



Upper Tampa Bay Park/Bower Tract/Rocky Creek C. P.

General Description

Size: Upper Tampa Bay Park = 596 acres, Bower Tract = 1,549 acres, Rocky Creek Coastal Preserve, 279 acres. Total = 2,424 acres. These three areas are combined as a single unit because they function together as an ecological system, and all three are managed by Hillsborough County. The Upper Tampa Bay Park was developed as a County Park in the early 1980's and contains picnic areas with shelters and a playground, trails and boardwalks, a canoe/kayak launch and a nature center. The nature center consists of two separate buildings, one of which houses displays, offices and a meeting area, and the other a classroom used by the Hillsborough Community College Environmental Studies Program. The Bower Tract was purchased in 1986 by the State under the CARL Program, and is leased to Hillsborough County for management as a preservation area. The Rocky Creek Coastal Preserve was purchased by the County, with funds from the ELAP Program, in 1992. The overall complex encompasses approximately 5 miles of shoreline on Old Tampa Bay.

Location and Access

Only the Upper Tampa Bay Park section is accessible from land. Take Highway 580 (W. Hillsborough Avenue) to Double Branch Road, turn south and the park entrance is at the end of Double Branch Road. Once in the park, hikers can access the park's environs on three separate trails and two boardwalks. The only way to visit the other two sections is by water. For canoes and kayaks, a launch site next to the nature center provides access to Double Branch Creek and Old Tampa Bay. Motorized boats can launch at the Courtney Campbell Causeway boat ramp.

Environmental Significance

The site encompasses about 2,000 acres of highly valued coastal wetlands on Old Tampa Bay. The majority of the historical coastal wetlands in the upper bay, including mangrove swamp, salt marsh, tidal creeks and seagrass beds, have been destroyed by coastal development, and much of this site was under threat as well. These remaining wetlands provide critical habitat for the plants and animals that form the foundation of the estuarine ecosystem, one of the most productive natural systems on the planet. The site also includes extremely rare coastal upland natural communities. Upper Tampa Bay Park contains the most upland habitat, with pine flatwoods, oak hammock, and cabbage palm hammock. Small freshwater marshes are scattered through the uplands. Similar uplands can be found in a much smaller area of the Bower Tract, between Double Branch Creek and Channel "A", while the Rocky Creek Coastal Preserve consists almost entirely of tidal wetlands.

Recreational Opportunities

Visitors to the park can enjoy picnicking, hiking, nature study, bird watching, canoeing/kayaking, and fishing. The park's canoe launch provides access to the Double Branch Creek and over five miles of natural shoreline along Old Tampa Bay. Kayaks can be rented and launched at Mad Paddlers on Rocky Creek.

Volunteer Opportunities

The park offers opportunities in the nature center, helping to maintain displays and provide visitor information, or out in the park itself, leading guided walks or helping with park upkeep. Volunteers can also help with preserve management by conducting habitat surveys, assisting with exotic control, developing a canoe trail, etc.

Contact Information

Upper Tampa Bay Park, 8001 Double Branch Road, Tampa, FL 33635. (813) 855-1765.
 Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, 1101 E. Rivercove Drive, Tampa, FL 33604. (813) 975-2160. Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, River-view, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876.
 Mad Paddlers Kayak Center, 8802 Rocky Creek Drive, Tampa, FL 33615. (813) 243-5737.
www.madpaddlers.com