

Great Nature Hikes Within An Hour of Naples

Presentation by Paul Pacter

www.PaulVisits.com

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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.
 - Well, in summer there might occasionally be water.

Easy walks where you can see some flora and fauna 30-60 minutes from Naples:

- Ten Thousand Islands Nat'l Wildlife Refuge
- Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
- CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
- CREW Cypress Dome Trails
- CREW Flint Pen Strand
- CREW Marsh Trail
- Big Cypress Bend
- Kirby Storter Park
- Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

Bring:

- Hat.
- Sunscreen.
- Insect repellent.
- Water.

About the photos:

- I took them all.

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Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

What: One of 545 national wildlife refuges.
Largest expanse of mangrove forest in North America.

- Established 1996.
- 35,000 acres.
- Maze of waterways and mangrove islands.
- 1.2-mile hiking trail.
- Observation tower overlooking the marsh.
- Canoe and kayak trails.



**Ten Thousand Islands Nat'l Wildlife Refuge
Website:**

www.fws.gov/refuge/ten_thousand_islands/

Get there by boat (best): Ramps at Goodland and Port-of-the-Islands. Guided boat tours from Marco Island and Everglades City.

Get to Marsh Trail by car: US-41 11 miles east of Collier Blvd.

Managed by: US Fish & Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System, Department of the Interior.

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Marsh Trail
Hiking 1.2 mi

P 11 mi E of Collier Blvd

You can see why it's best
to go by boat
Tours from Marco Is
and Everglades City

**Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge
Start of Marsh Trail 1.2 miles.
First 1,000' paved. Then gravel.**

**Do Not
Forget!**



**Ten Thousand Islands Natl Wildlife Refuge
Gumbo Limbo (Tourist) Tree**

Tourist = Skin Is Red and Peeling

**Ten Thousand Islands NWR
Mangroves**

**Mangroves thrive in salt water by
filtering out the salt.**

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Roseate Spoonbill Anhinga Cormorant

Gator

**All of the
bushy trees
are mangroves**

**Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge**

**Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge
Observation
Tower**

**Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge**

**This is between rainy and dry seasons.
Rainy: Cannot see mangrove roots at all.
Dry: Almost no water.**



**Same place at
10,000 Islands
March 2020 to
May 2021.**

**Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge
Marsh Trail**

Past the observation tower, the
paved trail becomes gravel.

**True Story: On April 6, 2022 I was
sitting on this bench when...**

Notice the tilapia or
turtle in its mouth

**10,000 Islands NWR
Brown Pelicans**

Resident year-round (not migratory)
in South Florida.

Today's Lunch Menu: Tilapia

**Cormorant Eating
A Fish**

Blue Heron

Limpkin

Their diet is dominated by
apple snails. This one is at
Collier-Seminole State Park
next to Ten Thousand Islands.

**Bird Frenzy at Ten Thousand Islands
NWR - December 2022**

Coots, Teals, etc



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve



Six Mile Slough Preserve "Sloo"

Website: www.leegov.com/parks/preserves/sixmilecypress

Friends of Six Mile Slough:
www.sloughpreserve.org/

Where: 7751 Penzance Blvd at 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy, Fort Myers, FL. 33966.

Get There: I-75 Exit 131 Daniels Pkwy. West 2.7 mi to 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy. Right onto 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy. Then 1.8 mi to entrance, on right.

Admission: Free. Parking is \$1 per hour max \$5.

Trail hours: Daily dawn to dusk.

Interpretive Center: Tues-Sun 10-4. Closed Mondays. *But trails still open.*

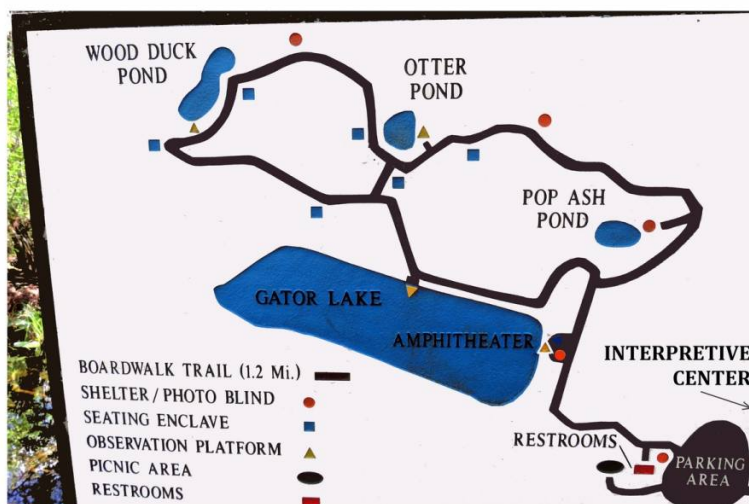
Guided nature walks:

- Twice daily Jan-Mar.
- Daily Apr, Nov, Dec.
- Approx. once a week in other months.

Check website of Friends.

What's there:

- 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.
- Four viewing platforms onto lakes.
- Many benches and shelters along the boardwalk.



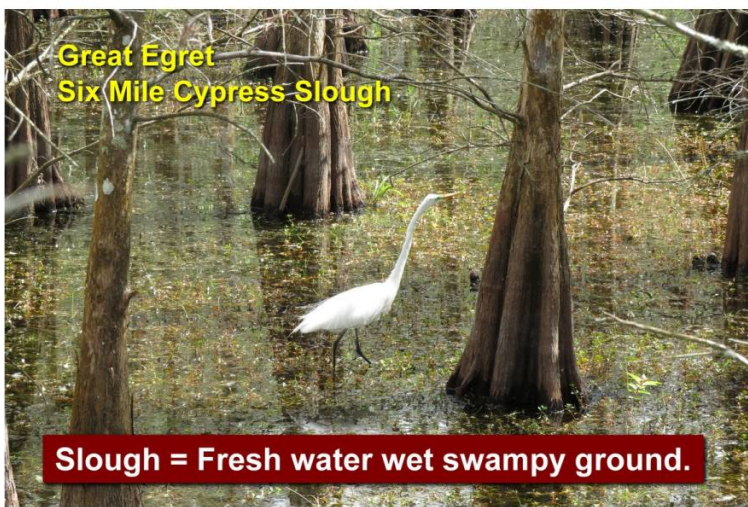
Beginning of 1.2 mile boardwalk over the marsh

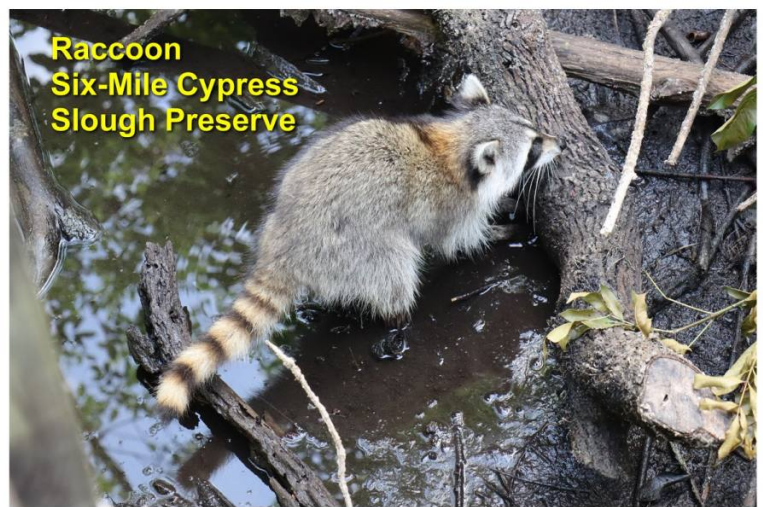
Many interpretive signs



Bald Cypress Mitigation Area

Mitigation means these were planted to replace logged cypresses.





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



American Alligator



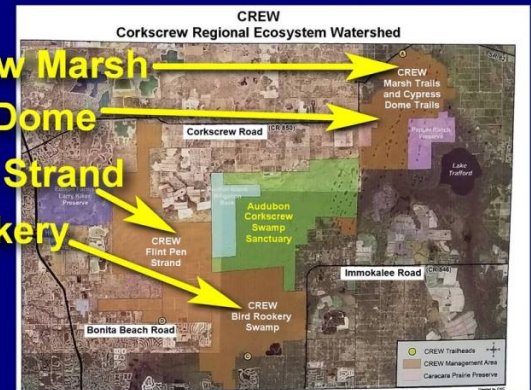
About 5 million alligators in USA
1.25 million in Florida.
Fresh water - Natatorial.
Cold blooded.

Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)

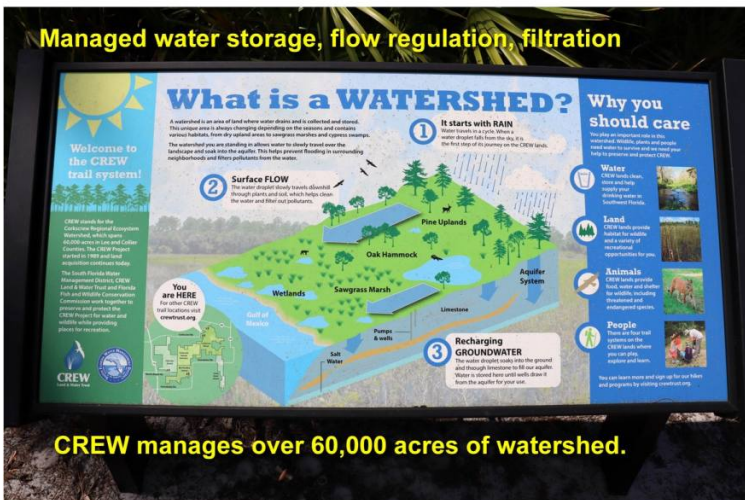


CREW Land and Water Trust

Corkscrew Marsh
Cypress Dome
Flint Pen Strand
Bird Rookery



Managed water storage, flow regulation, filtration



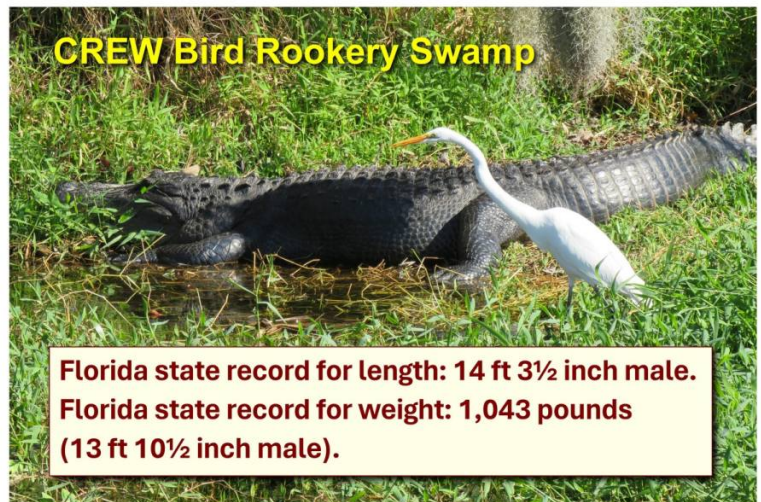
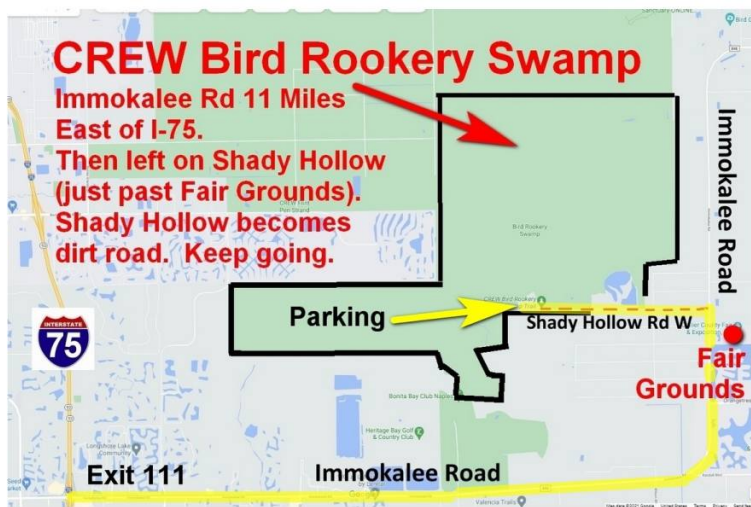
CREW manages over 60,000 acres of watershed.

CREW Bird Rookery Swamp



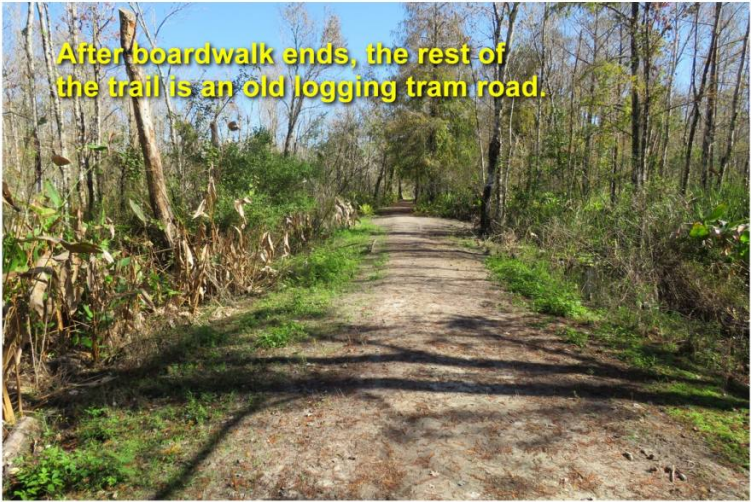
Crew Bird Rookery Swamp Trail
(CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)
Website: <https://crewtrust.org/bird-rookery-swamp-trail/>
Where: 1295 Shady Hollow Blvd W, Naples 34120.
Get There: Immokalee Road then left (shortly past County Fair Grounds) on Shady Hollow Blvd. On the right shortly after Shady Hollow becomes gravel.

When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.
Admission: Free. Don't walk dogs even on leashes.
What: 12 miles of hiking and biking on nature trails, including a 1,500-foot boardwalk with wheelchair access. The trails are actually old logging tram roads.
Alligators likely, otters, deer, more. Lots of birds, including songbirds, raptors, barred owls, and kites.

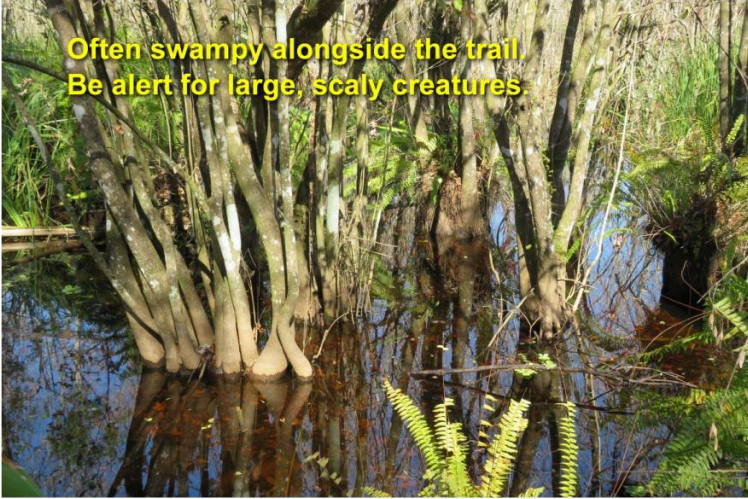




CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail Boardwalk



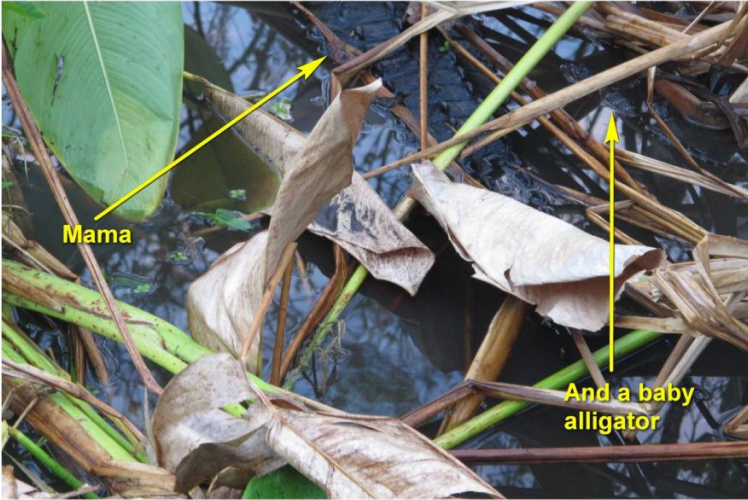
After boardwalk ends, the rest of the trail is an old logging tram road.



**Often swampy alongside the trail.
Be alert for large, scaly creatures.**



In the canal next to the trail



Mama

And a baby alligator



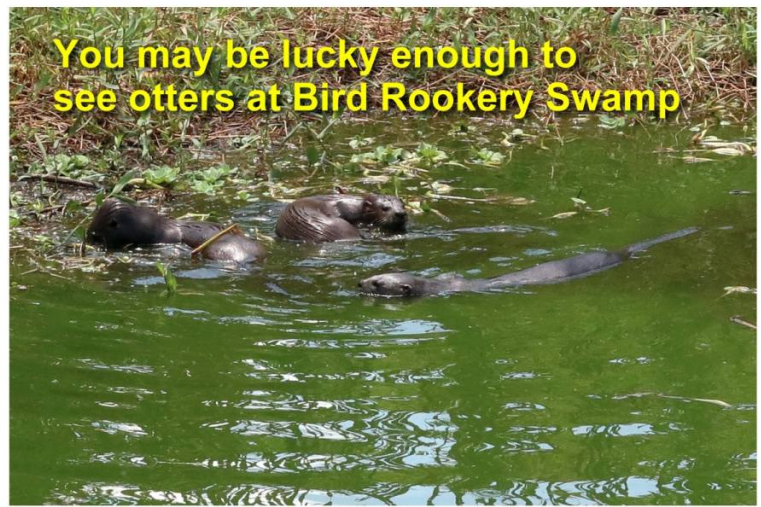
**CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Gator Swimming**



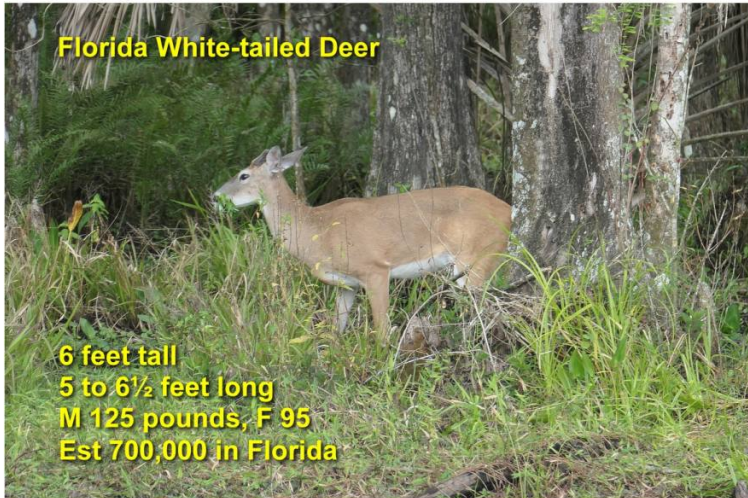
Scarlet Hibiscus - Beautiful Florida Wildflower



Be alert! This family has to get past the gator to reach the parking lot.



You may be lucky enough to see otters at Bird Rookery Swamp



Florida White-tailed Deer

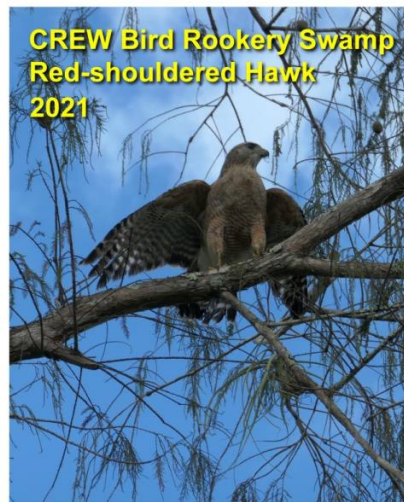
6 feet tall
5 to 6½ feet long
M 125 pounds, F 95
Est 700,000 in Florida



This Place Really Is a Rookery (Bird Colony)
3 Wood Storks 4 Ibises



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Great Blue Heron
Lunch



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Red-shouldered Hawk
2021



John James Audubon
Drawing 1839

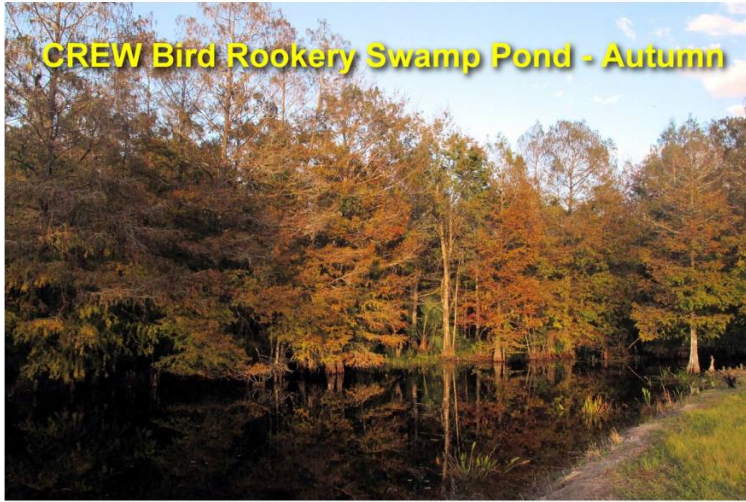
Bald Cypress Trees

- Coniferous (cones).
- Leaves are needle-like. →
- Deciduous: Leaves turn brown and fall each autumn.
- Called “bald” because (unusually for conifers) the leaves fall, leaving tree bald.
- Flood and swamp tolerant.
- Huge: Up to 150 feet tall. Trunk diameter up to 10 feet (occasionally much bigger).
- Typically live 600 years, sometimes 1,000.



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Pond - Spring

CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Pond - Autumn



CREW Flint Pen Strand



Crew Flint Pen Strand

(CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)

Website: <https://crewtrust.org/flint-pen-strand-2/>

Where: 15970 Bonita Beach Rd, Bonita Springs, FL 34135.

Get There: I-75 Exit 116 Bonita Beach Rd. East 3.7 miles. Left on Vincent Rd (Gravel). Parking on left.

When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

Admission: Free.

What: 14,000 acres of hiking trails and more. Trails:

Red	1.5 mi
Blue	0.25 mi
Yellow S.	3.0 mi
Yellow N.	2.9 mi
Orange	2.9 mi
Purple	6.2 mi
TOTAL	16.75 mi



Bonita Beach Rd 3.7 miles east of I-75. Then left on Vincent Rd (gravel) 500 feet.



Trails are well marked



Horseback riding on yellow trails only (I have never seen one). Walkers can use yellow trails, too.





Why do they have a water measure on this trail marker?
Occasionally, trails may be flooded in rainy season (summer).

Yes, the top of the gauge is 3.3 feet.



**August 2020
Red**



**Orange Trail Flooded
Sept 6, 2022 (3 weeks before Jan)**



Slash Pine
A "slash" is a swamp overgrown with trees and bushes, aka Southern Florida Pine.



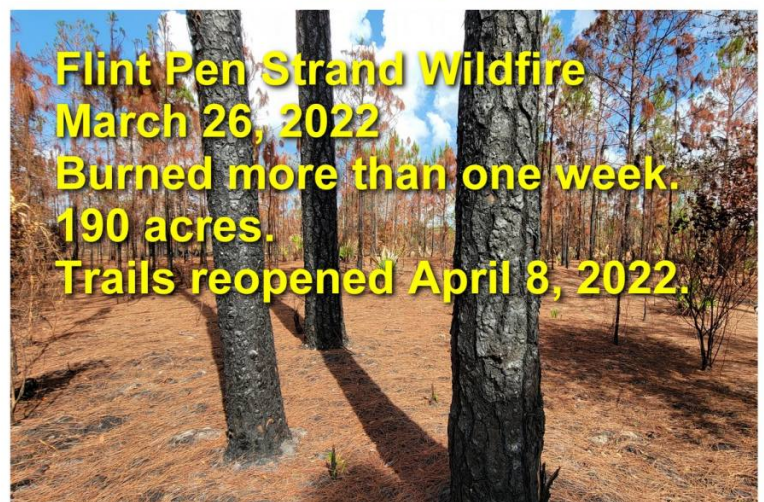
**Kehl Canal in Flint Pen Strand.
Dug in 1960s as drainage for ill-fated Sun Coast Acres development.**



Resident of a pond along the Purple Trail



**Flint Pen Strand - Tickseed
Florida State Wildflower**



**Flint Pen Strand Wildfire
March 26, 2022
Burned more than one week.
190 acres.
Trails reopened April 8, 2022.**



Wildfire - March 26, 2022



**CREW Flint Pen Strand
Red-bellied
Woodpecker**



**CREW
Marsh Trails**

CREW Marsh Trail

(CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)

Website: <https://crewtrust.org/crew-marsh-trails/>

Where: 4600 Corkscrew Rd, Immokalee, FL 34142

Get There: I-75 to Corkscrew Rd Exit 123, then east on CR850 Corkscrew Rd 17.4 miles.

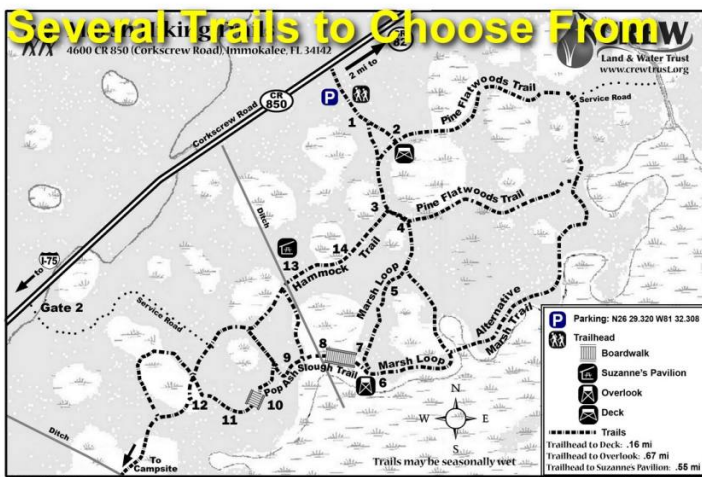
Admission: Free.

When: Open daily. One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

What: 5.5 miles of marked loop hiking trails through pine flatwoods and along the edge of a 5,000-acre sawgrass marsh. Birds, deer, alligators.

Most of the trails are wide and flat.

An observation deck and tower offer wide views of the Corkscrew Marsh.



**CREW Marsh Trails
Pine Flatwoods**



**CREW Marsh Trails
Trees burned by fire**



Controlled Burns Maintain Forest Health.

- Thin out undergrowth and flammable dead leaves and limbs to prevent a destructive wildfire.
- Reduce insect population.
- Destroy invasive plants.
- Return nutrients to the soil – much faster than decomposition.
- Let in sunlight for natural growth.

**CREW Marsh Trails
Black-eyed Susan
Maryland State Flower**



**CREW Marsh Trails
Slash Pine Cone**



Sawgrass Marsh Observation Tower



**CREW Marsh Trails
Woodpecker Holes**



**CREW Cypress
Dome Trails**



Crew Cypress Dome Hiking Trails (CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)

Website: crewtrust.org/cypress-dome-trails/

Where: 3980 CR 850 (Corkscrew Road), Immokalee, FL 34142.

Get There: I-75 Exit 123 Corkscrew Rd. East on Corkscrew 14 miles.

When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

Admission: Free. Donation box.

CREW Cypress Dome Hiking Trails - Immokalee



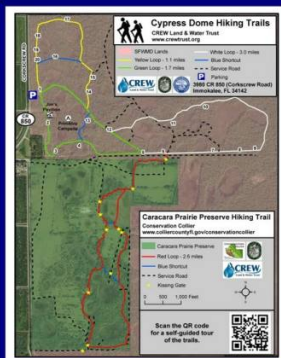
What: 5.8 miles of well-marked, flat hiking trails. Three loops:

Green: 1.1 miles.

Blue: 1.7 miles.

White: 3.0 miles.

Connects to Caracara Preserve Hiking Trail (Red, 2.6 miles), which is owned by Conservation Collier.



The Hiking Trails Are Well Marked Either On Poles or On Trees



The Hiking Trails Are Well Marked Either On Poles or On Trees



Saw Palmettos - Cypress Dome



Might Be a Bit Wet



**Even More Than a Bit Wet in Rainy Season
Proper Shoes + Bug Spray**



Slash Pine Tree aka Southern Florida Pine

A "slash" a swamp overgrown with trees. Unusually high strength (esp. for a pine). Exceeds many hardwoods.

Uses:

- Timber for ship-building.
- Turpentine.
- Resin.



Two Common Wildflowers at Cypress Dome



Thistle



Morning Glory

Corkscrew Grove Project "A New City" Approved by Lee County June 2022

- 6,676 acres.
- 10,000 homes.
- 240 hotel rms.
- 700,000 sq ft commercial.
- 61% open space.



Big Cypress Bend Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park



Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park Largest State Park in Florida (175 parks). Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is one feature of the Park.

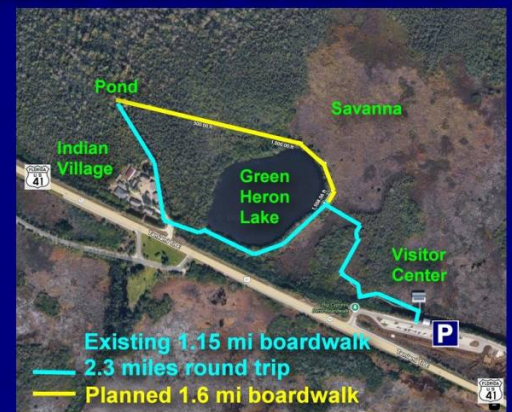
- Currently, the Boardwalk is 2.3-mile round trip walk from parking at US-41.
- An additional 1.6 mile Boardwalk is planned.
- Eventually will be a 2.7 mile loop.

Map on next slide...

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk

When the planned boardwalk is completed, will be a 2.7-mile loop.

Part of the yellow is planned as a canopy walk.



Big Cypress Bend – More Info

Website:

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>

Where: US-41, Copeland, FL.

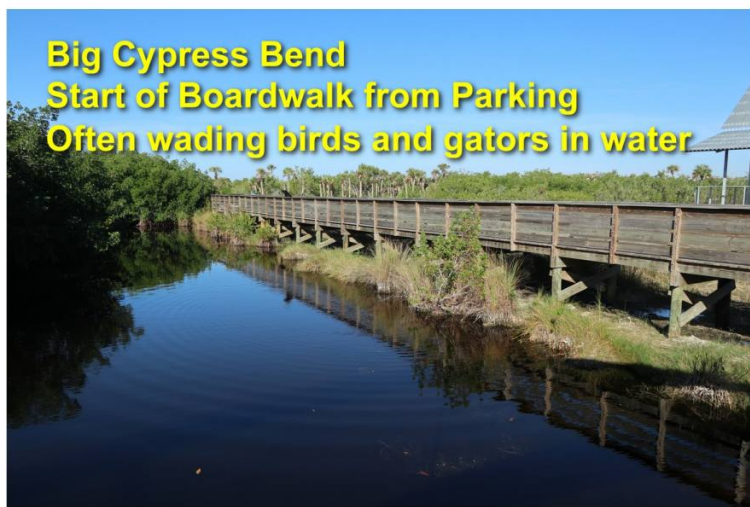
Get There: US-41 East 17 miles from Collier Blvd. 7 miles East of SR-29.

When: 8am to sunset.

Admission: \$3.

Big Cypress Bend Bridge from Parking to Visitor Center







Snowy Egret at Green Heron Lake



Canal alongside gravel path leading to "new old Boardwalk"



Mama and 2 baby gators

I got much too close taking this photo. Didn't see babies.



New boardwalk opened November 2025. Replaces part destroyed by Ian, which was closed for 3 years.



Pond at end of new (2025) boardwalk. Lots of wildlife: Alligators, birds, etc.

Tricolored Heron
Blue Heron

Two Gators



Big Cypress Bend Pond



Big Cypress Bend Pond



Barred Owl Looking Down on the Pond

Great Blue Heron



Banded Water Snake



Great White Egret



Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk ● is only a very small part of **Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park** (entire park 5 mi x 20 mi).

- Janes Scenic Drive is a good gravel road.
- All the dotted red lines are hiking and wading trails.



Kirby Storter Park Big Cypress National Preserve



Kirby Storter Park Part of Big Cypress National Preserve Website:

www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/kirby-storter-roadside-park.htm

Where: 48900 Tamiami Trail E, Ochopee, FL 34141.

Get There: On US-41 (Tamiami Trail) 37 miles east of Collier Blvd. Or take I-75 to State Rd 29 exit then down to US-41.

Admission: Free. Open dawn to dusk.

What:

- Half-mile boardwalk. Non-strenuous.
- Starts on a sawgrass prairie.
 - **Chickee hut for birding.**
- Continues through a cypress swamp.
- Ends at an overlook at a gator hole.
 - **Gator hole is a pond dug out by alligators to assure deep water even during dry season.**
- Wildlife include birds, snakes, fish, turtles, and alligators.

Map of Big Cypress National Preserve



Kirby Storter Park Beginning of Boardwalk

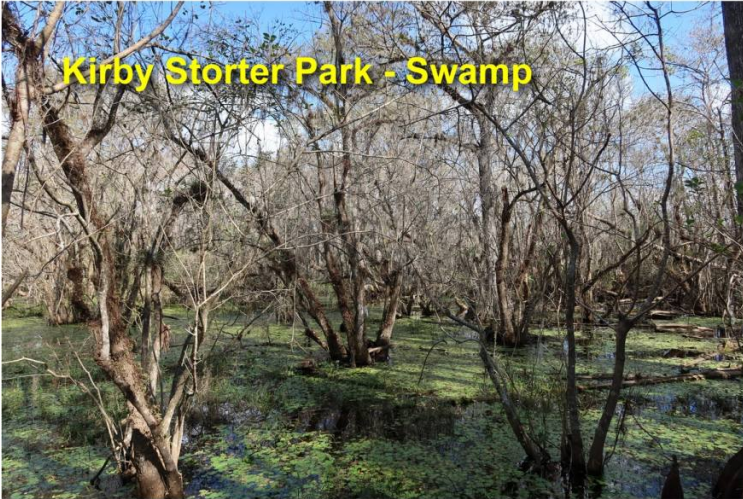


Kirby Storter Park

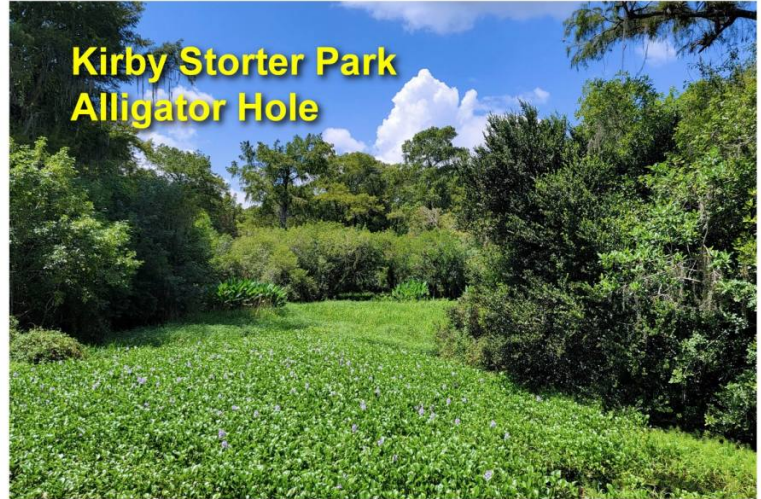
In October 2024, fire destroyed part of the Kirby Storter boardwalk. Part has now reopened, but the damaged part is not yet rebuilt.



Kirby Storter Park - Swamp



Kirby Storter Park Alligator Hole



Juvenile Alligator
By age 5, they lose their
camouflage stripes.



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

Website:

www.fws.gov/refuge/florida_panther/

Where: 20 miles east of Naples. I-75 just north of State Road 29 (Exit 80).

Get There: I-75 Exit 80 (SR-29) 21 miles east of Collier Blvd. Then ½ mile north on SR-29.

Admission: Free.

When: Daily sunrise to sunset.

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge



What: 26,400-acre refuge to protect panther habitat. Public access only on two trails in one corner. 12-16 Florida panthers den and roam there. Plus otters, alligators, birds.

Two Hiking Trails:

- Small Loop: 0.3 miles.
- Outer Loop: 1.3 miles.

There are only around 250 Florida panthers in the wild in all of Florida. (In 1970s there were only 20.)



Florida Panther NWR Hiking Trails

Outer Loop:
"Panther Trail"
1-1/3 miles

Shelter

Inner Loop:
"Memorial Trail"
1/3 mile

I-75 Exit 80

Immokalee
20 miles

Adult Florida panther:

Unspotted.
Typically tan overall.
Underside is dull white
Tip of tail, back of ears,
and sides of muzzle blackish.



Kittens:

Gray with dark brown or blackish spots and five bands around the tail.
Spots fade as kittens grow older.



Push to Open Gate (Dawn to Dusk)

Blue: 1/3 Mile Loop Trail

Orange: 1-1/3 Mile Loop Trail

LESLIE M. DUNCAN
MEMORIAL
TRAIL

1/3 MILE LOOP TRAIL
1 1/3 MILE LOOP TRAIL

**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Dragonfly Pond Observation Deck**



**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Trail Marker – Blue Loop Trail**

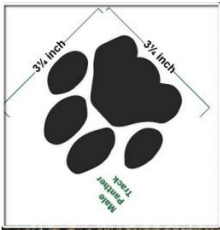


**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Trail Marker – Orange Loop Trail**



**Fresh Panther Track
Last Night or This Morning**





Panther Track

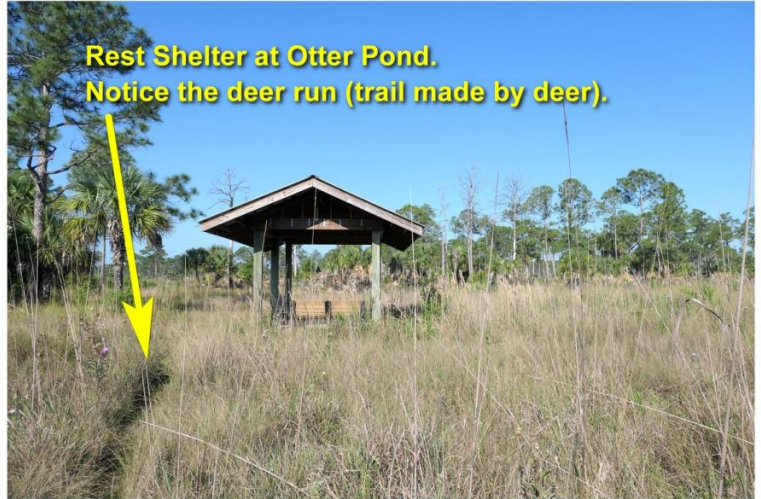
**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Doe and Fawn**



**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Slash pines**



**Rest Shelter at Otter Pond.
Notice the deer run (trail made by deer).**



**Eastern Lubber Grasshopper
aka Florida Lubber
Up to 3 inches long.
Sometimes black.
Non-flying.
Slow-moving.
Eat foliage.
Harmless to humans.**



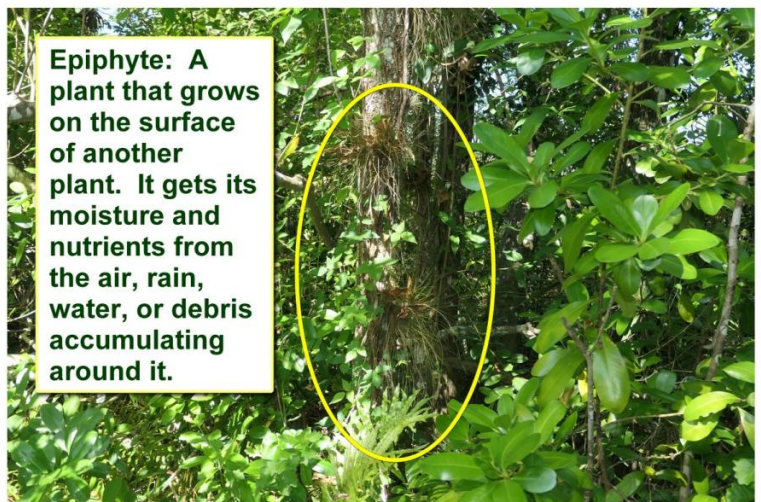
Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

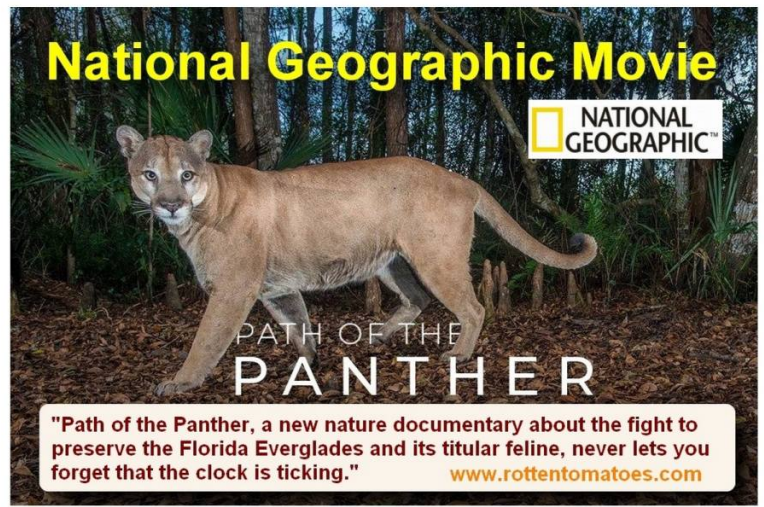


**Coral Bean Shrub
Some medicinal use.
Not edible.**



**Epiphyte: A
plant that grows
on the surface
of another
plant. It gets its
moisture and
nutrients from
the air, rain,
water, or debris
accumulating
around it.**





<p>Big Cypress Bend</p>	<p>THE END</p> <p>I hope you enjoyed these great hikes near Naples</p> <p>ppacter@gmail.com</p> <p>www.paulvisits.com</p> <p>© Copyright Paul Pacter All Rights Reserved</p>	<p>Florida Panther NWR</p>
<p>CREW Cypress Dome</p>		<p>Kirby Storter Park</p>
<p>CREW Flint Pen Strand</p>		<p>CREW Bird Rookery</p>
<p>CREW Marsh Trails</p>		<p>10,000 Islands NWR</p>

Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve