

Town and Country Preserve

General Description

Size: 150 acres. This site was purchased through the Hillsborough County ELAP Program in 1999, with joint funding from the Florida Communities Trust program. It was previously owned by the City of Tampa, and was part of a larger parcel that also contained the Tampa Police Pistol Range. Since the pistol range portion of the site did not contain natural habitat, and was in fact contaminated by lead and other chemicals, a joint project was developed between the City, the County School District, and Hillsborough County that resulted in a joint purchase following environmental cleanup and restoration. Under the agreement, the School District purchased the southern portion and constructed Alonso High School, while the County purchased the northern portion and designated it a nature preserve. The preserve is adjacent to a second, larger parcel on the west boundary that is also targeted for preservation, but has yet to be acquired. To the east runs a man-made canal designated "Channel A", and the southern segment of the Upper Tampa Bay Trail runs along the west edge of the canal, providing an opportunity to link the preserve into the trail system.

Location and Access

The site is located on the west side of Montague Street, just north of Alonso High School. To reach the site, turn south on Montague from Waters Avenue, or turn north from West Hillsborough onto Montague. Access is from the new Upper Tampa Bay Trail, with a connecting pathway across Montague just north of the school. Park at either the southern terminus of the trail, or in the visitor parking area in front of the school.

Environmental Significance

The site contains cypress swamp, pine flatwoods, and mixed oak and pine forest. Habitat restoration is being conducted in an area once occupied by a youth camp. This site is important because it supports a combination of uplands and wetlands in an area which has undergone extensive residential and commercial development in recent years. The large area of cypress swamp on the west half of the site extends onto the adjacent parcel, increasing the effectively protected area of the preserve substantially. Without public acquisition, the eventual loss of the upland portion of the preserve to development would have resulted in the loss of many native species, and compromised the environmental significance of the wetlands as well.

Recreational Opportunities

The site's uplands contain existing woods roads which offer a relatively short hiking experience. Future plans call for removal of the old building remains and construction of picnic shelters and a trail system. Users of the adjacent Upper Tampa Bay Trail will be able to walk or ride horses onto the preserve. In spite of its limited area of uplands, the site provides fairly good habitat quality and variety, and is worth a visit for native plant enthusiasts and general nature study.

Volunteer Opportunities

Native plant identification and wildlife observations are needed. Other activities include exotic plant removal and trail maintenance.

Contact Information

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

