

Easy Nature Hikes In or Near Naples

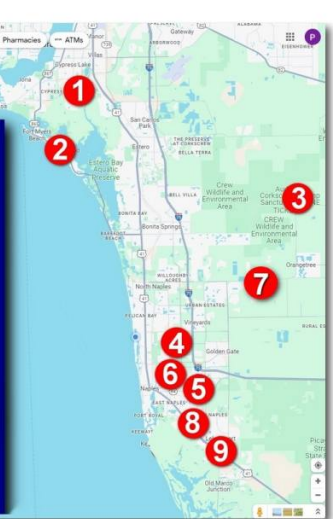
Paul Pacter

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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.

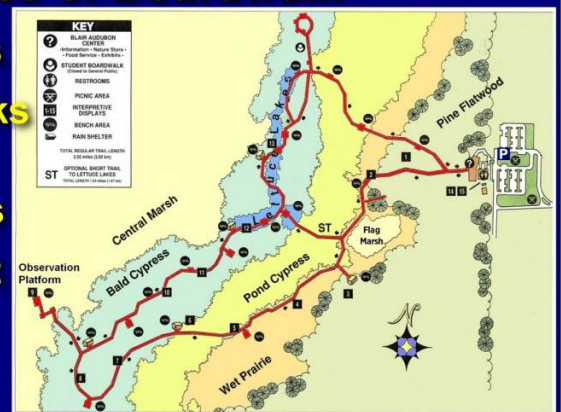
When: Daily 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. *Close 5pm In Season*

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.



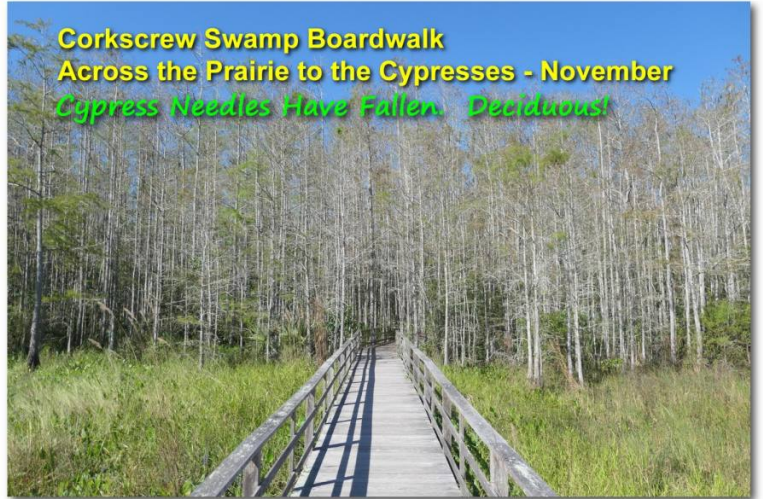
Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
Boardwalk and Pond Cypress



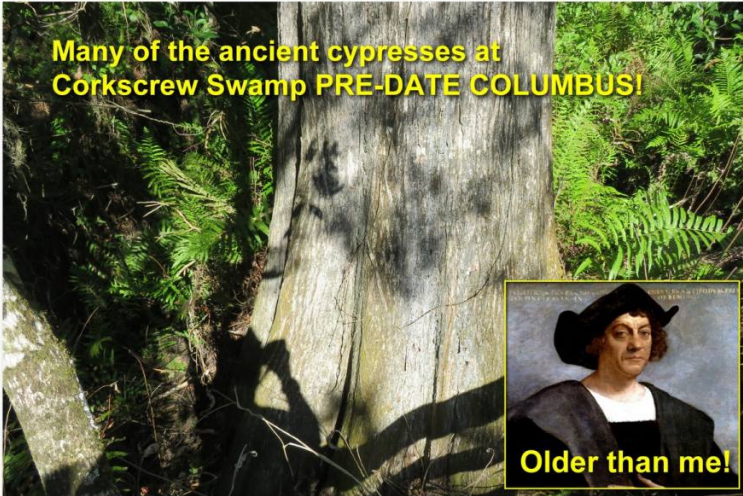
At that same place on the boardwalk in
October, a spectacular sunflower display



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!



Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
Wet Prairie (Marsh)



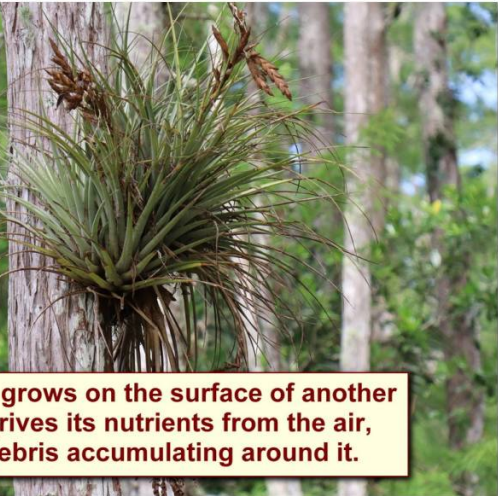
Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
Alligator Flag (Plant) Marsh
Growing in water where gators can hide
These were a "flag" for early settlers.



Several of the Many Flowers at Corkscrew Swamp



**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**



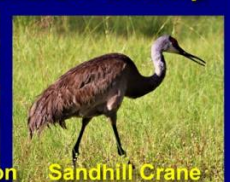
Several of the Many Birds at Corkscrew Swamp



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



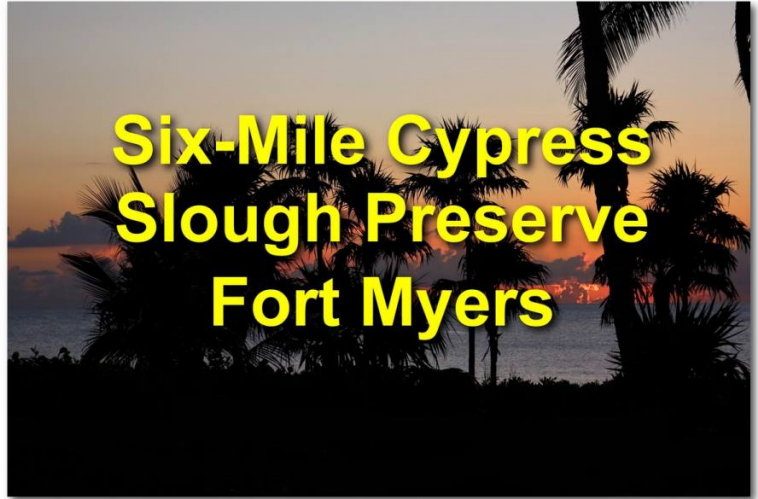
Audubon Corkscrew Swamp
February 16, 2026



Discovery Center - Exhibits



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Fort Myers

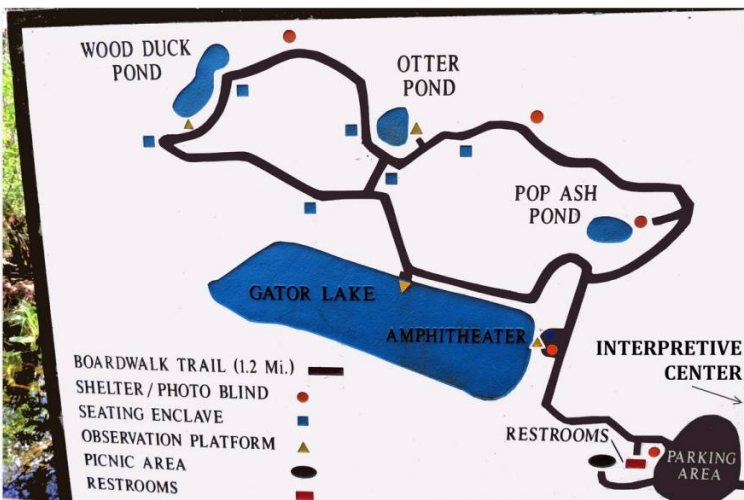


Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve



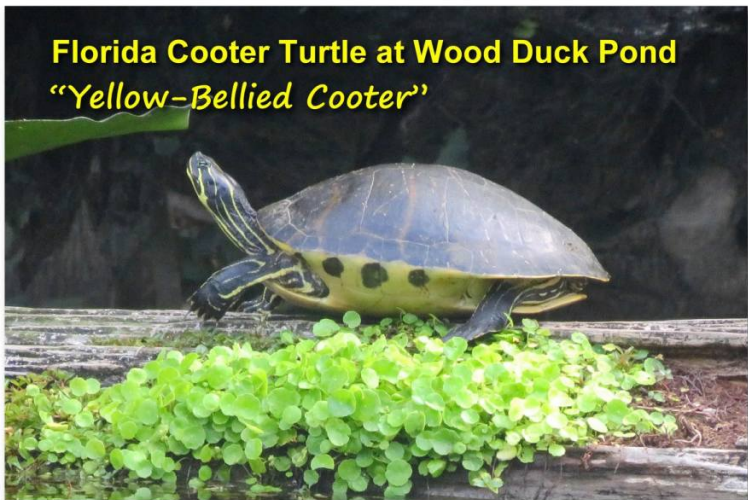
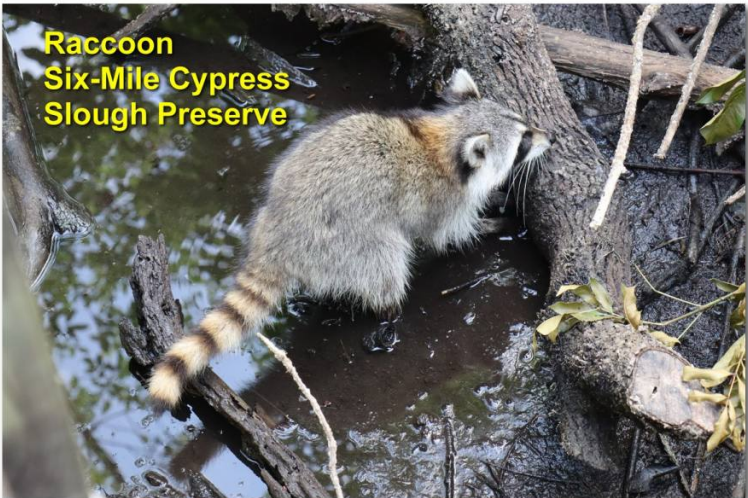
What's there: *Slough is a fresh water swamp*

- 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

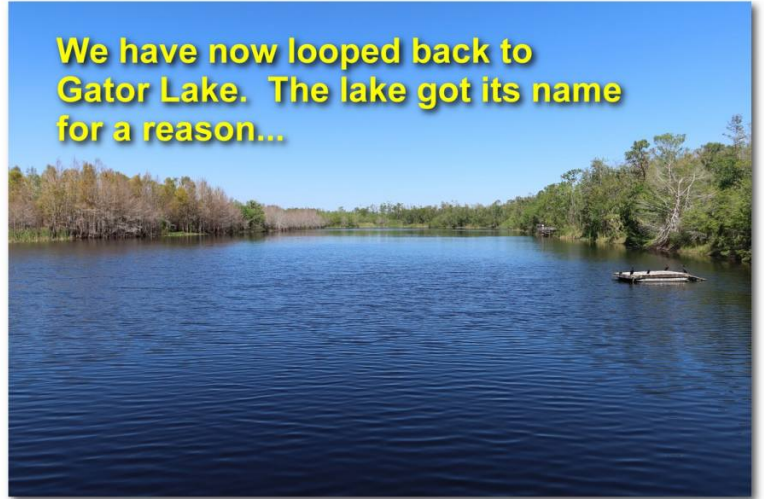
**Otter Pond
(I wasn't lucky enough to see one)**



**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**



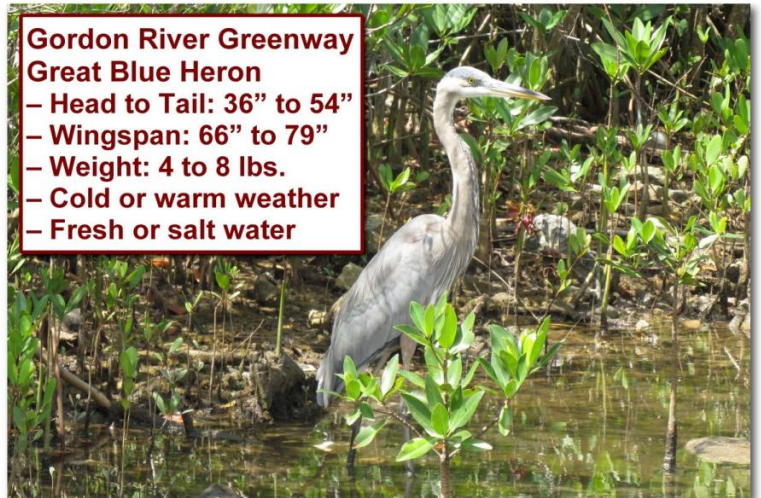
Gordon River Greenway - Wildflowers

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

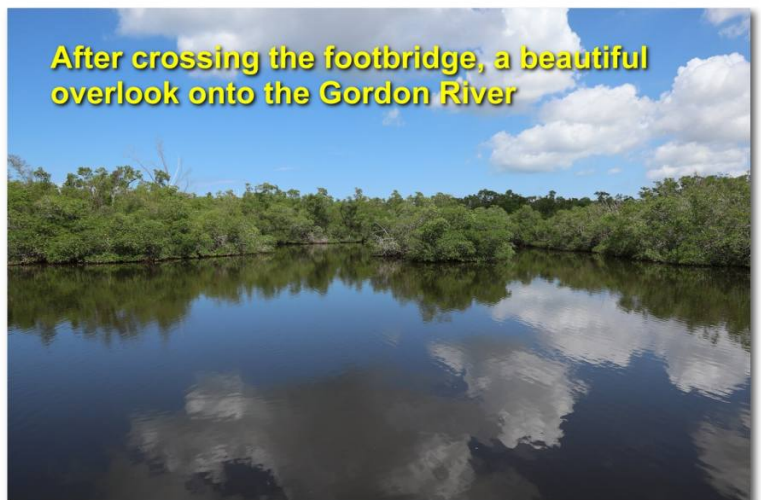


**Trail Crosses a Footbridge
Over the Gordon River
"Bridge #1"**



Gordon "River"

Golden Gate Canal



**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.

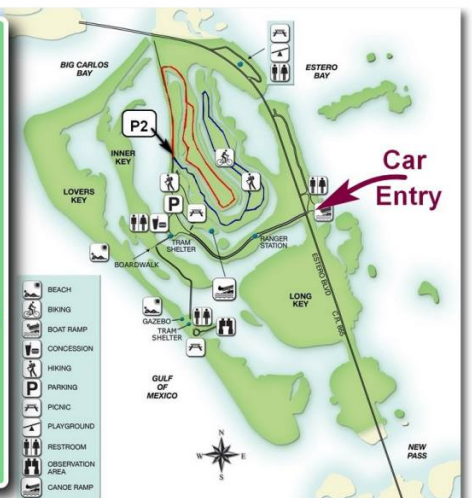
Two trails at Lovers Key:

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

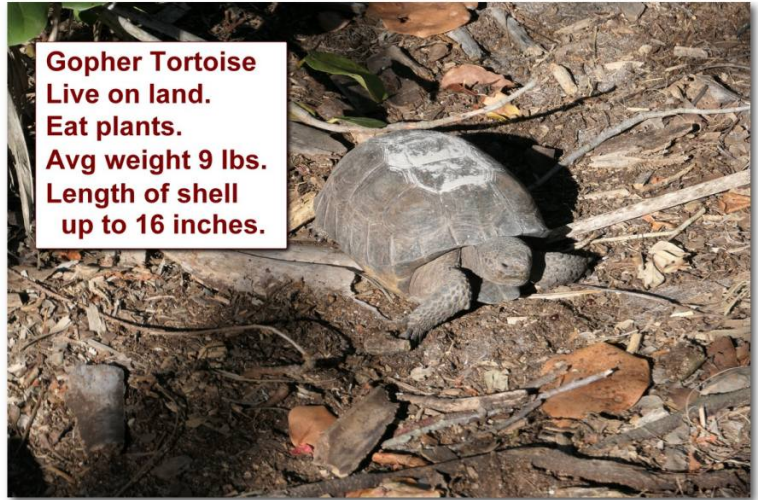
Trail
P Drive PAST first (beach) parking lot.
P2 For trails use SECOND parking lot.



**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.**

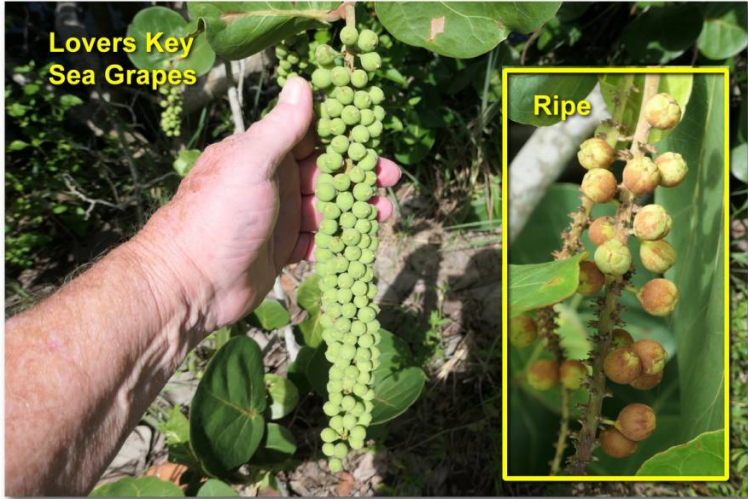


Sabal Palm or Cabbage Palm
Florida's State Tree



Lovers Key - Prickly Pear Fruit

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



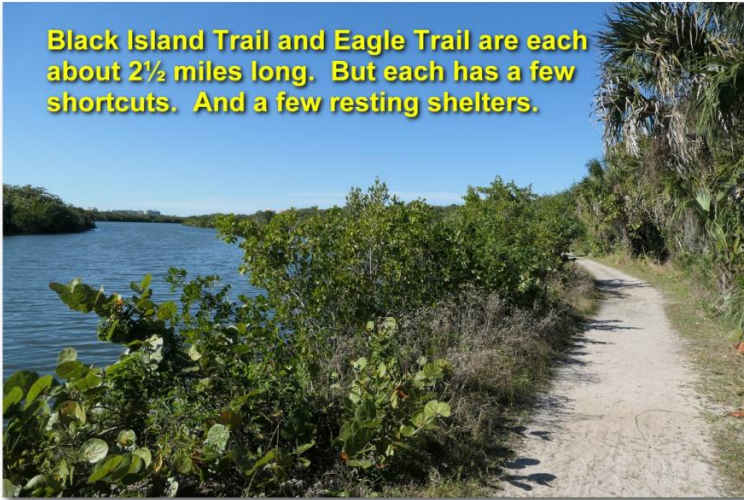
Lovers Key - Spanish Bayonet

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.

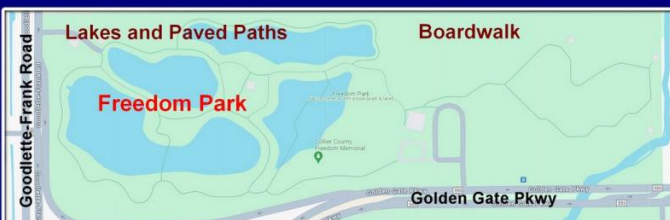
When: Daily 8am to Sunset.

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



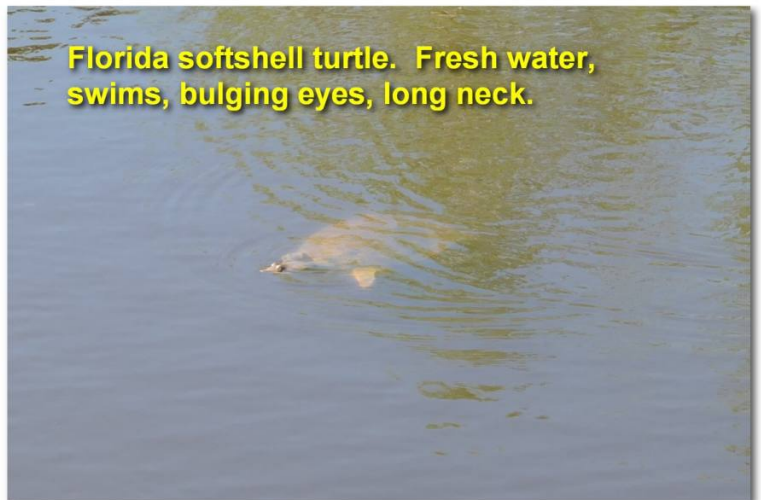
Large (3' or so) Iguana
Freedom Park



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.

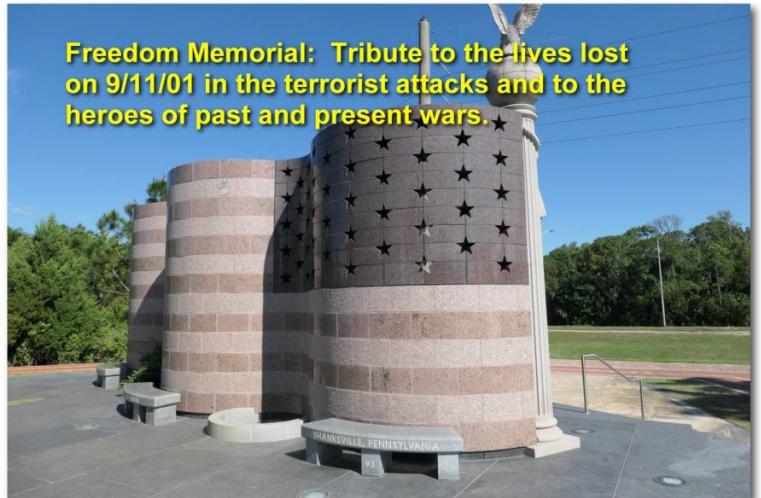
E.W. "Ed" Crayton (1870-1938)
"Shaping the Naples" Community
 A successful land developer in Ohio and St. Petersburg, Ed Crayton acquired 8,000 acres of land (most of which is now the City of Naples) from Walter Haldeman in 1912. Four years later he subdivided some of the land, including the Freedom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

Ed Frank (1900-1981)
 From swamp boggies to shopping, constructing lots of Collier County's popular gasoline. At age 12, Ed Frank worked as an apprentice mechanic. 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 mechanic, restaurant, and the first commercial building on 5th Avenue South. He is perhaps best known as "the creator of the swamp buggy" (in right, Ed Frank acquired the northern-most portion of Freedom Park in 1936).

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 Lindray 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 Yacht, 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 Nothing'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 Olympia Theatre 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.



The Naples Preserve

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.



**Naples Preserve
0.4 Mile Boardwalk**



**Naples Preserve - Gopher Tortoise
Found in all 67
Florida counties**



**Gopher Tortoise:
Originated in North America
60 million years ago.
Live up to 80 years.**



**Gopher tortoises dig burrows up to
33 feet long. Shared with rodents,
snakes, frogs, mice, various insects.**



**American
Beautyberry
Eaten by
birds and
deer.**

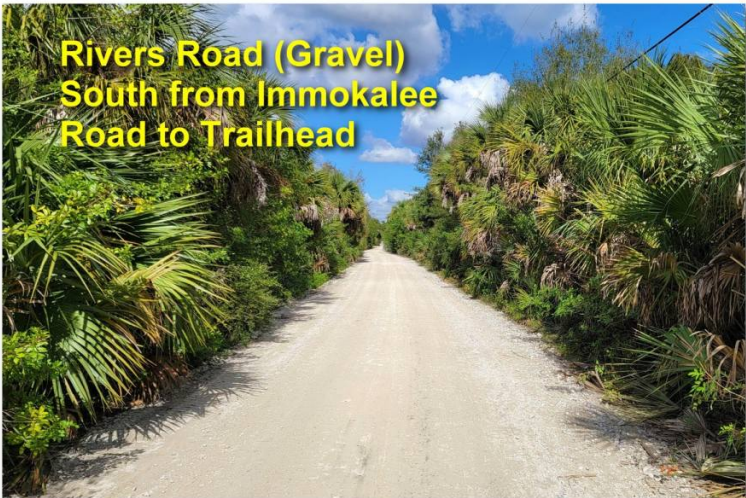


**Chapman's Blazing Star
A kind of aster.
Naples Preserve.
September**



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
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.

Three small photographs showing wildlife in a natural setting. The top photo shows a white-tailed deer, the middle one shows a bobcat, and the bottom one shows a Florida panther. Each photo has a timestamp and location data at the bottom.

**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/

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.



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
Alligator



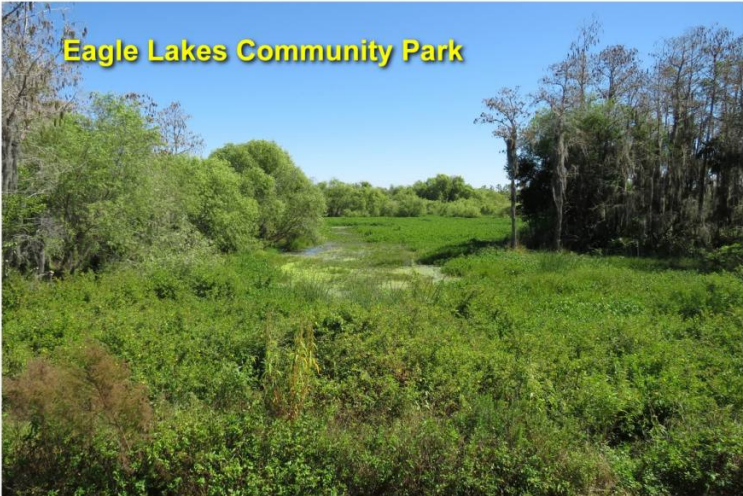
Eagle Lakes Community Park
Anhinga



Eagle Lakes Community Park
Blue Heron




Eagle Lakes Community Park




Eagle Lakes Community Park
Cormorants



THE END
Easy Nature Hikes
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www.paulvisits.com
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Six-mile Cypress



Gordon River




Corkscrew Swamp




Naples Preserve



Eagle Lakes Park



Rivers Road



Freedom Park



Lovers Key State Park



Serenity Walk