

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park

General Description

Size: State Park = 1,988 acres, Aquatic Preserve = 25,786 acres. One of 41 Aquatic Preserves located State wide, Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve consists of submerged lands of exceptional environmental quality in lower Tampa Bay. The Terra Ceia Preserve State Park consists of lands above the mean high water line adjacent to the aquatic preserve that serve to protect and enhance the resources of the aquatic preserve. The preserve state park contains both uplands and wetlands that support a diverse assemblage of native plants and wildlife, including several species classified as endangered, threatened, or species of special concern. These lands provide protection for the water quality and other resources of the adjacent environmentally sensitive areas, and provide continuity of habitats and corridors for wildlife. The Aquatic Preserve and State Park are managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserve Program, based at Terra Ceia, which is also responsible for managing the majority of the State owned islands and all of the Aquatic Preserves in the Tampa Bay area.

Location and Access

The park and preserve are located on lower Tampa Bay in Manatee County, and straddle I-275 in the vicinity of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. The Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserves and Terra Ceia Preserve State Park headquarters are located at the old Haley House, 130 Terra Ceia Road, in Terra Ceia. The main access to the water for small motorized boats, canoes and kayaks is at Bishop Harbor. From US 41 and I-275, go north on 41, 1 mile to Bishop Harbor Road, turn west and look for a dirt boat ramp at the 90 degree turn.

Environmental Significance

The preserve and state park contain extremely valuable estuarine, coastal wetland and upland habitat, including seagrass beds, mangrove swamp, salt barrens, salt marsh, coastal berm, coastal hammock, hydric pine flatwoods, or wet flatwoods, and hardwood hammock. Tidal creeks, including Frog Creek, thread through the uplands and wetlands before emptying into the bay. The wetlands of the preserve are largely undisturbed and provide habitat for an abundant variety of native and commercially valuable species, including red fish, tarpon, snook, mullet, blue crab, pink shrimp and brown shrimp. The preserve provides both nursery areas and foraging areas for marine life and migratory species such as shorebirds, waterfowl and wading birds. Portions of the state park uplands were cleared for agriculture in the past, and are undergoing habitat restoration. Highly invasive exotic plant species, including Brazilian pepper, Australian pine and Melaleuca, are being eradicated from the preserve.

Recreational Opportunities

Fishing, boating, canoeing, kayaking, birdwatching and nature study are popular activities in the preserve. Manatee County has established a "blueway" system, a series of canoe and kayak trails, throughout the County. Two sections of the trail are located in the preserve, with numbered markers and a corresponding map to provide orientation. The section north of the Skyway Bridge causeway is the Bishop Harbor Trail, and the section to the south is the Terra Ceia Trail. A guide booklet with trail maps and color illustrations is available from Manatee County. Hiking trails within the preserve are planned.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer events are held on a regular basis within the preserves, and include trail maintenance, exotic plant removal, native plantings and plant nursery maintenance, and helping with outreach programs at special events. The preserves maintain a contact list for those interested in volunteering.

Contact Information

Department of Environmental Protection, Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserves/Terra Ceia Preserve State Park, P.O. Box 309, Terra Ceia, FL 34250. (941) 721-2068. (www.dep.state.fl.us)
Manatee County Blueways "Paddle Manatee" Program (www.co.manatee.fl.us)

