



## Wilderness Park/Lower Hillsborough Flood Detention Area

### General Description

**Size:** The total area within the publicly-owned tract known as the “Lower Hillsborough Flood Detention Area” is 15,964 acres. This represents the largest contiguous tract of preserved land in Hillsborough County, and it includes the 7,200 acre Wilderness Park, an area managed by the County as a regional park. The official Water Management District name for the site reveals the original motivation for its acquisition, i.e. flood prevention. Although the motive behind the creation of the area’s largest preserve was to protect downstream areas from flooding, the ultimate benefit to area residents goes far beyond that, and includes a wide variety of environmental and recreational advantages.

### Location and Access

The preserve straddles the Hillsborough River corridor from I-75 to the Hillsborough River State Park, and comes within 1 mile of the Pasco County line. Public access points can be found at no fewer than 10 separate locations. Due to space limitations, this guide provides only a broad overview of the facilities at the preserve. Please refer to the contact information below in order to obtain more detailed information.

### Environmental Significance

Although it may be an exaggeration to use the term “wilderness” to describe the site, it is the closest thing to it within the scope of this guide. And it is most remarkable to find the kind of outdoor experience this site offers within such a short distance of a major metropolitan area. Whether you enter the preserve by horseback, mountain bike, paddle craft, or on foot, at some point you can find yourself far enough from the outside world to feel truly separated from it. Wilderness Park contains large expanses of bottomland hardwood forest within the floodplain of the Hillsborough River and several tributaries. Other important habitat types include pine flatwoods, cypress swamp, and sandhill. In combination, these resources provide an exceptional refuge for a wide variety of native plants and animals. One special aspect of this site, in addition to its size, derives from the fact that the Hillsborough River originates in the much larger protected area known as the Green Swamp. The river corridor provides a nearly continuous habitat link between the two, and the result is occasional but rare visits from species requiring much larger blocks of habitat, such as Florida black bear.

### Recreational Opportunities

This site is unquestionably the number one all around destination for resource-based outdoor recreation in the Tampa area. It offers canoeing, mountain biking, horseback riding, roller-blading, hiking, picnicking, and camping with a choice of multiple settings for most of them. The scale of the overall site map included in this guide is inadequate to show the trail systems in a usable format, but detailed versions are available from a variety of sources, some of which can be downloaded from web sites. See contact information below.

### Volunteer Opportunities

There are as many ways to get involved at this site as there are recreational activities. Several private groups assist with trail development, maintenance, and patrol, especially for the mountain bike, canoe trail and horse trails. County park staff can always use assistance with their management duties.

### Contact Information

For mountain bike trails: [www.swampclub.org](http://www.swampclub.org) or the Wilderness Trails Association, (813) 987-6211.

For canoeing: FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails, [www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt) or [www.canoeescape.com](http://www.canoeescape.com)

For horse trails: Triple B Riding Club, <http://tripleb.flahorse.com>

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, 1101 E. Rivercove Drive, Tampa, FL 33604. (813) 975-2160. Wilderness Park, Flatwoods Entrance Station, (813) 987-6211. Southwest Florida Water Management District, [www.watmatters.org](http://www.watmatters.org)