



## Hillsborough River Complex

All of the sites in this complex are located either along the shores of the Hillsborough River itself, or on major tributaries to the river. The Hillsborough River begins in an area known as the Green Swamp, a region of eastern Pasco County and northwestern Polk County that covers approximately 850 square miles. The green swamp is the birthplace of four rivers, the Hillsborough, Withlacoochee, Peace and Oklawaha. Initially, the Withlacoochee and Hillsborough flow together as one, before separating into two distinct channels. From that point, the Hillsborough flows in a southwesterly direction for 54 miles before entering Hillsborough Bay in downtown Tampa. The drainage basin encompasses 690 square miles, and includes many well known tributaries such as Blackwater Creek, Pemberton Creek and Cypress Creek, as well as two springs, Crystal Springs in Pasco County, and Sulphur Springs in Tampa.

The upper section of the Hillsborough River, upstream of Fletcher Avenue in Temple Terrace, has received a designation as an “Outstanding Florida Water” from the State. This designation not only recognizes the high quality and ecological significance of the river, it also provides a higher level of regulatory protection from human impacts such as stormwater runoff. Its no coincidence that the river also provides 75% of the City of Tampa’s drinking water, another reason to protect the watershed. A 34.5 mile section of the river from Crystal Springs in Pasco County to Rowlett Park in Tampa has also been designated as a State Recreational Canoe Trail, in recognition of its scenic quality and importance as a recreational resource. The portion of the river below the dam at Rowlett Park has been highly altered by urban development, including channelization, dredging, and shoreline hardening. The dam itself creates a barrier to fish and other aquatic species that would normally migrate back and forth along the river system.

The protected lands that are associated with the Hillsborough River include not only some of the largest contiguous tracts in the region, but also some of the most beautiful and unspoiled natural areas. The hardwood forests and hardwood swamps of the Lower Hillsborough Wilderness Park and the Cypress Creek Preserve are stunningly beautiful. When traveling down the Hillsborough River through the area known as the “Seventeen Runs”, it’s possible to imagine that modern civilization is far away, and its not unusual to actually get “lost”, at least temporarily. There are not many places left so close to a major urban center where you can find that kind of experience.

The large areas of protected habitat located along the river corridor support a wide diversity of wildlife. The natural shorelines are utilized by a variety of both aquatic and terrestrial species, and the upland habitat areas are large enough to support populations of wide ranging animals such as bobcat and Eastern indigo snake. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the river corridor is that it connects to the vast area of the Green Swamp, home to some species that require vast amounts of natural habitat to survive and reproduce. What this means is that, on an occasional but recurring basis, our area is visited by Florida black bears, and it is not impossible for a Florida panther to wander through. In the future, if successfully reintroduced, the red wolf may come for a visit.