

McKay Bay Park and Preserve

General Description

Size: McKay Bay Preserve= 62 acres, McKay Bay Park and Greenway= +/- 200 acres. This site is a multi-agency partnership between the City of Tampa, Hillsborough County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. McKay Bay Park was developed by the City on land located north of the McKay Bay Resource Recovery Plant. The Hillsborough County ELAP Program purchased the McKay Bay Preserve in 1990, and a smaller parcel on the Palm River was purchased in 2000 by ELAPP and the State of Florida Greenways and Trails Program. A large tract of land along the southeast shoreline is owned by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and is a spoil disposal area for the Tampa Bypass Canal. The City is developing a Greenway around McKay Bay that will link all the public lands together with a pedestrian/bike path.

Location and Access

McKay Bay Park is located on the east side of 34th Street, just south of Adamo Drive. Access to the other parcels is restricted at this time. Contact the appropriate agency to inquire about special authorization to conduct bird counts, habitat restoration or other volunteer projects.

Environmental Significance

The McKay Bay system is the extreme northeast section of Hillsborough Bay, north of the 22nd Street Causeway. Most of the bay has escaped the deep water dredging that created the Port of Tampa facilities to the south of the causeway. As a result, the bay consists of very shallow waters surrounded by mangrove and salt marsh wetlands. During the winter months, the upper part of McKay Bay is often exposed at low tide, and is utilized as a feeding ground for thousands of migratory shorebirds, waterfowl and wading birds. For this reason, it has been a well-known birding hot spot for many decades. Some of the more unusual species that can be observed on a daily basis during the right season, either during spring and fall migrations, or for some species all winter long, include American avocet, black-necked stilt, black skimmer, white pelican, Northern shoveler, canvasback, green wing teal, ruddy duck and glossy ibis. A man-made lake, once used as a cooling pond for a city incinerator, offers freshwater habitat to compliment the tidal mud flats of the bay, and is a great place to find bird species when the bay is submerged by the tides. The area serves as extremely important habitat for the birds both during the winter and especially during the spring and fall migrations, when an abundant food supply is critical.

Recreational Opportunities

McKay Bay Park includes a parking area, picnic tables, a raised pavilion, boardwalk with an observation deck, nature trail along the freshwater lake, and a bike trail that runs along the shoreline before circling back on 34th Street to the park. Future plans call for extending the trail all the way around the bay, using the 22nd Street Causeway and the Palm River Bridge, linking together public lands along the way. Birdwatching from the park is excellent, and interpretive signs provide information about native plants and animals likely to be encountered. McKay Bay is included in the State of Florida's Great Florida Birding Trail booklet.

Volunteer Opportunities

The Tampa Audubon Society has adopted McKay Bay Park, and holds regularly scheduled volunteer events to help the City with exotic plant control and trail maintenance. The City of Tampa Mayor's Beautification Program has a number of volunteer initiatives, such as annual shoreline cleanups, as well.

Contact Information

City of Tampa Parks and Recreation Department, 7525 North Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33604, (813) 274-8615.

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

Tampa Audubon Society, PO Box 320025, Tampa FL 33679. (813) (www.tampaudubon.com) Mayor's Beautification Program, (813) 221-8733. (www.mbptree.org)

