



## English Creek Environmental Center

### General Description

Size: 381 acres. The English Creek Environmental Center started out as a 120 acre parcel owned by Hillsborough Community College (HCC), that was designated for use as an environmental study area. Unfortunately, this original parcel did not include enough uplands to enable the development of any facilities. In 1989 and 1990, Hillsborough County (ELAPP) acquired an additional 261 acres for preservation, and agreed to lease the land to HCC for environmental education. Before long, the college designed and built a small but excellent study center consisting of a main building with classrooms, a learning lab, office space and restrooms, connected to an extensive boardwalk providing access to the forested wetlands of English Creek, and a trail system through the upland habitat of the preserve. The facility is one of three outdoor learning centers operated by HCC's Environmental Studies program, which offers continuing education classes for all ages. The other two centers are located at Cockroach Bay and Upper Tampa Bay Park.

### Location and Access

The preserve is located on the north side of State Road 60, just west of the Polk County line. The entrance gate is between Sam Hicks Road and the bridge over English Creek. Access to the preserve is restricted to scheduled groups, classes and meetings only. In addition to HCC sponsored educational activities, the facility is available as a meeting place for clubs, environmental organizations, civic groups, etc. A nominal fee is charged. Contact HCC staff at (813) 253-7522 for more information and to make a reservation.

### Environmental Significance

English Creek is an important tributary of the North Prong of the Alafia River. Since land use in the creek's watershed is predominantly rural and agricultural, while the upper basin of the North Prong has been heavily impacted by phosphate mining and processing, the water quality of English Creek is significantly better than that of the river itself. The upland habitat within the preserve provides a buffer for the creek from adjacent agricultural and residential uses, as well as important wildlife habitat, especially in an area of sandhill and pine flatwoods. Some of the preserve's uplands were converted to improved pasture prior to preservation, and these areas are undergoing restoration to natural habitat. Another significant feature of the preserve is a natural spring, Boiling Spring. Although relatively small, with its flow varying depending on the season and stopping altogether during extremely dry periods, the spring emerges into a large pool of crystal clear water and provides an excellent outdoor learning experience for students of all ages.

### Recreational Opportunities

Since the preserve is available only for scheduled educational activities and meetings, it does not provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the general public. It is possible, however, for a group to arrange for a guided field trip, led by an HCC biologist. The college would like to see more utilization of the facility, and the combination of excellent facilities and high quality natural resources make this site a worthwhile destination for nature lovers.

### Volunteer Opportunities

Management efforts at the preserve include exotic plant removal and restoration of upland habitat. There are also opportunities for groups to conduct community service projects. Past examples, completed by scout groups, include construction of a "touch trail" and an orienteering course, both of which have enhanced the educational opportunities at the preserve.

### Contact Information

Hillsborough Community College Environmental Studies, (813) 253-7522.