

Easy Nature Hikes In or Near Naples

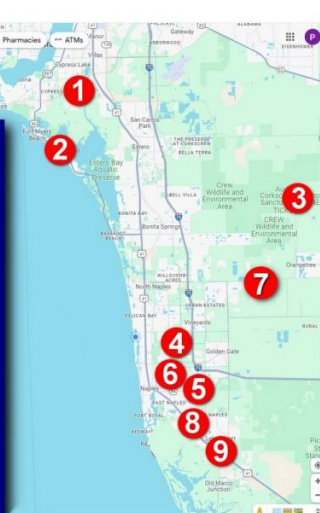
Paul Pacter

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www.PaulVisits.com

Nine Easy Walks In or Near Naples

- 1 Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve – Ft Myers
- 2 Lovers Key State Park- Ft Myers Beach
- 3 Audubon Corkscrew Swamp - Naples
- 4 Freedom Park - Naples
- 5 Gordon River Greenway - Naples
- 6 Naples Preserve - Naples
- ~~7 Rookery Bay- Shell Island~~
- 7 Rivers Road Preserve
- 8 Serenity Walk Park - Naples
- 9 Eagle Lakes Park - Naples

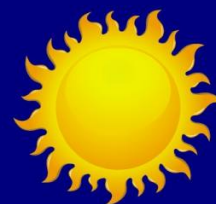


By "easy" I mean:

1. Flat (no uphill).
2. Suitable for a one-mile walk.
 - Of course, there are usually opportunities for two- or three-mile walks.
3. No hazards like roots to trip on or water on the trail.
 - Still, need to be alert.

Suggestions for all:

- Bring a hat.
- Bring insect repellent.
- Bring sunscreen.
- Bring water.



About the photos:

- I took virtually all of the photos.
- Any I didn't take are obvious or noted.

Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Naples

Corkscrew Swamp – “Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary”

Website: corkscrew.audubon.org/

Where: 375 Sanctuary Rd W, Naples

Get There: East on Immokalee Road. 15 miles East of I-75, turn left onto Sanctuary Rd. Follow signs.

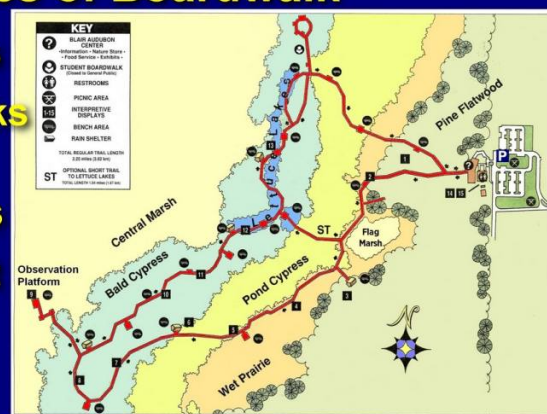
When: Daily 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. *Close 5pm In Season*

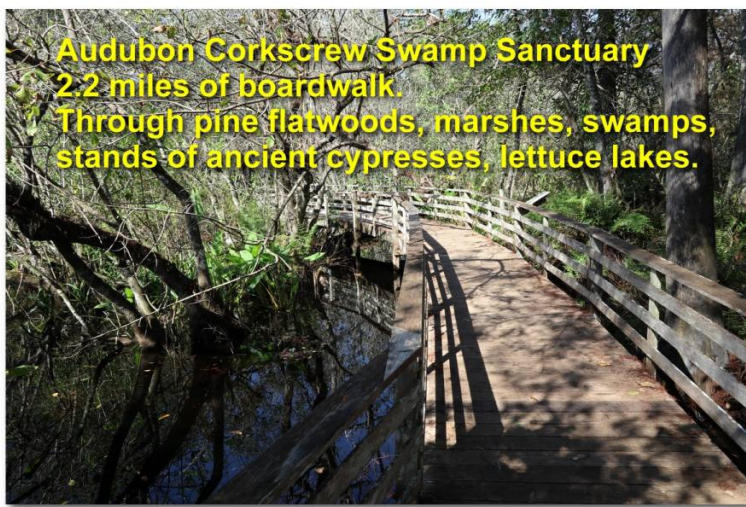
Admission: \$17. College students \$10. Children 6-14 \$6. Book online. *Recommended*



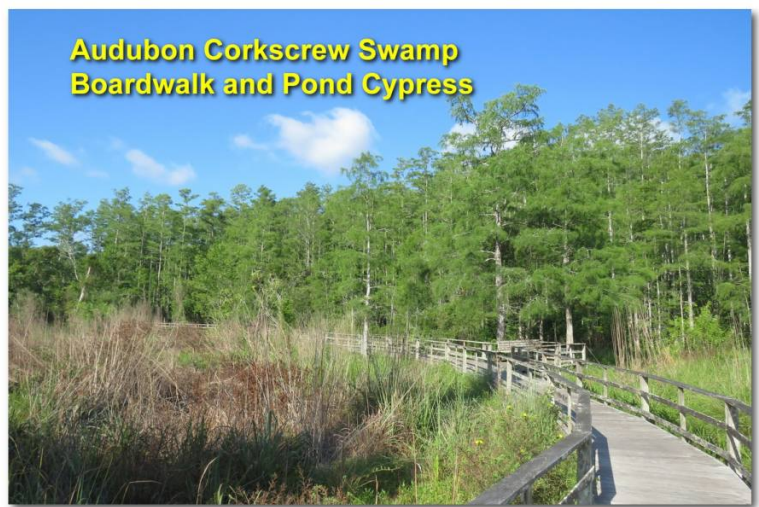
2.2 Miles of Boardwalk

Benches
Overlooks
Rain
Shelters
Shortcut





Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary
 2.2 miles of boardwalk
 Through pine flatwoods, marshes, swamps,
 stands of ancient cypresses, lettuce lakes.



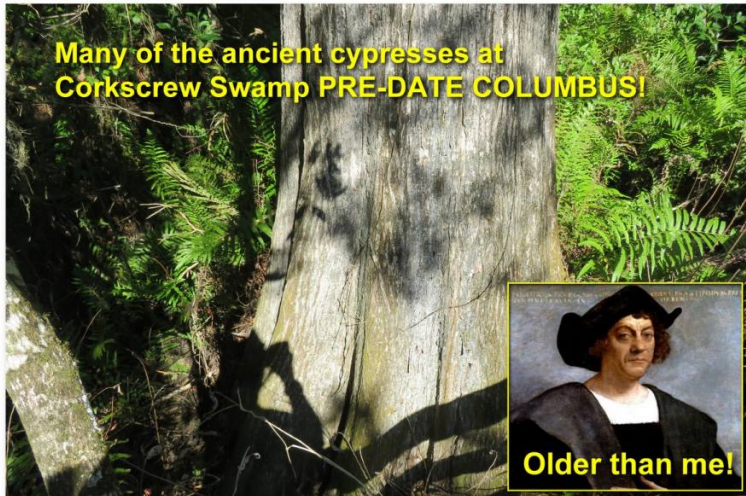
Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
 Boardwalk and Pond Cypress



At that same place on the boardwalk in
October, a spectacular sunflower display



Corkscrew Swamp Boardwalk
 Across the Prairie to the Cypresses - November
Cypress Needles Have Fallen. Deciduous!



Many of the ancient cypresses at
Corkscrew Swamp PRE-DATE COLUMBUS!



Older than me!



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
 Wet Prairie (Marsh)

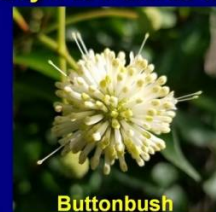


Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
Alligator Flag (Plant) Marsh
Growing in water where gators can hide.
These were a "flag" for early settlers.

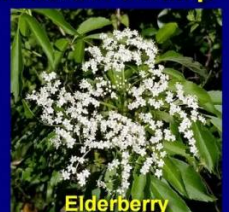
Several of the Many Flowers at Corkscrew Swamp



Swamp Lily



Buttonbush



Elderberry



Virginia Iris



Scarlet Hibiscus



Pickerelweed

**Epiphyte –
Does not
harm the
host tree
"Air Plant"**

An epiphyte grows on the surface of another plant and derives its nutrients from the air, water, and debris accumulating around it.

Corkscrew Swamp: Two Small Reptiles

Brown Anole

Lizard.
Native to Cuba, Bahamas.
Invasive in US. Drives out
native green lizard.
7 to 8 inches.

Skink

Lizard.
Big neck, small legs.
About 5 inches.
Can shed tail if predators
grab them. Regrows.

**Eastern Lubber Grasshopper
Cannot Fly - Harmless
Up to 3 inches**

**Eastern gray squirrel.
Scatter-hoarders.
Several thousand
caches per
season,
each location
remembered!**

Alligator at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Alligator Sunning - Corkscrew Swamp

**Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
Two Juvenile Alligators**

Several of the Many Birds at Corkscrew Swamp

Ibis

Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Sandhill Crane

Anhinga

Roseate Spoonbill

Barred Owl

**Red-shouldered Hawk and Skink
Corkscrew**



Lookout Over the Central Marsh



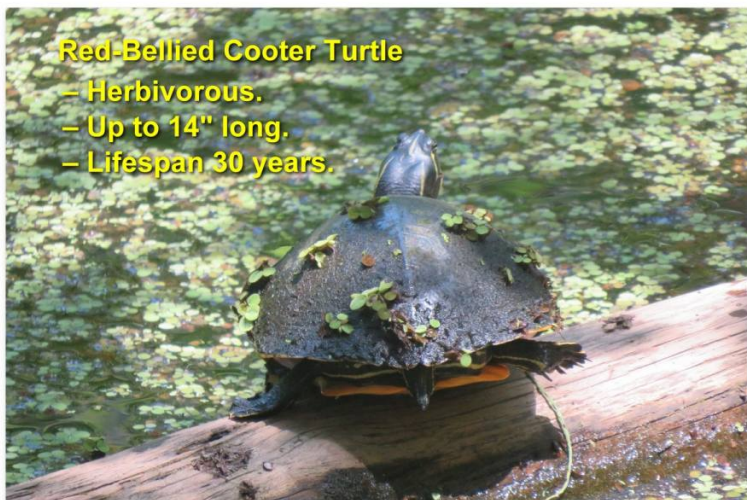
Lettuce Lakes at Corkscrew Swamp.
– Shallow ponds.
– Covered with water lettuce plants.
– Full of fish and birds.



**That same lettuce lake during
a Spring rainfall - 2023**



Red-Bellied Cooter Turtle
– Herbivorous.
– Up to 14" long.
– Lifespan 30 years.



**Wood Storks - North Lettuce Lake
Corkscrew Swamp**



Otter - Corkscrew Swamp



Yellow Rat Snake



Raccoon on Corkscrew Swamp Boardwalk



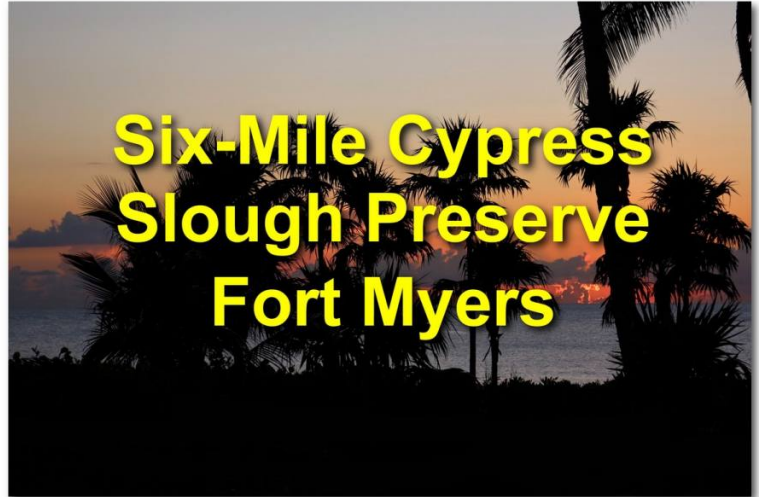
Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
February 16, 2026



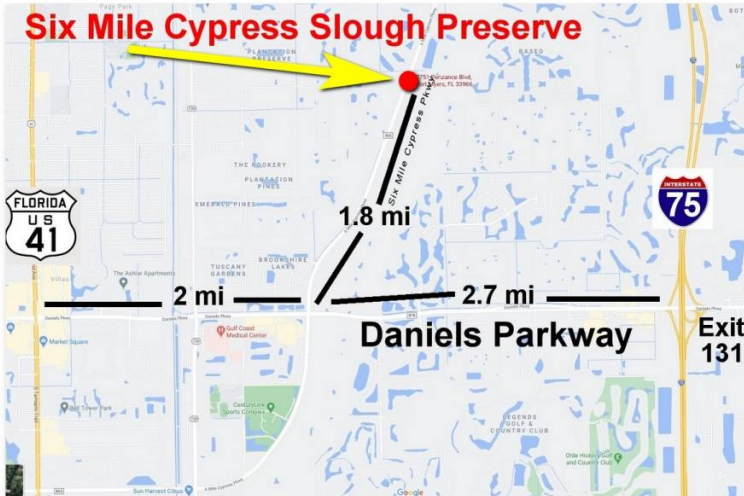
Discovery Center - Exhibits



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Fort Myers

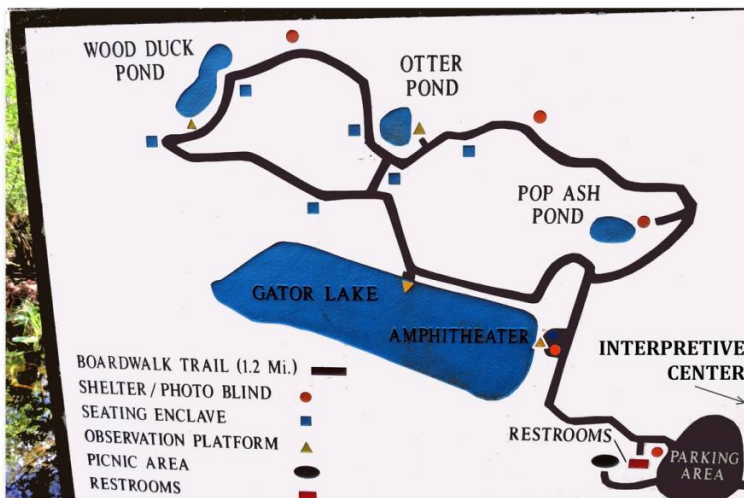


Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve



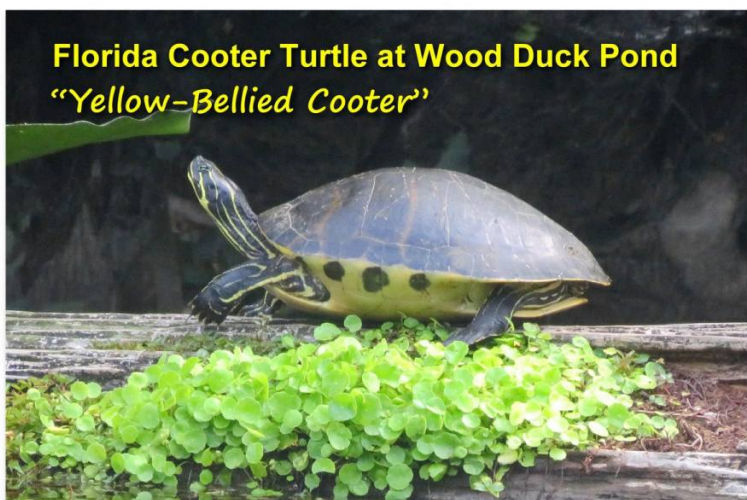
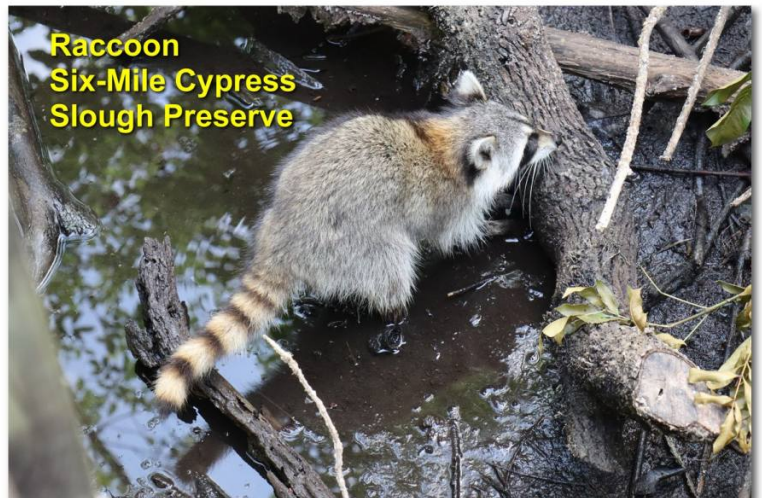
What's there: *Slough is a fresh water swamp*

- 3,500 acres of protected wetlands.
- Approx. 11 miles long, 1/3rd mile wide.
- 2-3 feet of water in wet season.
- Still mostly wet in dry season.
- 1.2-mile boardwalk over the water.
- Fully accessible. Free (parking \$1/hr).
- Four viewing platforms onto lakes.
- Many benches and shelters along the boardwalk.



Beginning of 1.2 mile boardwalk over the marsh





**Yellow-crowned
Night Heron
Sleeps in Trees
During the Day**



Sleeping in a Tree



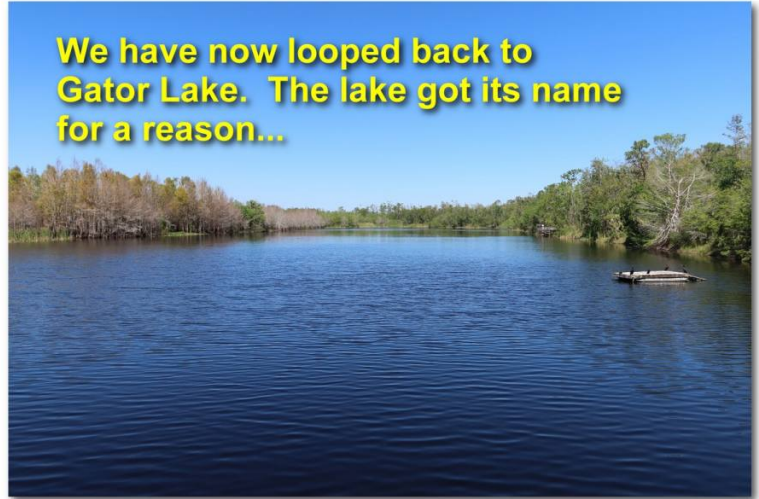
**Otter Pond
(I wasn't lucky enough to see one)**



**But I did see
several peninsula
cooter turtles.**



**We have now looped back to
Gator Lake. The lake got its name
for a reason...**



American Alligator



**About 5 million alligators in USA.
1.25 million in Florida.
Fresh water. Natatorial.
Cold blooded.**

**Gordon River
Greenway
Naples**



Gordon River Greenway

Website: www.gordonrivergreenway.org/

Where: Two entrances and parking areas:
1590 Goodlette-Frank Road. Main
entrance for Naples Zoo. Back of zoo
parking lot.

1596 Golden Gate Parkway. South side of
Golden Gate between Airport Rd and
Goodlette-Frank Rd.

Admission: Free.





**Gordon River Greenway
Trail is Partly Boardwalk
and Partly Asphalt**



**Mulch Trail
1/4-Mile Side Loop Off Main Trail**

May get muddy after a rain



**Greenway - Mulch Trail Pond (2024)
Roseate Spoonbills, Woodstorks, Ibis, Egrets**



Gordon River Greenway - Wildflowers

Mimosa

Evening Primrose



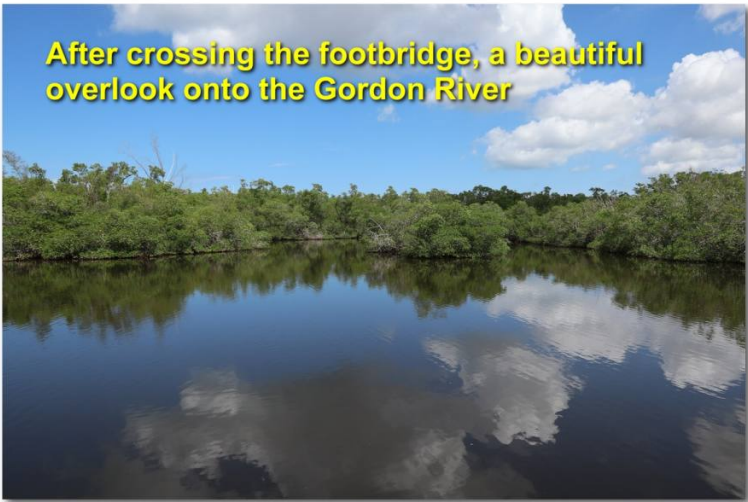
**Gordon River Greenway
Green Heron
Adult 17"
Short Neck
Short Legs**



**Gordon River Greenway
Great Blue Heron**
– Head to Tail: 36" to 54"
– Wingspan: 66" to 79"
– Weight: 4 to 8 lbs.
– Cold or warm weather
– Fresh or salt water



**Trail Crosses a Footbridge
Over the Gordon River
"Bridge #1"**



**After crossing the footbridge, a beautiful
overlook onto the Gordon River**

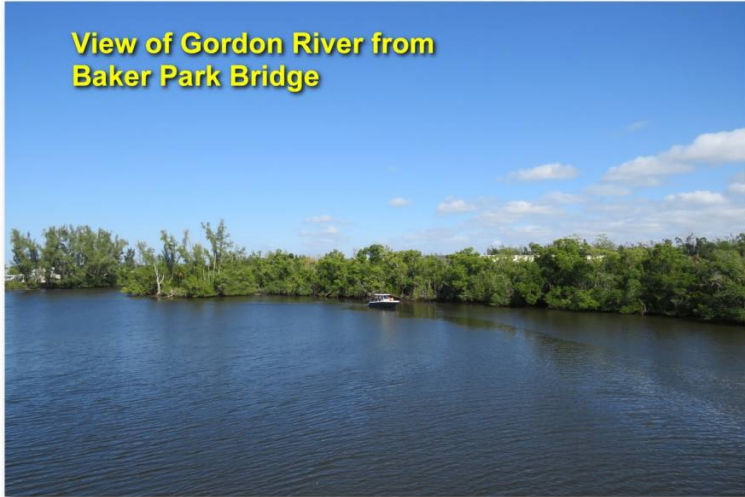
Bridge Across Gordon River
From the Airport to Baker Park
"Bridge #2"



Bridge Across Gordon River
Baker Park
"Bridge #3"



View of Gordon River from
Baker Park Bridge



Lovers Key State Park Fort Myers Beach



Lovers Key State Park – Trails and Beaches

Website: www.floridastateparks.org/lovers-key.

Where: 8700 Estero Blvd, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931.

Get There: West on Bonita Beach Rd to Gulf. Curve right onto Hickory Blvd. About 5 miles to Lovers Key.

Admission: \$8 per vehicle. **1 person \$4.**

When: 8am to sunset, daily.



What: Two miles of Gulf Beaches.
Miles of hiking trails.
Kayaking, canoeing, shells.
Dolphins, manatees, birds, gopher tortoises.

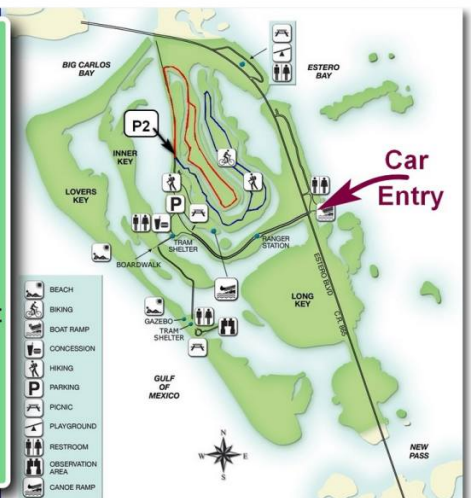
Two trails at Lovers Key:

Black Island Trail and Eagle Trail.

Each about 2.5 miles long (with shortcuts). They follow estuaries originally dredged to make way for residential development. That was stopped by the State in 1983.

RED is Eagle Trail
BLUE is Black Is. Trail

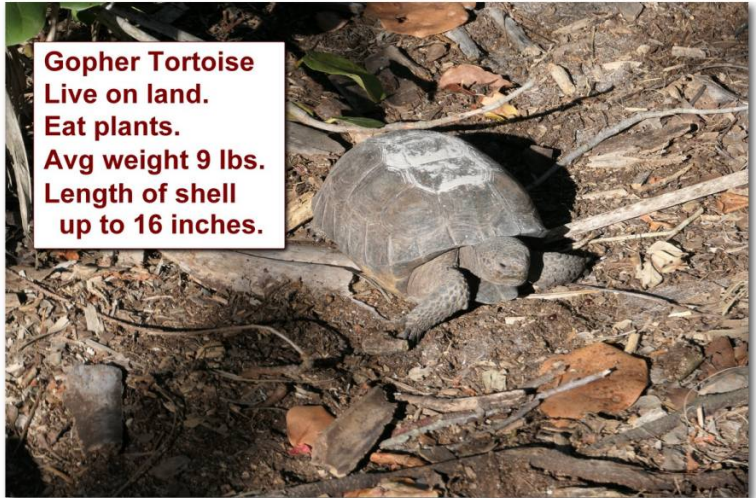
P Drive PAST first (beach) parking lot.
P2 For trails use SECOND parking lot.



**Trails at Lovers Key
Are Mostly Like This
Some More Shaded
Some Alongside Estuaries**



Gopher Tortoise
Live on land.
Eat plants.
Avg weight 9 lbs.
Length of shell
up to 16 inches.



**Another Reptile at
Lovers Key
Black Swamp
Snake**



Harmless

Lovers Key – Black Island Trails



**Gumbo Limbo "Tourist Tree"
Skin is red and peeling**



Wild Coffee
Scientific name: *Psychotria nervosa*
Seeds look like coffee. But no caffeine.
If roasted, "bad taste and terrible headaches."



**Kayakers at Black Island – Lovers Key.
Park Offers Canoe and Kayak Rentals**



Manatee - Lovers Key Black Island



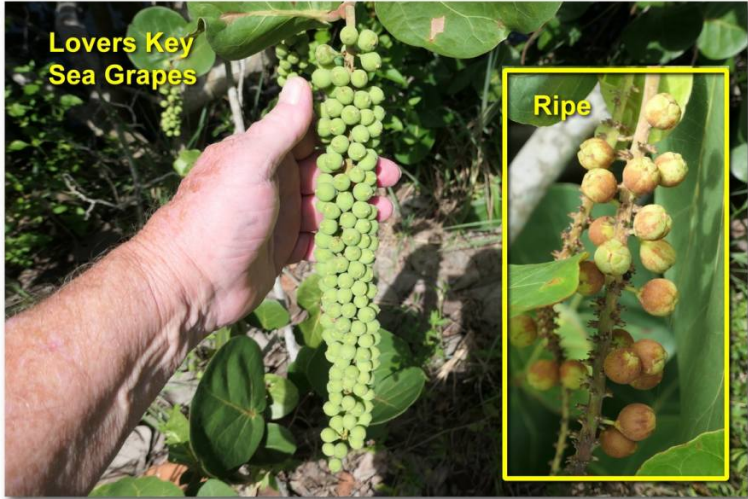
**Manatees live in water but
come up for air every 5 to 20 minutes.**



Sabal Palm or Cabbage Palm
Florida's State Tree



Both fruit and pads are edible
after carefully scraping spines.
Raw (salads) or cooked.
Can buy in Latino food shops.
Mexican: Nopales.



Lovers Key
Sea Grapes

Ripe



Dolphins - Lovers Key



Lovers Key
Passion Flower
aka Apricot Vine
aka Maypops
Tennessee
State Flower



Agave - Black Island Trails



Sap is Sweet



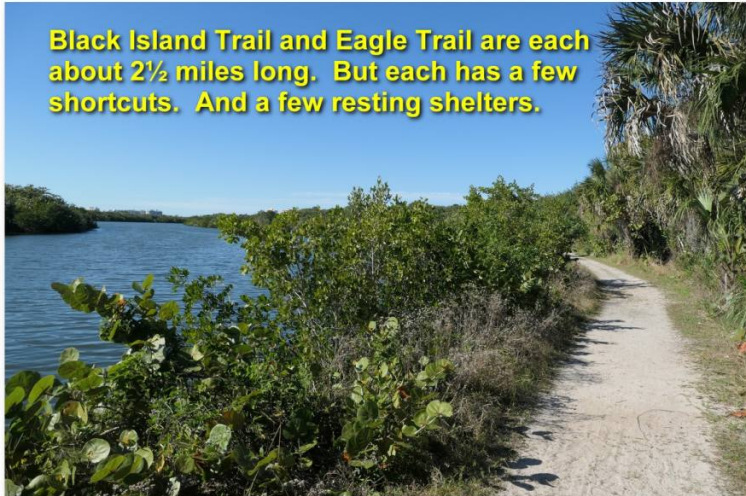
Lovers Key - Spanish Bayonet

Fruit is edible



Starfish (Sea Star) from Black
Island waters. They live only in
salt water.

Black Island Trail and Eagle Trail are each about 2½ miles long. But each has a few shortcuts. And a few resting shelters.



In addition to trails, Lovers Key Has a Two-Mile Long Beach!
Free tram to get you to the more remote end.



Osprey at Lovers Key



This nest is near beach parking lot

Lovers Key Discovery Center Exhibits and Programs



Freedom Park Naples



Freedom Park (Collier County)

Website: www.collierparks.com/

Where: 1515 Golden Gate Pkwy Just East of Goodlette.

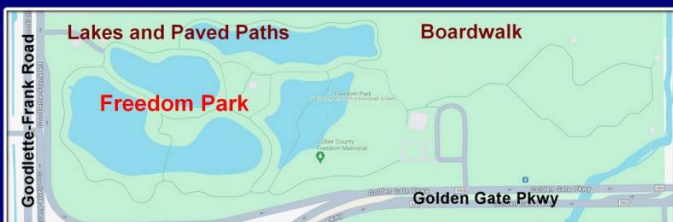
When: Daily 8am to Sunset.

Admission: Free.

What: 50-acre Park with 3,500 foot boardwalk plus paved trails and 6 lookout pavilions around the lakes.

Frequent wildlife sightings include:

- Red-shouldered hawks.
- Barred owls.
- Green herons.
- Blue herons.
- Great white egrets.
- Limpkins.
- Alligators.
- Gallinules.
- Marsh rabbits.
- Turtles and Snakes.
- Iguanas.
- Raccoons.



Freedom Park has 3,500 feet of boardwalks.
Loop around Eastern side of Freedom Park.



Western side of the park has 4 lakes and 6 lookouts like this one.



One of the four lakes in Freedom Park



Freedom Park - December 2024



1/4 Mile from Coastland Mall

Freedom Park - Sept 2024



Alligator - Freedom Park



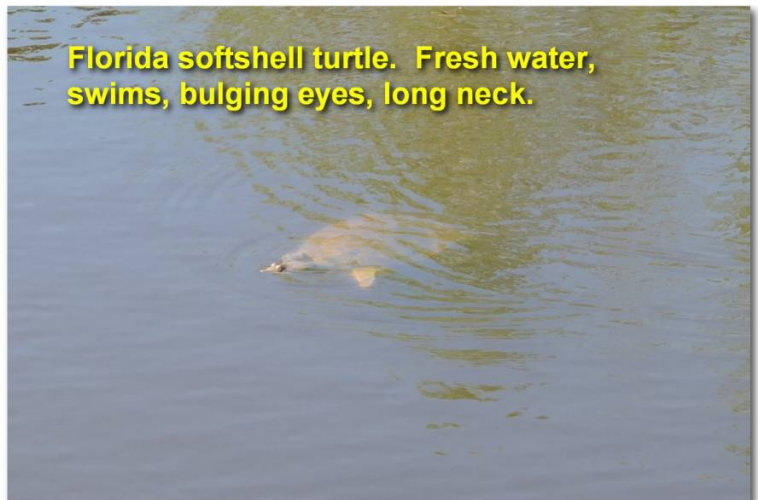
Large (3' or so) Iguana
Freedom Park



Freedom Park
All trails either boardwalks or smooth
pavement. Wheelchair accessible.



Florida softshell turtle. Fresh water,
swims, bulging eyes, long neck.





**Freedom Park
Peninsula Cooter
Turtle**



Limpkin - Freedom Park



**Tri-colored Heron
Freedom Park**



**Marsh Rabbit (Short Ears)
Freedom Park**

Four famous prior owners of the park land.

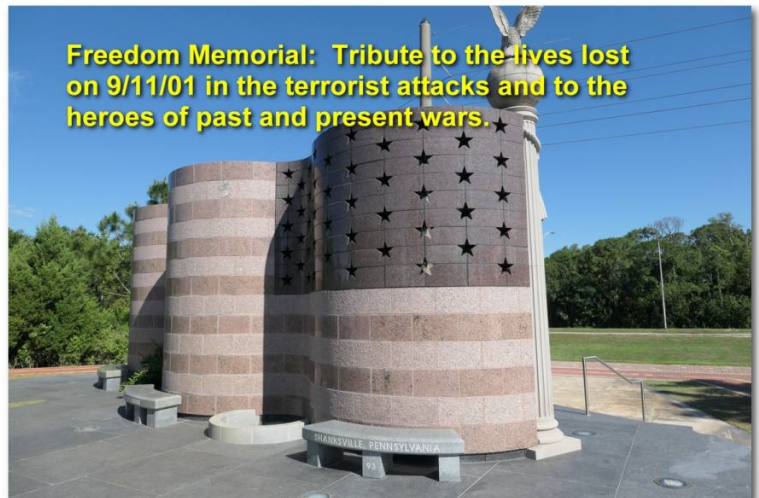
E.W. "Ed" Crayton (1870-1938)
Shaping the Naples Community
 A successful land developer in Ohio and St. Petersburg, Ed Crayton acquired 8,000 acres of land (most of what is now the City of Naples) from Walter Haldeman in 1912. Four years later he subdivided some of the land, including the Freedom Park property, into the Naples Improvement Company's Little Farms Subdivision. Back Bay was renamed Crayton Cove in honor of Ed Crayton.

Ed Frank (1900-1981)
From swamp legions to shopping: constructing the Collier County's proper position.
 At age 12, Ed Frank worked as an apprentice machinist. In 1927, at age 26, he opened "The Ed Frank Garage" on the road that would become Tamiami Trail. Completed in 1929, soon to follow was Frank's car dealership, restaurant, and the first commercial building on 5th Avenue South. He is perhaps best known as "the creator of the swamp buggy" (see right). Ed Frank acquired the northern-most portion of Freedom Park in 1938.

Stephen F. Briggs (1889-1976)
Beatrice "Bea" Briggs (1893-1979)
A healthy Naples for humans and wildlife
 Stephen Briggs, co-founder of the Briggs and Stratton Motor Company, and his wife Bea became seasonal Naples residents in 1935. In 1947, Stephen co-founded the Naples Yacht Club. Bea was instrumental in the creation and growth of Naples Community Hospital, and both Stephen and Bea were noted supporters of The Conservancy - now known as The Conservancy of Southwest Florida. In 1943, the Briggses purchased a portion of Freedom Park from Lindsay Crayton, and in 1944 the northern-most portion from Ed Frank.

Julius "Junkie" Fleischmann (1900-1968)
From Vacationer to Naples Visionary
 Julius K. Fleischmann, whose grandfather established Fleischmann Yeast, came to Naples from Cincinnati as a winter visitor in 1946. This first visit led to his many notable projects throughout the city, such as the Third Street South Shopping District. Fleischmann revived legendary Henry Nathan's arboretum in 1952, renaming it Caribbean Gardens (now The Naples Zoo). He added animal attractions to the Gardens, and his Vaudeville Ducks' television appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show and Paris' famous Champs Elysees put Naples on the international map. Julius Fleischmann acquired the Freedom Park property in 1960. Collier County then acquired the land from his heirs in 2004.

CONSERVATION COLLIER



Freedom Memorial: Tribute to the lives lost on 9/11/01 in the terrorist attacks and to the heroes of past and present wars.



**Naples Preserve
Naples**

**Naples Preserve
Website:**

www.naplesgov.com/parksrec/page/naples-preserve

Where: 1690 Tamiami Trail N, Naples, FL 34102

Get There: US-41 just south of Crossland Mall.

When: Boardwalk dawn to dusk. Eco-center daily, 8am to 5pm.

Admission: Free.



What: 9-1/2 acres at the corner of US-41 and Fleischmann Blvd.

Right in the heart of Naples!

- **Nature Walk:** 0.4 mile-long boardwalk through dry scrub and flatwoods. You will likely see many gopher tortoises.
- **Hedges Family Eco-Center:** Exhibits. Programs. Conservation info.



Rivers Road Preserve Naples

Rivers Road Preserve

Conservation Collier (taxpayer-funded county land preservation agency)

Website: www.collier.gov/Resident-Resources/Conservation-Collier

Where: 2021 Rivers Rd, Naples, FL 34120

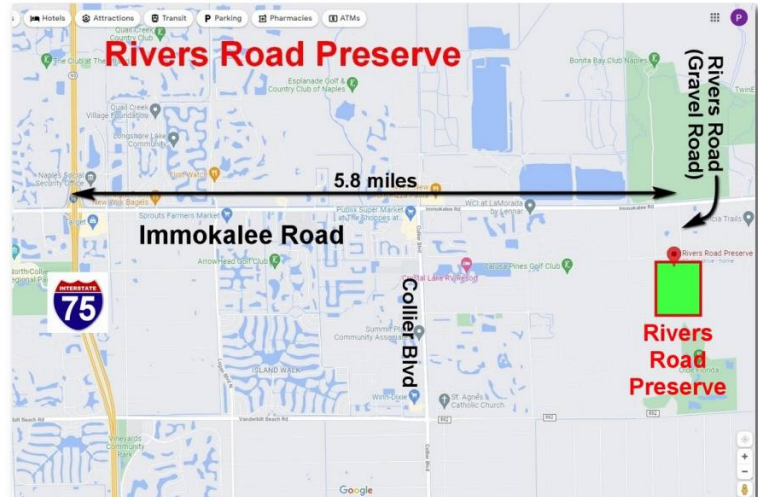
Get There: Immokalee Road 5.8 miles east of I-75. Turn south on Rivers Road (gravel road) to end.

Admission: 6:00 am–8:00 pm Daily. Free.

What: 97-acre preserve. 1.7 miles of easy wooded hiking trails with benches. Picnic table near parking. No restrooms.

West Trail: Starts at parking near bulletin board. Loop.

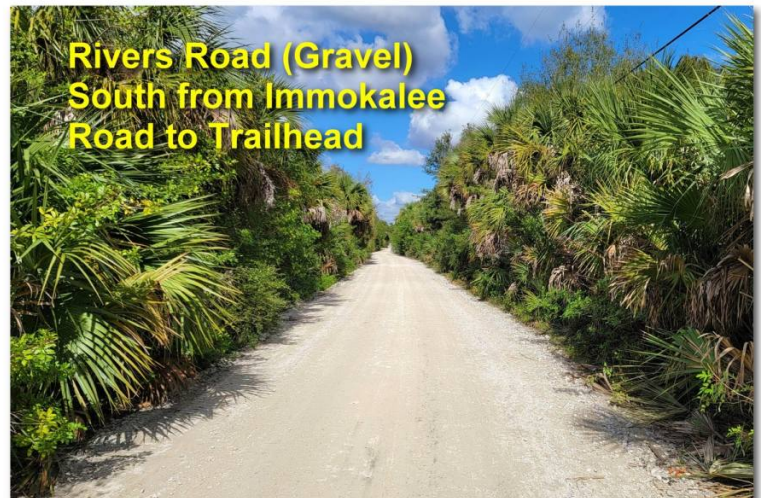
East Trail: Starts across Rivers Road. Loop. Goes past lake.



Rivers Road Preserve Trail Map



Rivers Road (Gravel) South from Immokalee Road to Trailhead



Rivers Road Preserve Start of West Trail



Rivers Road Preserve West Trail





**Rivers Road Preserve
West Trail**



Rivers Road Preserve Wildlife Camera

www.fstopfoundation.org

Mission: Create a positive effect on conservation through photography

**Wildlife monitoring
photos taken at
Rivers Road Preserve**

Fstop Foundation:

- Florida Panther.
- Bobcat.
- White-tailed Deer.



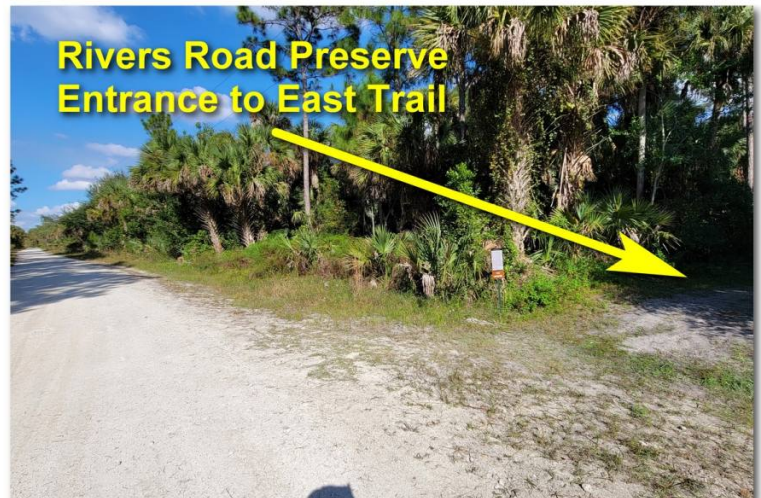
**Rivers Road Preserve
West Trail**



Rivers Road Preserve

A sign we
don't
often see.

**PLEASE
CLEAN UP
AFTER
YOUR
HORSE
THANK YOU**



**Rivers Road Preserve
Entrance to East Trail**



**Rivers Road Preserve
East Trail**



**One of several Eagle Scout
projects at the Preserve**

Red Fire-Ant Mound
Beware: Harsh Itchy Stings
Do Not Step On!

One red fire ant mound has, on average, between 100,000 and 500,000 worker ants under one queen. Mound also contains eggs, larvae, and pupae of developing ants.

Air Potatoes
Invasive weed
Fast-growing
Noxious
Inedible



Rivers Road Preserve
East Trail - Lake



Rivers Road Preserve
East Trail - Lake

**What's on the
other side of
the fence?**



**Edun Lake Au Naturel Swimming
and Sunbathing** www.edunlake.org



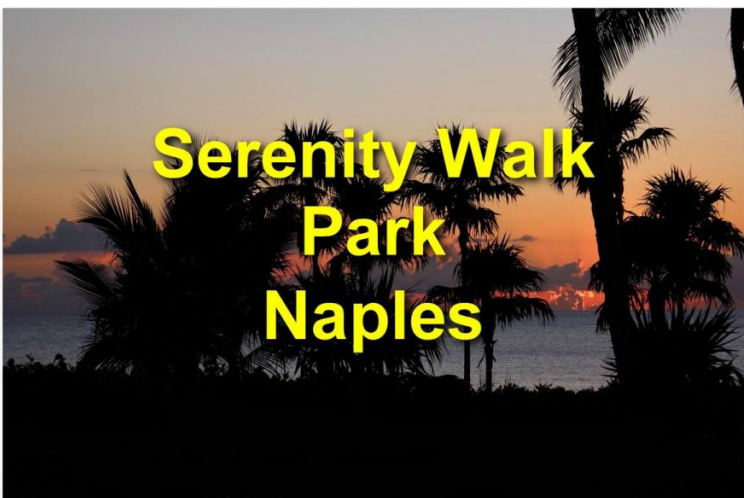
What is Edun spelled
backwards?



**We Rivers Road Preserve hikers
just keep walking on the trail. Trail
loops back to here and on back to
the Trailhead and Parking.**



**Serenity Walk
Park
Naples**



Serenity Walk Park

Website: [www.collierparks.com/
collier_park/serenity-walk-park/](http://www.collierparks.com/collier_park/serenity-walk-park/)

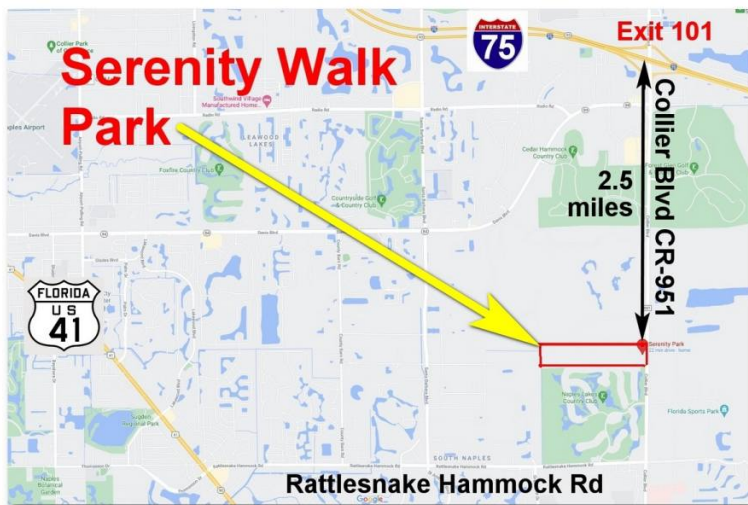
Where: 8962 Collier Blvd, Naples, FL 34114.

Get there: I-75 Exit 101 Collier Blvd CR-951.
South 2.5 miles. On right.

Admission: Daily 7am to dusk. Free.

What: One-mile loop flat walking trail.

Problematic: Only five parking spaces.



Serenity Walk Park One-Mile Loop Trail



Serenity Walk Park
99-acre Collier County Park Preserve



Eagle Lakes Park East Naples

Eagle Lakes Community Park

Website:

https://www.collierparks.com/collier_park/donna-fiala-eagle-lakes-community-park/

Where: 11565 Tamiami Trail East, Naples.

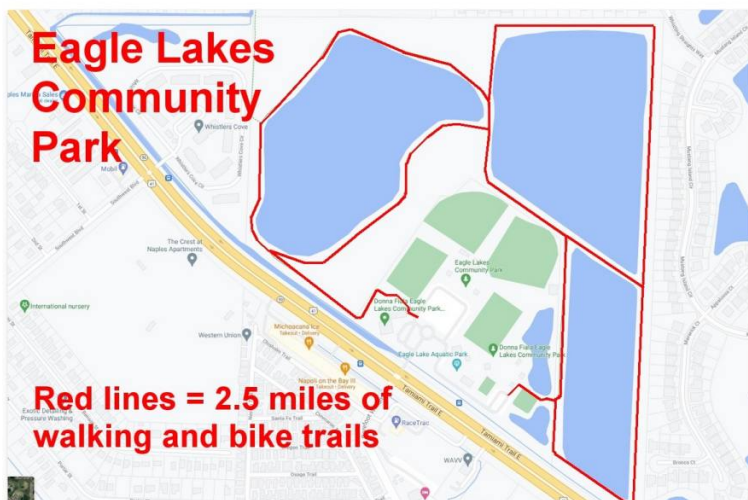
Get There: US-41 just north of Collier Blvd.

When: Mon-Sun 8 am-10 pm.

Admission: Free.

What: 2-1/2 miles of walking trails and ponds with alligators (sometimes).

- 2.5 Mile Nature Trail.
- 1 Mile (paved) Pathway for Walking/Running.
- Aquatic Complex (fee).
- Community Center.
- Fitness Center (fee).
- Meeting Room.
- Lighted Baseball and Softball Fields.
- 2 Lighted Soccer/Football Fields.
- Lighted Basketball Court.
- Picnic Shelter.
- Lighted Playground.



Eagle Lakes Community Park



Eagle Lakes Community Park



Eagle Lakes Community Park
Alligator



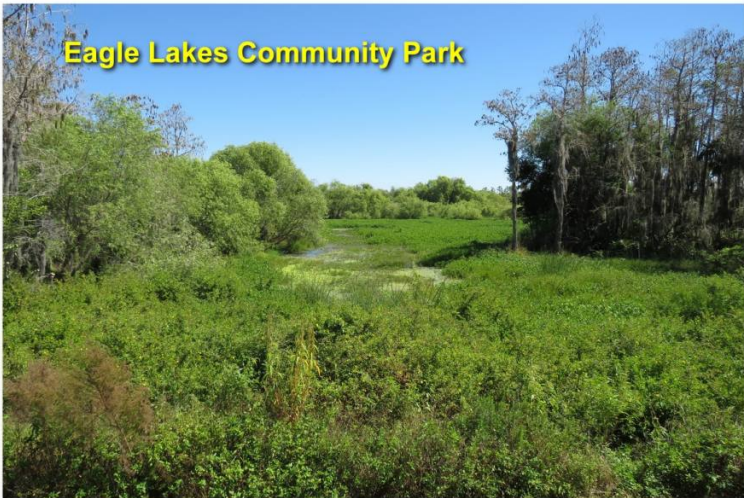
Eagle Lakes Community Park
Anhinga



Eagle Lakes
Community Park
Blue Heron



Eagle Lakes Community Park



Eagle Lakes Community Park
Cormorants



Six-mile Cypress



Corkscrew Swamp



Eagle Lakes Park



Freedom Park



THE END
Easy Nature Hikes
In or Near Naples
ppacter@gmail.com
www.paulvisits.com

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Gordon River



Naples Preserve



Rivers Road



Serenity Walk



Lovers Key State Park

