters of the County's Invasive Species Task Force is also located here.

### Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, Cockroach Bay Office, 3709 Gulf City Road, Ruskin, FL 33570. (813) 671-7754. Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876. Tampa Bay Aquatic and Buffer Preserves, PO Box 309, Terra Ceia, FL 34250. (941) 721-2068. ([www.dep.state.fl.us](http://www.dep.state.fl.us)) Tampa BayWatch ([www.tampabaywatch.org](http://www.tampabaywatch.org))