



Rhodine Scrub Preserve/ Stephen J. Wortham Park

General Description

Size: 575 acres. Hillsborough County purchased the 400 acre main section of the preserve, known as Rhodine Scrub, in 1991 under the ELAP Program. The adjacent Stephen J. Wortham Park was under development at the time, and opened to the public in 1992. Additional parcels were added to the preserve in 1997 and 1998. Both areas contain similar habitat and are linked together by an equestrian trail. The north boundary of the preserve is the shoreline of Lake Grady, a man-made lake created by a dam on Bell Creek. The preserve is connected to other protected areas both upstream on Bell Creek to the south, and by a habitat link through privately owned land to the north-east.

Location and Access

The park and preserve are located on the north side of Rhodine Road, between Balm-Riverview Road and Boyette Road, near Riverview. The main park entrance road leads to a picnic shelter/ restroom building on a small fishing lake, while a separate parking area for horse trailers is just to the west at the end of Sykes Road. There are walk-through access points to the preserve located farther east on Rhodine Road, and at the end of Silver Pine Drive in the Shadow Run subdivision.

Environmental Significance

The 107 acre park site was originally proposed for development of a large equestrian facility, including an arena, but the County downsized the facility after discovering that the site contained environmentally sensitive resources. The preserve was targeted for preservation due to the presence of rare sand pine scrub habitat and a large population of the endangered Florida golden aster (*Chrysopsis floridana*). Prior to acquisition, the property was heavily abused by a variety of unauthorized activities, including mud-bogging with 4-wheel drive vehicles in wetlands, illegal dumping, especially of used tires, and target shooting. The previous owner was unable to effectively curtail these activities, even with fencing and digging a deep trench around the entire property. In spite of these impacts, the scrub habitat was still able to support an unusual number of rare and endangered plant and animal species. Both before and after acquisition, many tons of trash were removed, and the County installed a heavy duty fence reinforced with bollards and cable in places. These measures, together with frequent site patrols, have been successful. Over the past 14 years, the site has shown a remarkable recovery, especially in the degraded wetlands, although some scars will remain for many decades to come. In addition to the sand pine scrub, the park and preserve contain pine flatwoods, sandhill, oak hammock, open grasslands, freshwater marsh and hardwood swamp habitat. Natural corridor linkages increase the ability of the preserve to support a wide variety of wildlife species. The property to the northeast, occupied by the Dorothy Thomas Girl Scout Camp, provides a critical link with the Fish Hawk Creek Preserve, and the Alafia River corridor. It will be very important to find a way to maintain this habitat connection in the future.

Recreational Opportunities

The park offers picnic facilities, a playground, multi-purpose court, and fishing. A foot trail leads from the picnic area to a horse trail. The horse trail starts in a separate parking area at the north end of Sykes Road. The trail itself consists of a total of five miles, with a short one mile loop in the park connected to a longer 3 mile loop in the preserve. The trail was constructed with the help of volunteers from the Triple "B" Riding Club.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers are needed to help maintain the trail, advise the County of problems such as erosion, hazardous conditions, unauthorized activities, etc. Tortoise poaching has been a problem at this site in the past. Records of unusual sightings are always welcome.

Contact Information

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