



Upper Little Manatee River Corridor Preserve

General Description

Size: 4,240 acres. This preserve consists of multiple parcels located along an 8 mile stretch of the Little Manatee River Corridor, from just upstream of the State Park, all the way to Grange Hall Loop Road, in southeastern Hillsborough County. The existing preserve lands were purchased by Hillsborough County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District over a period of years from 1993 through 1999. The majority of the site is owned by the District, and the entire site is managed by the County.

Location and Access

Since the preserve consists of lands falling within a linear corridor along both sides of the river, there are multiple access points at different locations. Starting at the west end and working upstream, there are as many as five gated access points on the south side of the river, and the same number on the north side. Although there are old roads and trails at each of these points, none have been developed as marked hiking trails at the time of this writing. This preserve offers the potential for some of the best hiking trails in the region, and several trails are proposed. The best way to make sure they become available as soon as possible, is for groups of volunteers to step forward and offer to assist County staff with trail construction. The river is a designated Florida State Canoe Trail, and the farthest upstream launch point is at the Leonard Lee Road bridge. The Canoe Outpost on HWY 301 provides rentals and shuttle service for the Little Manatee River.

Environmental Significance

This preserve contains some of the highest quality and diversity of habitat found anywhere in the Tampa Bay region. Preservation and management of these lands along the Little Manatee River Corridor is essential to protect the many unique and valuable natural resources found here. The river itself is an Outstanding Florida Water, the highest State water quality designation possible. The wetlands and uplands along the corridor contain rare habitat of exceptional quality, including sand pine scrub, oak scrub, pine flatwoods, hardwood hammock, bay swamp, cypress swamp, freshwater marsh and floodplain forest. This is one of the few places in the area where one can see pine flatwoods with an open, wiregrass understory, the way it used to look all over the State. Considered together with the protected lands downstream and west of HWY 301, the total area of connected wildlife habitat in this riverine corridor is approximately 8,000 acres.

Recreational Opportunities

The preserve does not currently contain any developed trail systems, although existing roads offer hiking opportunities for those who like to explore on their own. The area is open to foot traffic only during daylight hours. Map and compass are not only recommended but essential. Canoes and kayaks may launch at the Leonard Lee Road bridge, but other sections of the river farther downstream are more popular. Future plans include development of hiking trails on several sections of the site.

Volunteer Opportunities

Potential activities are as varied as the site itself. The County needs accurate records of wildlife utilization and rare plant species found on the site. Regular surveys of known populations of wildlife, including burrowing owls, could use volunteer participation. Other management activities include exotic plant control, hiking trail development, fence line patrol and repair, and much more.

Contact Information

Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876. Canoe Outpost, (813) 634-2228. www.canoeoutpost.com