



Cypress Creek Preserve

General Description

Size: 2,547 acres. This site consists of five separate parcels purchased by Hillsborough County (ELAPP), with support from the Florida Communities Trust, over a period of five years, from 1996 through 2001. Additional land may be acquired in the future. The preserve is unique due to its location adjacent to “New Tampa”, an area that has undergone tremendous growth over the past fifteen years. The preserve was considered a high priority for preservation due to the need to protect the watershed of Cypress Creek, an important tributary of the Hillsborough River. The majority of the site consists of forested wetlands within the creek floodplain. However, a major objective of the preservation effort was to acquire a protective buffer of upland habitat, that would have otherwise been developed.

Location and Access

Public access is available at three separate points. The largest contiguous portion of the site is accessed from the far northwest corner of the parking lot behind Freedom High School in Tampa Palms, by climbing over a gate in the barbed wire fence. Future access will be much improved following construction of a planned roadway along the site boundary. A much smaller area of only 71 acres is accessed directly from Livingston Road. Look for a walk-thru opening next to a metal gate on the east side of the road, 1/2 mile north of Sinclair Hills Road, and park on the roadside. The third portion of the site, an area of almost 400 acres, is accessed at the dead end of Robertson Trail. Turn east from Livingston Road onto Robertson Trail, about one mile south of County Line Road. Once the paved road ends, continue straight ahead and look for several metal gates, park and use the walk-thru next to the center gate. Please avoid blocking gates when you park.

Environmental Significance

The site is part of an extensive wildlife corridor that extends along the Hillsborough River all the way to the Green Swamp in Pasco and Polk Counties, and along Cypress Creek northwards into Pasco County. This habitat corridor provides a potential dispersal route for several rare or endangered species. Many plant and animal species listed as endangered, threatened or species of special concern have been documented on the preserve, including wood stork (nesting), Eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, and auricled spleenwort fern (*Asplenium auritum*). Although the preserve itself is protected from development, the continued survival of its native wildlife populations is threatened in many ways. A proposed major roadway that would follow the preserve boundary has the potential of causing major damage to the preserve, unless extensive measures are taken to prevent impacts such as road kill mortality and fragmentation of the wildlife corridor habitat. Adjacent residential development, and the resultant human related impacts, will also compromise the ability of the site to support a healthy and diverse wildlife population, unless ongoing management efforts are directed to minimizing those impacts.

Recreational Opportunities

An extensive network of woods roads leads throughout the largest section of the site, including a five mile loop that requires wading across the creek at one point, and is only recommended during the dry season. Scenic qualities are very high in the hardwood forest and floodplain wetlands. Wildlife viewing opportunities are excellent at times, including deer, turkey and feral hogs. The smaller sections of the site west of I-275 also offer good wildlife viewing opportunities. The site at the end of Robertson Trail provides the greatest range of habitat conditions, with xeric uplands gradually transitioning through mesic hardwood forest and patches of open flatwoods to hardwood swamp forest.

Volunteer Opportunities

There is a great need for documented observations of wildlife utilization, as well as help with exotic plant control, trail construction and maintenance, and public education.

Contact Information

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