

Southwest Florida History

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Class 4

History of Major Parks and Preserves

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Six Class Meetings

Download PDF of slides:
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- Class 1 Historical Overview
- Class 2 History City of Naples
- Class 3 South and East of Naples
- **Class 4 Major Parks & Preserves**
- Class 5 North of Naples
- Class 6 *A Land Remembered* by Patrick Smith & Other Resources

SW Florida History: Parks and Preserves

Public parks provide community spaces for recreation, social interaction, and connection with nature. They also have significant environmental and economic benefits.

As important as those benefits are, they are not the focus of this course. **Instead, our focus will be on parks as historical sites. History, not ecology.**

Parks we will look at with an overview of the important related historical issues

| Park | Historical Issues |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Audubon Corkscrew Swamp | Preserve an ancient forest. Plume Hunting. Logging. |
| Lovers Key State Park | Stop an environmentally unsound planned development. |
| Rookery Bay | Preserve evidence of early settlement. |
| Collier-Seminole State Park | Collier's walking dredge. Barron Collier Memorial. |
| Ten Thousand Islands NWR | Stop oil drilling. |
| H P Williams Park | Stop an environmentally unsound planned development. Also tribute to H P Williams, who worked on Tamiami Trail. |
| Kirby Storter Park | Fire. Tribute to engineer Kirby Storter. |
| Oasis Visitor Center | Replace a hotel, airstrip, gas station. |
| Loop Road | Planned alternative route for the Tamiami Trail. Preserve an ill-fated Pinecrest community. |
| Florida Panther NWR | Protect Florida panther from extinction. |
| Everglades National Park | Preserve tropical wilderness. |
| Big Cypress National Preserve | Preserve tropical wilderness. |
| Picayune Strand State Forest | Stop a huge but environmentally disastrous planned development. Partly Golden Gate Estates today. Restoration of development canals and roads. |
| Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve | Remember how high school students forced a referendum to create this park. |

Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Website: www.corkscrew.audubon.org

Where: 375 Sanctuary Rd W, Naples.

Get There: East on Immokalee Road. 15 miles east of I-75 left on Sanctuary Road.

When: Daily 8am to 1:00pm (Dec 16 to Apr 30 3:00pm). Must be off boardwalk 2 hours later.

Admission: \$17, college students \$10, youth \$6. Book online.

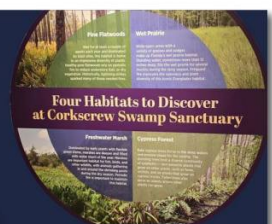
Visitor Center: Check in. Exhibits. Nature store.

Wetlands: 13,000 acres.

Boardwalk: 2.25 miles through pine flatwood, wet prairie, marsh, largest old growth bald cypress forest in N. America.

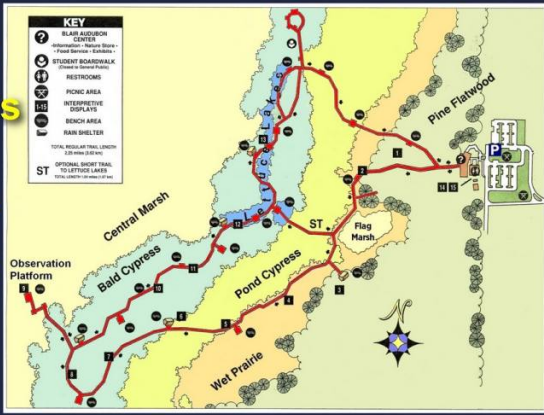
Wildlife: Alligators, otters, deer, snakes, turtles.

265 bird species: Including wading birds, songbirds, raptors.

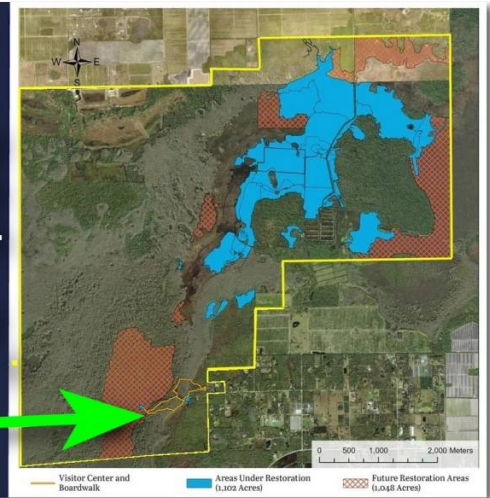


2.2 Miles of Boardwalk

Benches
Overlooks
Rain
Shelters
Shortcut



Boardwalk covers only small part of Corkscrew's 13,000 acres. Rest is wetland and mitigation area.



History of Corkscrew Swamp

1953: National Audubon Society began fundraising. **Goal: Stop logging.**

1954: 2,880 acres purchased. Accessible only by 4-wheel drive vehicle on dirt road.

1956: First boardwalk completed using local cypress wood. 10,000 visitors.

1969: Marsh observation platform added.

Total length nearly 2 miles.

1980s: Cypress wood no longer available.

Boardwalk repaired and treated with pine. But pine is not good in a wet swamp area.

By 1990: 70,000 visitors a year.

1995: Completely new boardwalk built using ipe wood, grown sustainably in Brazil. Length 2.25 miles.

2017: Hurricane Irma broke the boardwalk in 24 places. 560 foot section had to be fully replaced. But ipe wood was no longer grown sustainably. Now repairs are made using domestic black locust wood and some plastic "wood".

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



Plume Hunting

Historical Sign at Corkscrew Swamp

Protecting the Plume Birds

As the end of the 1800s, PLUM HUNTERS slaughtered hundreds of thousands of egrets and herons for the sake of fashion. In 1890, millions were going B.S. on parade - back the price of gold at the time - for egret plumes to adorn ladies' hats.

The hunt took place during breeding season when the birds' snowy feathers were at their finest. This decimated the adult population and all but wiped out the next generation.

Audubon Takes Action
In 1896, Boston society activist Susan Barton led a campaign to boycott feathered hats and to get legislation passed to protect nesting birds.

This was the initial action of the fledgling Audubon Society, the first nationwide grassroots conservation organization in that country. The Society's efforts to save the plume birds launched many further actions that helped preserve Corkscrew Swamp, one of the few remaining functional parts of the greater South Florida Ecosystem.

Hunted almost to extinction for their feathers

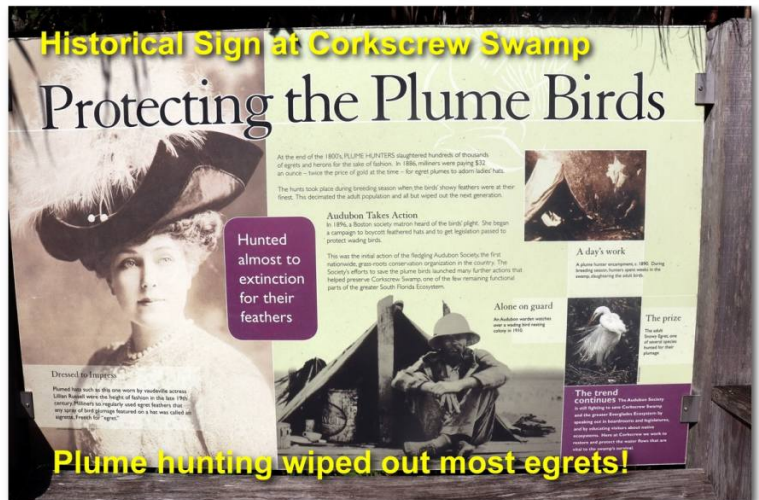
Abate on guard
An Audubon member watches over nesting birds in 1910.

A day's work
A plume hunter, c. 1880. Feeding Audubon Society members with the plume bird they had just killed.

The price
The cost of a single egret plume was as high as \$100 in 1890.

The trend continues
The Audubon Society continues to protect plume birds through its conservation programs and by educating visitors about the importance of these birds in the ecosystem and the impact of plume hunting.

Plume hunting wiped out most egrets!



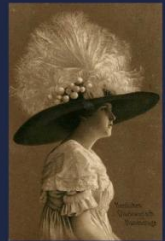
Plume Hunting in SW Florida

Late 1870s to about 1910:

Feathers used to decorate women's hats.

Fashion craze.

Snowy egrets favorite. Also great white egrets, roseate spoonbills, flamingos, peacocks, blue herons. Even eagle feathers.



Egret population virtually wiped out.

1886-1900: 5,000,000 birds killed per year.

95% of Florida's shore birds – Gone!

Feathers sold for more per ounce than gold!



1901: State Audubon society persuaded Florida Legislature to pass a bird protection law. Hired wardens to protect rookeries, in effect establishing sanctuaries.

Including Corkscrew Swamp.

On July 8, 1905, Audubon game warden Guy Bradley confronted plume hunters near Flamingo, FL. He was shot and killed at age 35.



Along the boardwalk at Corkscrew Swamp:

LANDMARK CYPRESS #5

Bradley

The Everglades and surrounding bald cypress swamps were once home to giant flocks of birds. However, over-hunting in the late 1800s quickly changed that. The National Audubon Society was formed, in part, to save these birds and their habitats.

Audubon hired wardens to patrol the swamps and stop poachers. This was risky work, and some wardens lost their lives in the line of duty.

This tree is named in memory of Audubon's long history in the Greater Everglades, and the price that has been paid by a committed few for the cause of conservation.

Guy Bradley (1870-1905) started out as a plume hunter, making good money killing birds for their feathers. He came to see how quickly the flocks were being destroyed and had a change of heart. Bradley was hired as the first Audubon warden, becoming a well-known enemy of poachers in the Greater Everglades. In 1905, at age 35, he was shot and killed by poachers in the line of duty.

Death in the Everglades

216 Pages
Univ Press of Florida

EN SPANISH AN KREVOL ATZEN

Saving Entire Bird Species

Turn of the century, citizen activism started.

National Audubon Society founded January 5, 1905.

Nationally, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 made it illegal to “pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, possess, sell, purchase, barter, import, export, or transport” any migratory bird or their parts - even including feathers you find on the ground.



Snowy Egret

Egret Population recovered quickly.

Current threats:

- Habitat losses and degradation.
- Contaminated runoff from farm fields or sewage treatment.

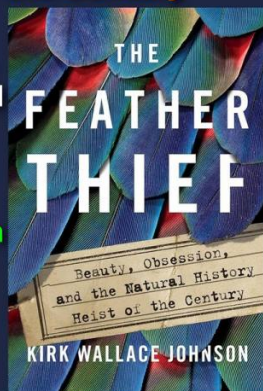


Egrets were nearly extinct in 1900.

Now thriving thanks to conservation.

The Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century

In 2009, a young American student in London broke into a branch of the British Natural History Museum and stole hundreds of rare bird skins collected in the 19th century. He made millions. **Non-fiction but a classic mystery thriller.** A third of the book focuses on the plume trade in the 19th and 20th centuries.




Cypress Logging



Logging of Cypress Wood


- Cypress is strong and resists rot.
- Grows in Southern US mainly in swamps.
- Logged as early as 1700.
- Major commercial logging began when the Timber Act of 1876 made large tracts of swamp available for 25 to 50 cents per acre.



Cypress

Unfortunately, after logging cypress forests do not easily regrow.


- By 1920s much of US cypress was harvested and not replaced.
- 1900-1920: Small scale logging in Naples, Everglade, Immokalee.
- 1920s-1940s: Major logging in Collier.



Cypress

By 1960, most major cypress stands had been felled. Corkscrew remained because it was not easily accessible.

- 1952: Logging in Corkscrew began.
- 1954: Concerned citizens raised \$ to purchase 2,880 acres and start Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.



Cypress

Lovers Key State Park

Lovers Key State Park

Website: www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/lovers-key-state-park

Where: 8700 Estero Blvd, Ft Myers Bch.

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 pers. \$4.

When: 8am to sunset daily.

What: Two miles of Gulf Beaches. Miles of hiking trails. Kayaking, canoeing, shells. Dolphins, manatees, ospreys, tortoises. **712 acres.**

Two trails at Lovers Key:

- Black Island Trail and Eagle Trail.
- Each about 2.5 miles long (+ shortcuts).
- They follow estuaries originally dredged for residential development.

That was stopped by the State last minute.

RED is Eagle Trail

BLUE is Black Is. Trail

Trail

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



From the early 1900s to the late 1950s, fish camps operated on Black Island, supporting a small local economy.

1960s-70s: Threatened by development:

- Developers planned to transform the islands into residential communities.
- Mangrove swamps were dredged, canals cut through Black Island, damaging the natural ecosystem.

1983-1996: Conservation and Park Creation

- In 1983, State of Florida acquired the islands to protect them from further destruction.
- In 1996, the state merged the area with the adjacent Carl E. Johnson County Park, creating Lovers Key State Park.

Today: A "protected paradise".



**Rookery Bay
National Estuarine
Research Reserve**



Sabal Palm – Florida State Tree (South Carolina too)
Can Grow to 65 Ft Height.
aka Cabbage Palm, Palmetto,
Swamp Cabbage.



Our State Tree is technically NOT a tree!
It is a GRASS.

Calusa Shell Mound
1700s or earlier



Calusa "Axe"

**Bits of History
on Shell Island**

1887 Water Tank

**1901 & 1908
Gravestones**



George Washington Kirkland
1832 to 1901



Jesse James Jones
1900-1908



Commemorating 4,000
Naples school children who,
in 1971, raised money to help
preserve this area as a
sanctuary



Collier-Seminole State Park

Collier-Seminole State Park
Tamiami Trail 8 miles east of Collier
Blvd. 7,271 acres.

- Two sites of historical in this park:
- 1924 Walking Dredge used in the original construction of the Tamiami Trail.
 - Memorial to Barron G Collier, founder of Collier County in 1923.

Bay City Walking Dredge - 1924
One mile per month



Designated "National
Historic Mechanical
Engineering Landmark"

Barron Collier Memorial
Collier-Seminole State Park



Interesting Historical Fact about Mr Collier:

Barron Collier was NYC Deputy Police Commissioner and head of Public Safety 1922 to 1926.

To try to reduce the number of car-pedestrian accidents, he:



- Invented the painted crosswalk (keep pedestrians in line).
- Invented the painted lines down the center of streets (keep cars in line).
- Invented side lines on roads near curbs (keep pedestrians out of car roadway).
- Ran an anti-jaywalking campaign.

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Website:

www.fws.gov/refuge/ten_thousand_islands/

Get to Marsh Trail by car:

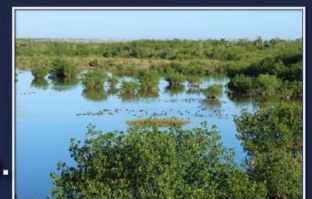
US-41 11 miles east of Collier Blvd.

Managed by:

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

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.



The refuge was created under the Arizona-Florida Land Exchange Act of 1988, a unique federal deal:

- The Department of the Interior transferred 68 acres of Indian School property in Phoenix, Arizona to Collier family interests.
- In return, the Collier family conveyed 108,000 acres in Collier County, FL to the federal gov't.
- Of this, 35,000 acres were designated for the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge.
- The remaining land was added to Big Cypress National Preserve and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

Marsh Trail in Ten Thousand islands NWR is an old oil and gas exploration road.

The exchange of land between Collier and the Federal Govt applied only to surface land rights. Collier family retains the subsurface mineral rights.

While oil and gas exploration is still possible, it would face strong regulatory and public opposition.

In the early 2000s, US government offered \$120 million to the Collier family to buy out mineral rights across approximately 400,000 acres, including the Ten Thousand Islands area.

The deal stalled due to valuation, and the offer has expired. Negotiations are ongoing



Possible?

The Marsh Trail is a great place to view wading birds (eg roseate spoonbills, herons, egrets) and alligators and turtles.



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge
1.2 mi Marsh Trail



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Brown Pelican

Sunning



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge
Four Alligators Sunning
March 2026



2020 March

2020 June

2020 August

2020 November

2021 February

2021 March

2021 April

2021 May

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



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

Notice the tilapia or turtle in its mouth



Bird Frenzy at Ten Thousand Islands NWR - December 2022

Coots, Teals, etc

H P Williams Park Turner River Road

Turner River Road (CR-839)

Get There: US-41 30 miles east of Collier Blvd (6 miles past SR-29). Turn north.

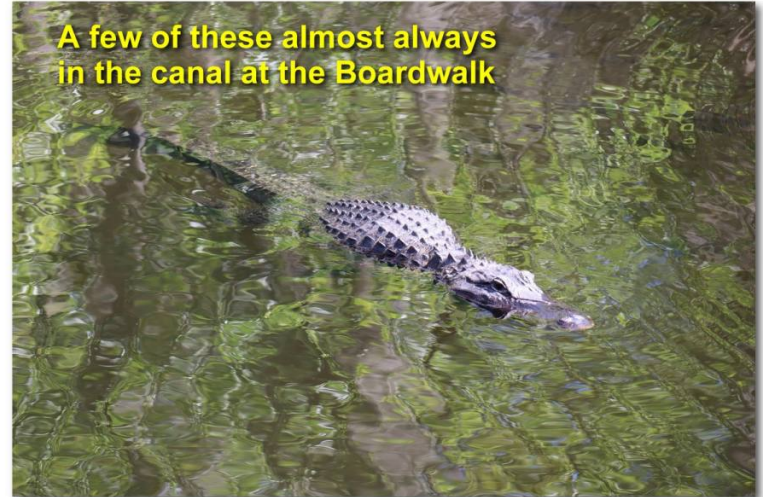
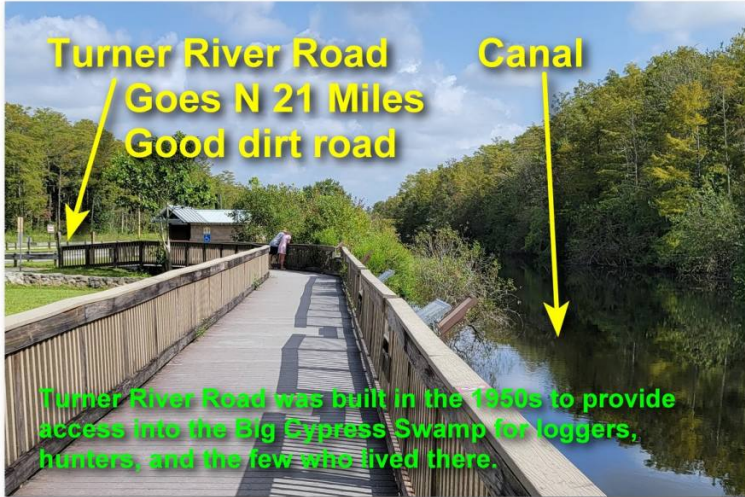
What: Turner River Rd (unpaved but good) runs 21 miles north under I-75. Then ends. Road was built in the 1950s to provide access into the Big Cypress Swamp. Built by making a canal alongside from which dirt was taken. **You almost always find alligators, wading birds, and turtles in the canal. Sometimes otters.**

Do not feed the gators (illegal).

Be very cautious getting out of your car along the road.

Right where Turner River Rd starts at US-41 is a small park (H P Williams Park) with a boardwalk. **There are almost always alligators in the canal next to the Boardwalk and along the road.**

H P Williams was Homer P. Williams, one of Collier's engineers responsible for building the Tamiami Trail in the 1920s.



Kirby Storter Park

Map of Big Cypress National Preserve



Major Fire Damage to Boardwalk

Most of the park's boardwalk is closed due to a fire on the evening of October 14, 2024.



Kirby Storter Park Now Entering Cypress Swamp



Kirby Storter Park Cypress Swamp



Kirby Storter Park Juvenile Alligator



Kirby Storter Park Cooter Turtle



Kirby Storter Park - Florida Softshell Turtle



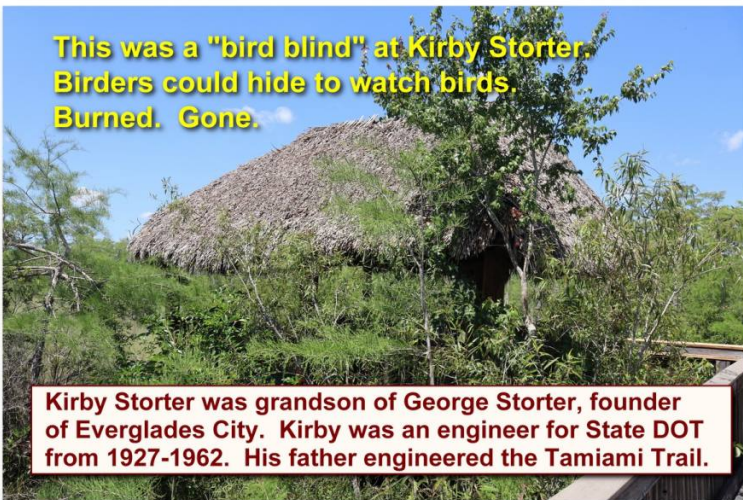
Florida Banded Water Snakes Kirby Storter



Instead of swamps and wildlife we now see this.



This was a "bird blind" at Kirby Storter. Birders could hide to watch birds. Burned. Gone.



Kirby Storter was grandson of George Storter, founder of Everglades City. Kirby was an engineer for State DOT from 1927-1962. His father engineered the Tamiami Trail.

Oasis Visitor Center Big Cypress National Preserve

Big Cypress National Preserve Oasis Visitor Center

33100 Tamiami Trail East
Ochopee, FL

Info and exhibits, plus...

Great boardwalk to see lots of alligators swimming in a canal.

On US-41 45 miles East of Collier Blvd.



Originally built in the 1960s as a private airport and restaurant, complete with a passenger plane mounted on its roof.

Then became a gas station.

Acquired 1980s by NPS as visitor center for Big Cypress National Preserve.

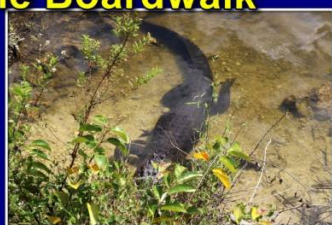
- History and cultural exhibits.
- Florida panther display.
- Introductory film.
- Staffed information desk.



Big Cypress National Preserve Boardwalk Open Daily



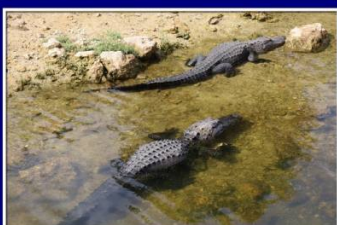
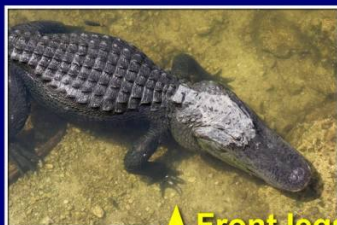
Big Cypress Preserve Oasis Visitor Center



Views from the Boardwalk



Rear legs
4 toes



Front legs
5 toes

Oasis Visitor Center May 14, 2025

Lunch?



Loop Road Big Cypress National Preserve

In 1915 the State decided to build the Tamiami Trail.

Miami developer James Jaudon agreed to build the section from Miami to 24 miles west of Dade County Line.



James Jaudon

Along this road, Jaudon planned to build "the next Miami" called "Pinecrest".

Map of Jaudon's Loop Road.
Now a gravel wilderness road.

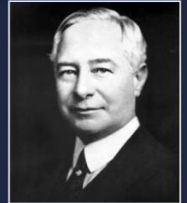


Jaudon's company built a few rustic homes 1921-1923. And dirt Loop Road.

But by 1923 he ran out of money. Could not find any outside investors.

1923 State awarded Tamiami Trail contract to Barron Collier.

Including Jaudon's 24-mile section.



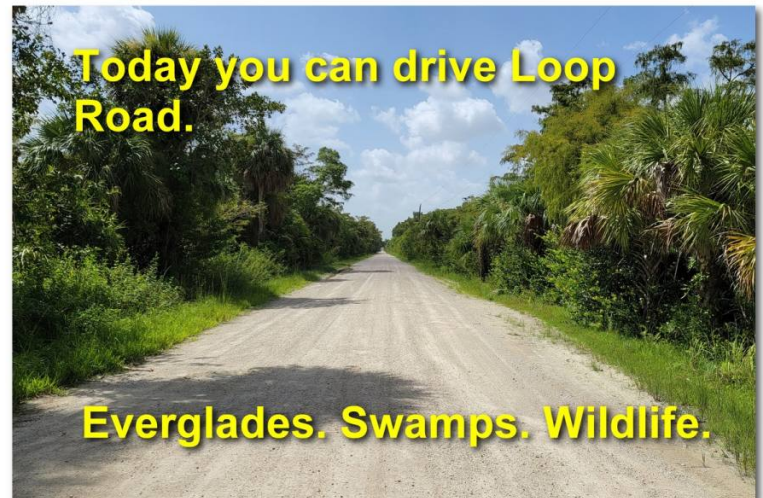
Barron Collier

Collier did not agree with Jaudon's loop. Built a straight road to Dade line.

- Loop Road dirt road survived.
- But not as part of Tamiami Trail.
- By early 1930s, 200 people lived along Loop Road. Pinecrest had a saw mill, school, store, gas station, bunk house.
- In 1937 Jaudon's company filed for bankruptcy. Land sold to Government.
- Today a few pioneer types live along Loop Road.

Today you can drive Loop Road.

Everglades. Swamps. Wildlife.



And you can see the ruins of (supposedly) Al Capone's home in the ruins of Pinecrest.



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 1/2 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 120-230 Florida panthers in the wild in all of Florida. In the 1970s there were only 20.



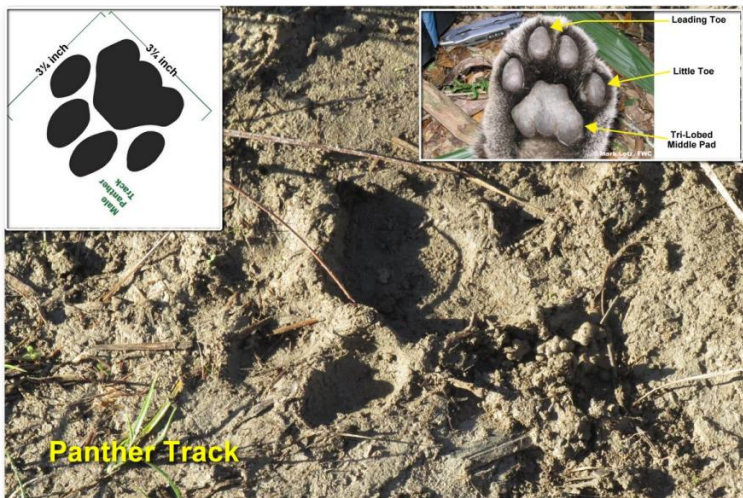
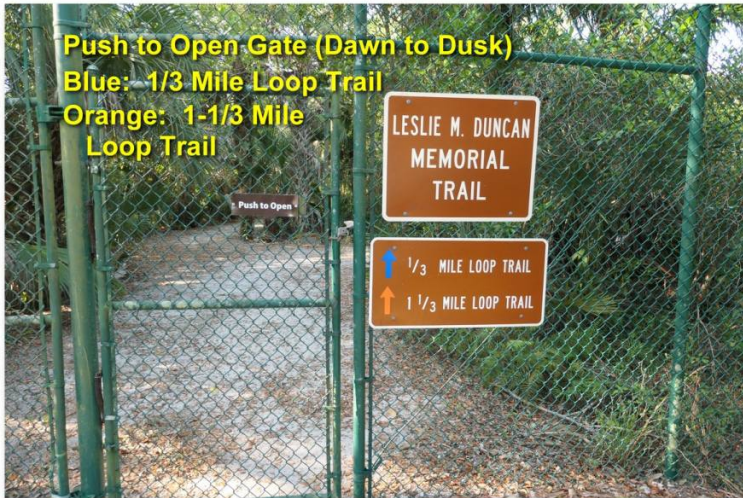
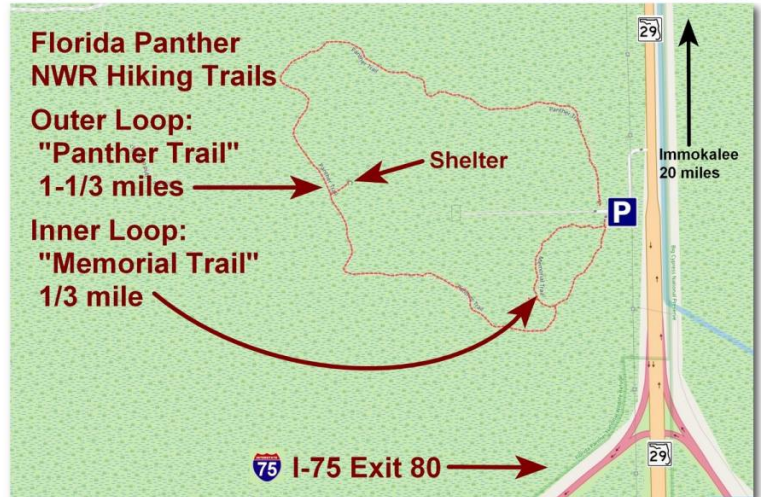
Florida Panther NWR Hiking Trails

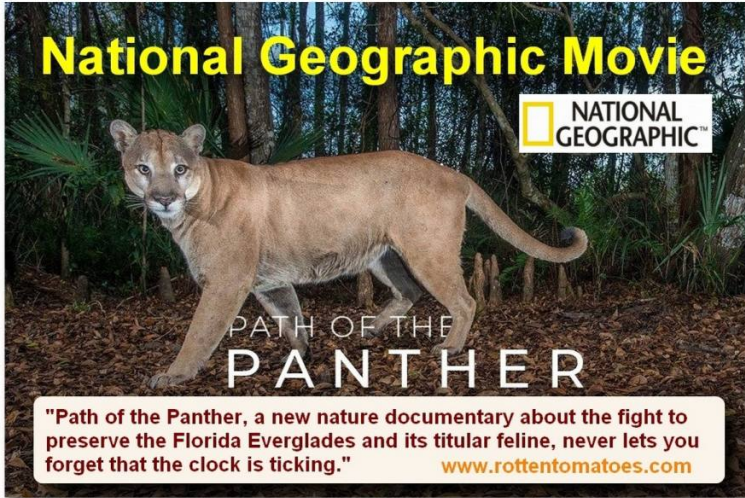
Outer Loop:

"Panther Trail"
1-1/3 miles

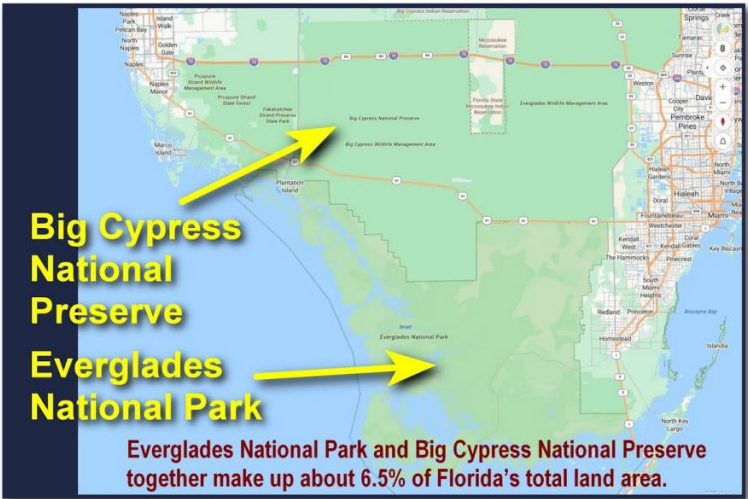
Inner Loop:

"Memorial Trail"
1/3 mile





Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve



- Everglades National Park**
- Legislation Passed 1934.
 - 1.5 million acres of land acquired 1934-1947.
 - Collier, Dade, Monroe Counties.
 - Largest subtropical wilderness in US.
 - Elevation 8 feet.
-

- Everglades National Park opened in 1947.**
- Dedication ceremony in Everglades City.
 - Attended by US President Truman.
- UNESCO World Heritage Site.**
-
- 1947**

Everglades National Park Gulf Coast Visitor Center was destroyed by Hurricane Irma 2017. A temporary replacement Visitor Center was destroyed by Hurricane Ian in 2022.

A new Visitor Center is now under construction in E.C.

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas Visitor Center
Everglades City - Opening Late 2025*

- Big Cypress National Preserve Abuts Everglades National Park.**
- America's FIRST National Preserve**
- Established 1974. 729,000 acres.
 - Classification as Preserve is somewhat political.
 - Preserve allows more commercial and recreational activity than Park.
-

Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport Lately Known as Alligator Alcatraz

Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport (aka Alligator Alcatraz)

- Public airport 36 miles west of Miami.
- Owned by Miami-Dade County. Entirely in Collier County
- Begun 1968 as the Everglades Jetport.
- Planned as largest airport in the world.
 - 39 square miles.
 - 6 runways.
- Connected to both central Miami and the Gulf of Mexico by an expressway and monorail line.

Abandoned 1970. But Dade retained the property as a public airport, used mainly by airlines for pilot training. One 10,449 x 150 foot paved runway.

Detention center

In July 2025, the State of Florida and US Department of Homeland Security installed the South Florida Detention Facility, known informally as Alligator Alcatraz, an immigration detention center, on the airport grounds.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management is operating the center (tents and other facilities) at estimated cost of \$450 million annually, plus construction costs. Expected to be partially reimbursed by the federal government. It's controversial.

In January 2026, Gov DeSantis said more than 20,000 detainees had been processed through the facility.

www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2026/01/06/deportation-depot-alligator-alcatraz-florida-detained-immigrants/8603322007/?utm_source=copilot.com

There are no recent data about aircraft operations at Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport.

Latest is Y/E October 10, 2018:

- Total operations: 14,468.
- This includes both takeoffs and landings, typically counted as one operation each.
- Averages to about 40 operations per day (highly variable).

Public Access Now Prohibited

Alligator Alcatraz



Picayune Strand State Forest

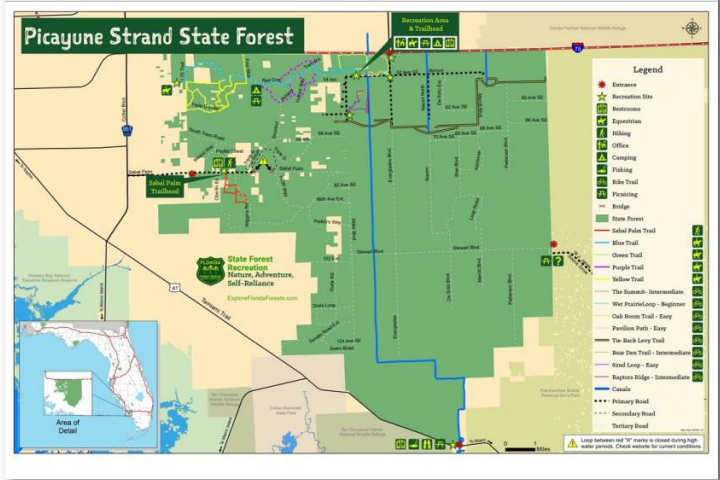
Picayune Strand State Forest

<https://www.fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/Our-Forests/State-Forests/Picayune-Strand-State-Forest>

Where: The forest can be accessed via Everglades Boulevard from the north and Sabal Palm Road from the west.

Admission: \$2 day pass.

What: 74,138 Acres. Fourth largest State Forest in Florida.



History of Picayune - 1

1940s and 50s: Extensive logging for cypress. 62 miles of tram roads.

1960s: Purchased by developers and drained for the construction of what was intended to become the largest subdivision in the world:

- 42 miles of canals. ← Think about these numbers!
- 285 miles of roads
- 17,000 home sites sold. ←

History of Picayune - 2

"Many buyers bought plots that were submerged underwater."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_American_Land_Corporation

Some call it "Swampland in Florida Scam".

By 1970s: It was obvious that the extensive road and canal system was harming the natural communities and ecosystems.

1980s and 1990s: State of Florida purchased the land from 17,000 individual private owners. **One by one**

2002: Restoration work began on 55,000 acres. Ongoing. To date (25 years):

Building 3 massive pumping stations: **DONE**

- Merritt: 810 cubic feet per second.
- Faka Union: 2650 cubic feet per second.
- Miller: 1250 cubic feet per second.

Plugging of 42 miles of canals. **70% OF CANALS NOW PLUGGED**

Removal of 285 miles of roads. **DONE**
Removal of 62 miles of tram roads. **DONE**
Work under way on the remaining canals.

Facilities today include:

- Hiking trails.
- Equestrian trail.
- Primitive campgrounds.
- Birding.
- Cycling.
- No off-highway vehicles.
- Day use sunrise to sunset.

Picayune Strand State Forest Egrets, Wood Storks, Other Birds



Yes, lots of alligators.



Eagles, and nest



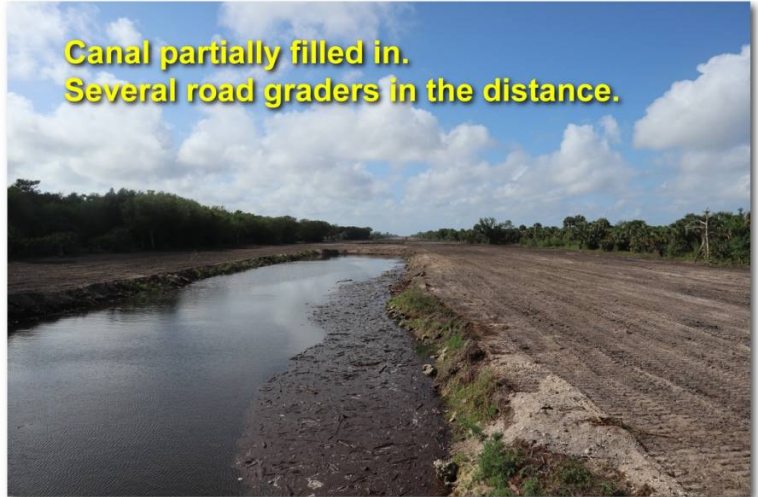
And wood storks



One of the 42 miles of canals that is being filled in



Canal partially filled in. Several road graders in the distance.



Coming Up:

- ~~Class 1 Historical Overview~~
- ~~Class 2 History City of Naples~~
- ~~Class 3 South and East of Naples~~
- ~~Class 4 Major Parks & Preserves~~
- Class 5 North of Naples
- Class 6 *A Land Remembered* by Patrick Smith & Other Resources



End of Class 4

Southwest Florida History

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