



Fish Hawk Creek Preserve

General Description

Size: 1,550 acres. This site has been acquired in stages over a period of years, beginning in 1991, and efforts to protect additional areas are still underway. Hillsborough County (ELAPP) purchased 270 acres initially, then in 2002, the County partnered with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Florida Communities Trust to add the additional 1,050 acres. The County is the managing agency for the entire preserve. The site is named for the creek that flows through the property from the southeast to the northwest, before joining the Alafia River less than one mile north of the site. The Fish Hawk residential community borders the preserve on two sides, while other significant tracts of preservation land lie to the southeast and southwest. The preserve contains forested wetlands along the creek corridor, heavily wooded uplands on the higher elevations, and approximately 300 acres of improved pasture. A cattle lease is in effect for the majority of the pasture area.

Location and Access

The preserve is located on the south side of the Alafia River, mostly south of Fish Hawk Blvd., and between Balm-Boyette Road on the west and Boyette Road on the south and east. Access for hiking is via several metal gates located on all three roads (see map). Always look for the County's white "Posted-nature preserve" signs to verify public ownership.

Environmental Significance

This preserve includes some of the rarest upland habitat in the region. Approximately 250 acres of sandhill habitat, a natural community that occurs on extremely well-drained, gently sloping soils, is found along the higher elevations of the Fish Hawk Creek corridor. Sandhill is a fire dependent community, and unfortunately, the majority of the sandhill in the preserve is heavily overgrown due to decades of fire suppression. As a result, many of the rare and unusual plant and animal species that prefer this habitat type are absent or exist in small remnant populations. Habitat restoration is planned for these areas, and will consist of a combination of selective removal of hardwood vegetation and prescribed burning. Other significant wildlife habitat also exists in the preserve, including scrub (110 acres), hardwood forest (250 acres), flatwoods (185 acres) and hardwood swamp (400 acres). The environmental significance of these natural habitats is further enhanced by the existence of corridor connections to other protected natural areas in the region. The preserve forms an essential link in a regional habitat corridor system formed by the Alafia River and its tributaries.

Recreational Opportunities

Hiking is currently available during daylight hours. Although a short section of trail has been constructed to connect to the Fish Hawk residential community, access to the majority of the preserve is limited to existing unimproved dirt roads. Future plans call for development of an access park at the intersection of Boyette Road and Balm-Boyette Road, with a marked trail system leading throughout the preserve. This site offers an excellent natural setting for this activity.

Volunteer Opportunities

Since the majority of this site has only been recently acquired, there is a need for information about existing populations, so be sure to report all plant and animal sightings. Future needs will include trail construction and maintenance, exotic plant control, and habitat restoration.

Contact Information

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