



Cone Ranch

General Description

Size: Approximately 13,000 acres. This property was purchased in 1988 by the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority, now known as Tampa Bay Water, and later transferred to the Hillsborough County Water Department, with Tampa Bay Water retaining the “water rights”, i.e. the right to develop a drinking water supply on the property. Over the past 15 years, Tampa Bay Water has been monitoring the site’s hydrologic resources in an effort to evaluate the potential water yield and the resulting environmental impacts of a proposed wellfield on the site. As part of this effort, a long term management plan was developed for the site to provide a blueprint for the future. The plan included potential habitat restoration, conservation and outdoor recreation initiatives that were considered to be compatible with the site’s primary purpose as a public water supply resource. At this time, the Cone Ranch Wellfield Project has yet to receive final approval by the Board of Directors of Tampa Bay Water, a step necessary for implementation. If for some reason the project is abandoned, it is possible that the property will be available to the County’s ELAP Program for permanent preservation. Until a final decision is made, the site will continue under its current status as public conservation land. The site is being leased for cattle grazing and related agricultural activities, and opportunities for habitat management, restoration or outdoor recreation are minimal.

Location and Access

The site is located in the northeast corner of Hillsborough County, east of Hwy 39 and north of Knights Griffin Road. There are two main access points, one on Hwy 39 approximately 4 miles north of Knights Griffin Road, and the other on Knights Griffin Road approximately 4 miles east of Hwy 39. Access is restricted at the present time, but groups may arrange for guided field trips on a limited basis.

Environmental Significance

Although the majority of the site has been disturbed by drainage improvements and agricultural development, the overall size of the property, significant surface water resources, and remaining areas of habitat combine to make this an important natural resource. The site contains portions of Blackwater Creek and Itchepackasassa Creek as well as numerous smaller tributaries, all of which have been channelized long ago. Upland habitat has mostly been converted to improved pasture, and some of the pasture has been subsequently planted with hybrid slash pine. Large areas of cypress swamp remain, but these wetlands have been impacted to varying degrees by ditching and channelization, which have the effect of lowering the surface water table. Hardwood swamp and hardwood forest remain along the creek corridors, and some fairly large blocks of pine flatwoods also remain on the site. Wildlife is abundant and easily observed on the open landscape, and includes turkey, deer, bobcat, foxes, Sherman’s fox squirrel, coyote, gopher tortoise, Florida sandhill crane, and even on rare occasions Florida black bear.

Recreational Opportunities

The site is not currently open to the public. Future plans include development of trails throughout the site, with an access area on Knights Griffin Road. The management plan recommends hiking and horseback riding trails as being compatible with site conditions.

Volunteer Opportunities

None at the current time, but future trail development will rely heavily on participation by volunteer support groups.

Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, 1101 E. Rivercove Drive, Tampa, FL 33604. (813) 975-2160.
Tampa Bay Water Administrative Office, 2535 Landmark Drive, Suite 211, Clearwater, FL 33761. (727) 796-2355. www.tampabaywater.org

