



Little Manatee River State Park

General Description

Size: 2,400 acres. This is a relatively new State Park. Constructed on lands acquired in 1974, it opened to the public in 1987. Additional lands were purchased through a State (Florida Forever)-Hillsborough County (ELAPP) partnership in 1994 and 1995, to expand the park and protect sensitive habitat from future development. The Little Manatee River flows through the park for 4.5 miles, but the majority of the land both upstream and downstream is also protected public land, so the natural, undeveloped shoreline actually stretches for a total distance of over 15 miles, interrupted only by highway bridges. The park is developed with picnicking, camping and trail facilities, but care has been taken to preserve the natural environment, and visitors will discover one of the most beautiful and diverse examples of native habitat in the Tampa Bay region.

Location and Access

The park entrance is located on Lightfoot Road, just west of US Hwy 301. From I-75 traveling southbound from Tampa, take exit 240-A, go east on Sun City Center Blvd. for 2.5 miles to 301, then south on 301, 4 miles to Lightfoot Road.

Environmental Significance

The 4.5 mile stretch of the Little Manatee River that runs through the park is part of the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, and has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water. This is one of the cleanest rivers in the State, and it is not uncommon to see a West Indian manatee during the warmer months, especially in wider sections downstream. The rest of the park contains prime examples of native habitat including bottomland hardwood forest, hardwood hammock, oak hammock, pine flatwoods, and extremely rare sand pine scrub. Portions of the park have been altered by past land use and include slash pine plantations and farm land. These areas are being restored to more natural conditions. Some of the sand pine scrub has become overgrown due to lack of fire, which results in a decline of habitat quality, causing the displacement of rare species such as the Florida scrub jay and gopher tortoise. These areas are also undergoing restoration through a combination of selective removal of large trees, and prescribed burning. Please let the staff know that you support these efforts to improve the park's habitat for wildlife.

Recreational Opportunities

The park offers picnicking, camping, canoeing, hiking and horseback riding. The park has 10 miles of horse trails as well as special campsites for equestrians, equipped with stables. An excellent 6.5 mile hiking trail, developed with assistance from the Florida Trail Association, is across the river from the developed section. Visitors must obtain a map and gate combination from the ranger at the entrance station before using the trail. Hike counter-clockwise early in the morning for the best chance of observing Florida scrub jays. A primitive campsite is available for backpackers. A canoe launch is available in the main park section, and canoes and kayaks can be rented from the Little Manatee River Canoe Outpost, located on 301 just upstream from the park. Water levels fluctuate daily due to tidal influence and rainfall.

Volunteer Opportunities

Opportunities include campground host, clerical work, maintenance and repair, ranger station assistant, interpreter, resource management, trail maintenance and more. Private clubs are involved in developing and maintaining the trail systems.

Contact Information

A volunteer coordinator for all the State Parks in Hillsborough County: (813) 987-6771.
 Little Manatee River State Park, 215 Lightfoot Road, Wimauma, FL 33598. (813) 671-5005.
 Friends of Little Manatee River, 116 Hickory Creek Drive, Brandon, FL 33511.
 Triple B Riding Club (Equestrian) P.O. Box 6313, Brandon, FL 33508 (<http://tripleb.flahorse.com>).
 Florida Trail Association, 1-877-HIKE-FLA. (www.floridatrail.org)