

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.

Download PDF:

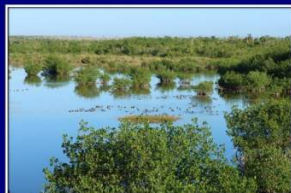
www.paulvisits.com



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:

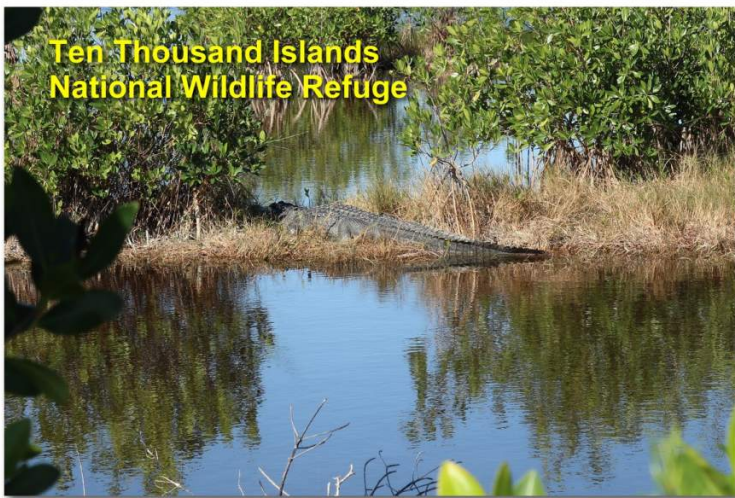
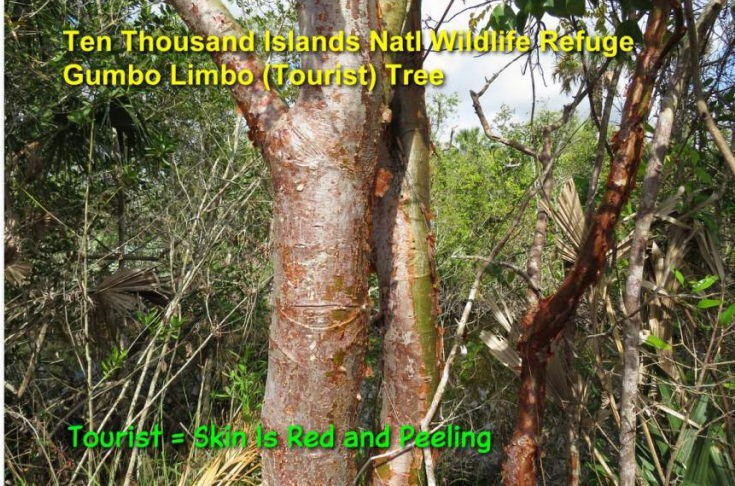
www.fws.gov/refuge/ten_thousand_islands/

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.









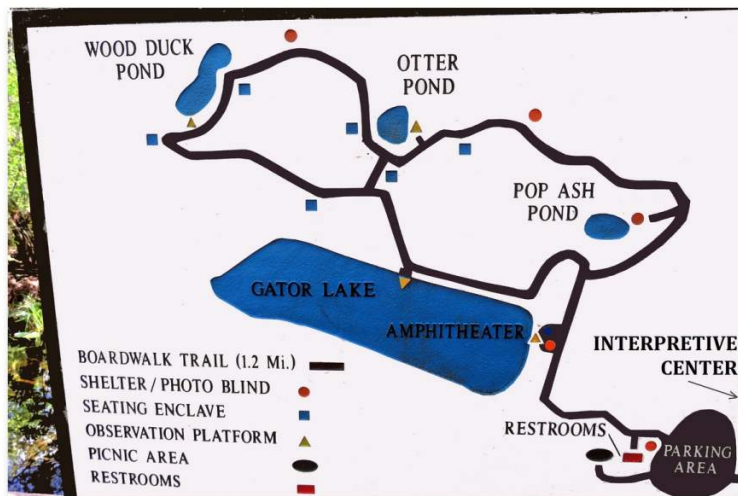
Six Mile Slough Preserve "Sloo"
Website: www.leegov.com/parks/preserves/sixmilecypress
Friends of Six Mile Slough:
www.sloughpreserve.org/
Where: 7751 Penzance Blvd at 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy, Fort Myers, FL. 33966.
Get There: I-75 Exit 131 Daniels Pkwy. West 2.7 mi to 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy. Right onto 6 Mile 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

2



Bald Cypress Mitigation Area

Mitigation means these were planted to replace logged cypresses.



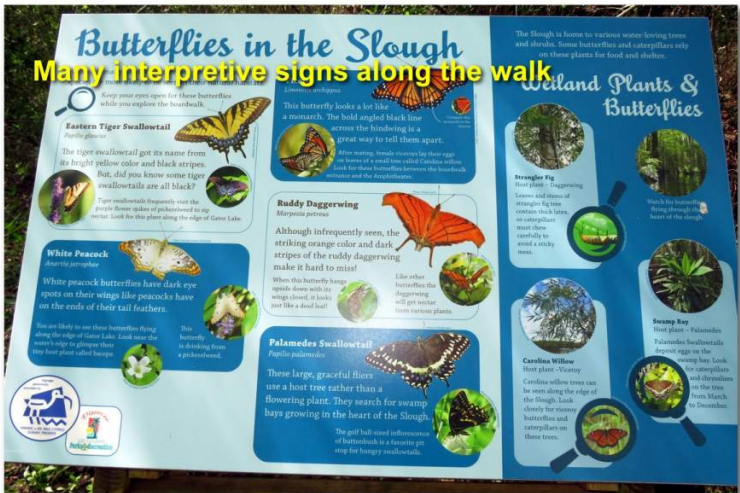
**Great Egret
Six Mile Cypress Slough**

Slough = Fresh water wet swampy ground.



Six-Mile Cypress Slough - Young Ibis

At around age 2, feathers turn pure white



**Butterflies in the Slough
Many interpretive signs along the walk**



**Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Gator Lake**

Man-made 1970s



Six Mile Cypress Slough is a birder's and photographer's paradise

Each pond has a viewing platform



**Alligator sunning on a platform on
Gator Lake, Six Mile Cypress Slough**



The white blotches on many trees are lichen



Bald Cypress Trees shed their leaves.
Cypress knees: Stability? Aeration?
Trap nutrients for tree?

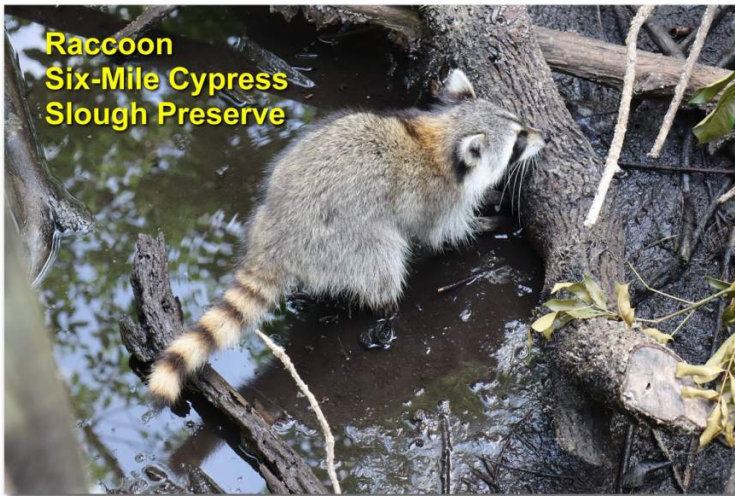


Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Alligator at Wood Duck Pond



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Juvenile Alligator Sunning - Wood Duck Pond

Gators are about 8 inches when they hatch.
Grow about 1 inch a month.



Raccoon
Six-Mile Cypress
Slough Preserve



Florida Cooter Turtle at Wood Duck Pond



Gar

Heavily armored. Sharp teeth.



Eastern Pondhawk Dragonfly

"Within one
minute of mating,
the female starts
to lay her eggs"



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



**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.**

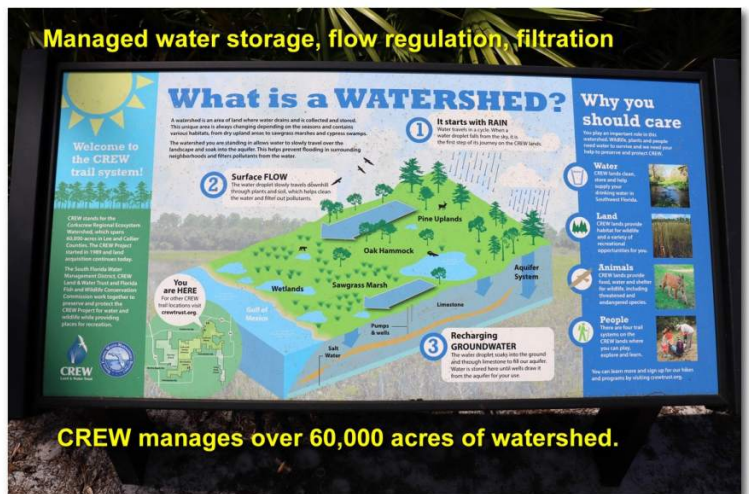


Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)



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.

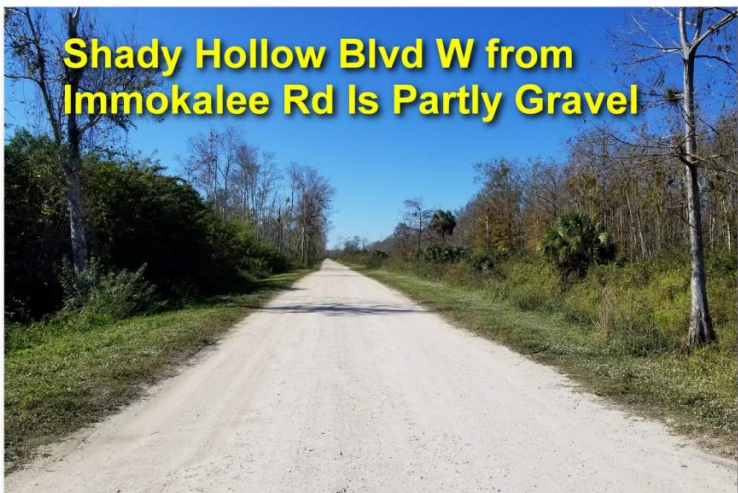
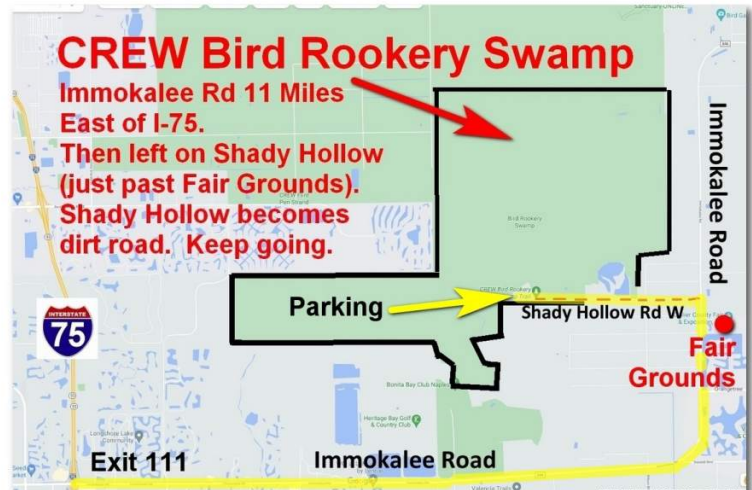
When: One hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.

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.



Shady Hollow Blvd W from Immokalee Rd Is Partly Gravel



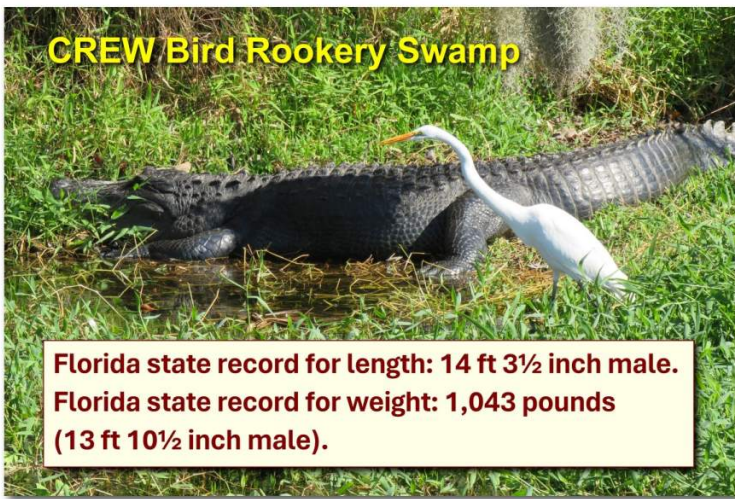
Parking and Start of Trails

CREW Management Area
Bird Rookery Trailhead
sfwmd.gov
In Cooperation with Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission

Before starting on trails walk over to the pond here



Sometimes, one or more large gators on far side of the pond



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp

Florida state record for length: 14 ft 3½ inch male.
Florida state record for weight: 1,043 pounds
(13 ft 10½ inch male).



CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail From Parking to Boardwalk

Sometimes small gators and turtles
in the marsh on the left



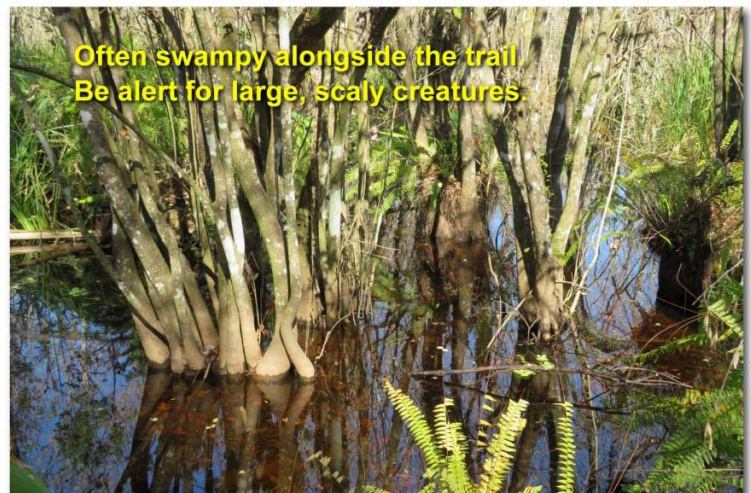
Florida Red-bellied Turtle
aka Florida Red-bellied Cooter
Shell up to 15"
Weight up to 9 lbs.



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**



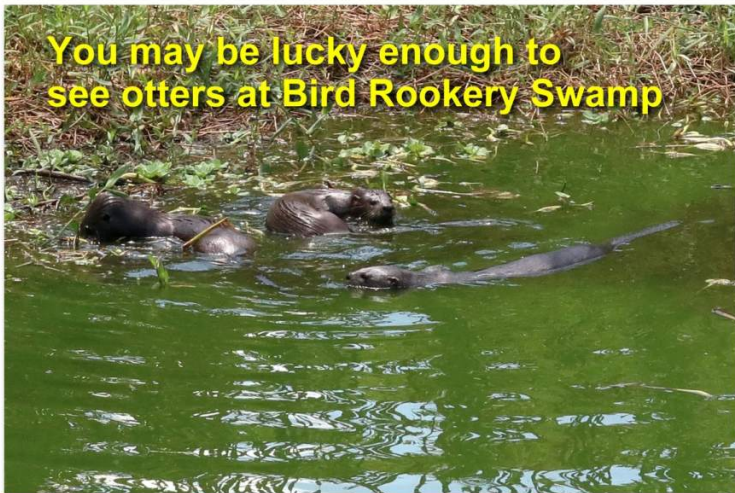
Scarlet Hibiscus - Beautiful Florida Wildflower



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

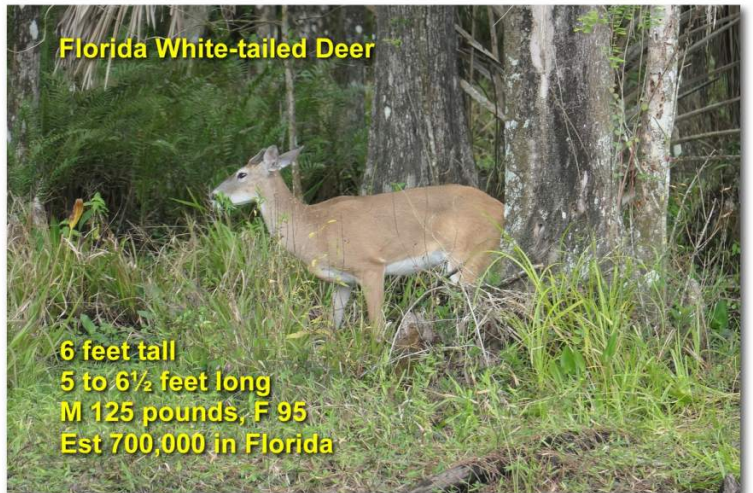


**You may be lucky enough to
see otters at Bird Rookery Swamp**



Florida White-tailed Deer

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



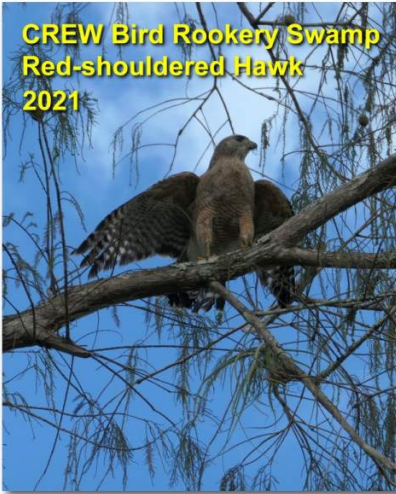
**This Place Really is a Rookery (Bird Colony)
3 Wood Storks 4 Ibises**



**CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Great Blue Heron
Lunch**



**CREW Bird Rookery Swamp
Red-shouldered Hawk
2021**



**John James Audubon
Drawing 1839**



Bald Cypress Trees

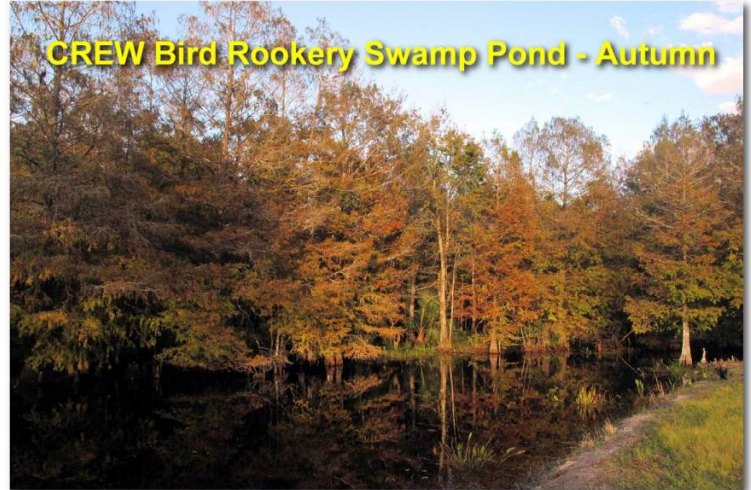
- Coniferous (cones).
- Leaves are needle-like.
- Deciduous: Leaves turn brown and fall each autumn.
- Called "bald" because (unusually for conifers) the leaves fall, leaving tree bald.
- Flood and swamp tolerant.
- Huge: Up to 150 feet tall. Trunk diameter up to 10 feet (occasionally much bigger).
-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

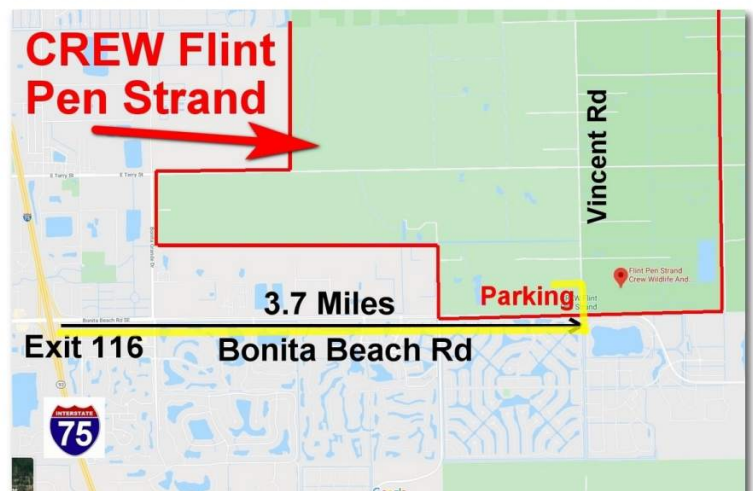
Admission: Free.

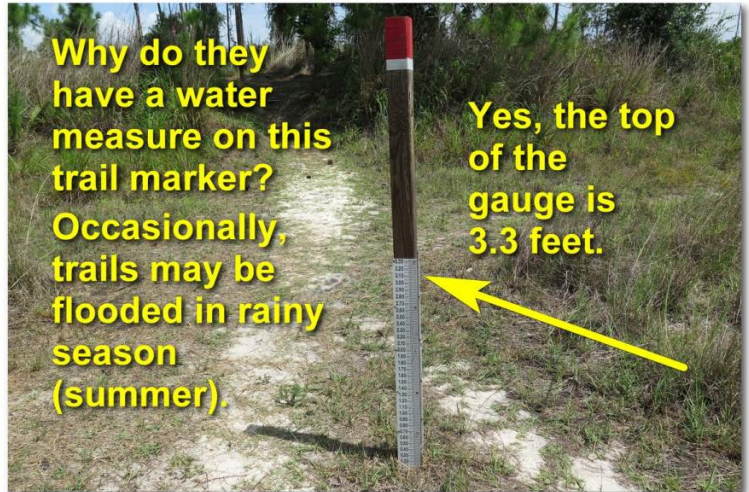
What: 14,000 acres of hiking trails and more. Trails:

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



**CREW Flint
Pen Strand**







**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.

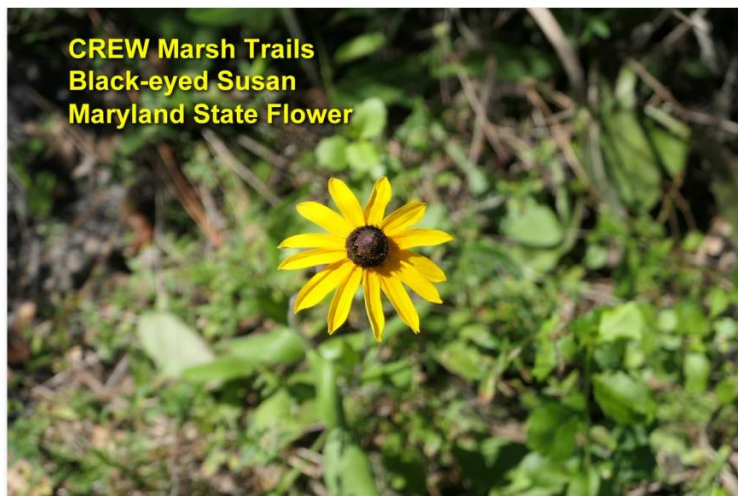
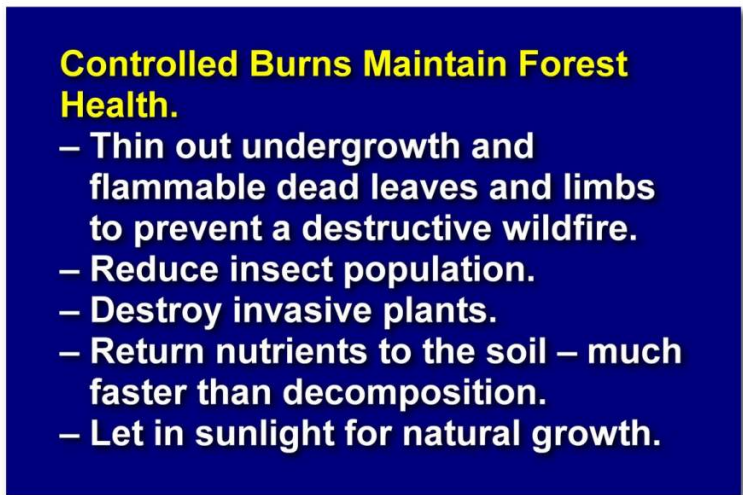
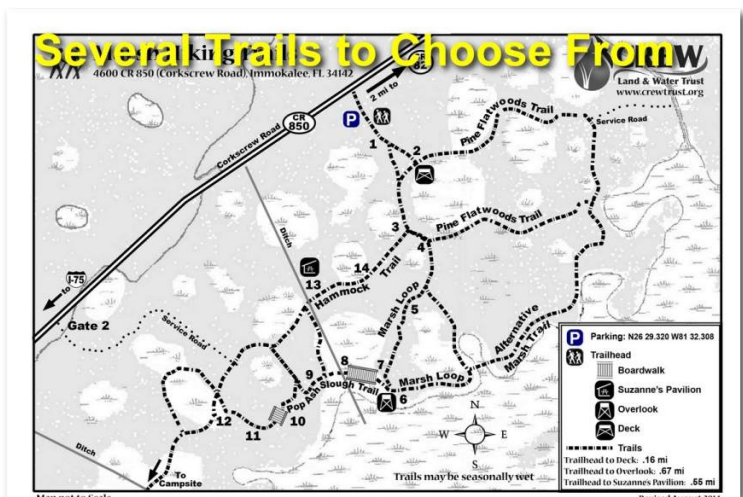
Admission: Free.

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 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.



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.





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 Approved by Lee County June 2022

**"A New
City"**

- 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**

Big Cypress Bend

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

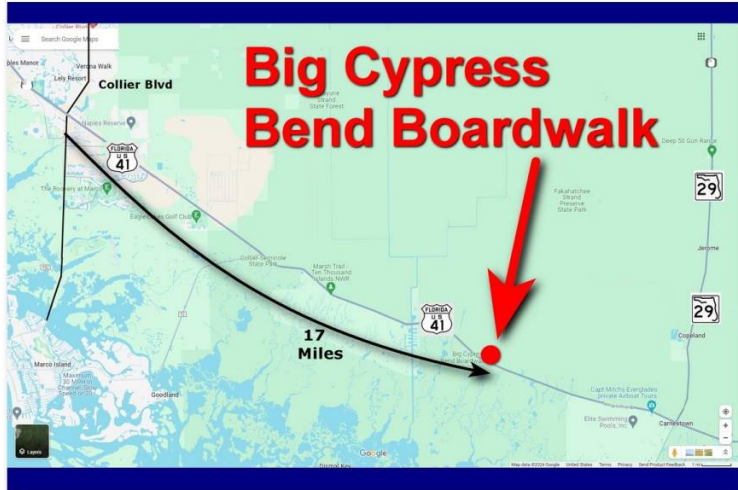
Website: www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park

Where: US-41, Copeland FL 34137.

Get There: US-41 East 17 miles from Collier Blvd intersection.

When: 8am to sunset.

Admission: \$3.



What: Fakahatchee Strand Preserve is the largest State Park in Florida (out of 175 parks).

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is one feature of the Preserve.

At the moment, there are TWO Big Cypress Bend Boardwalks: One closed and one partially open.

Eventually the two will be connected to form a loop.

Why are there currently two Big Cypress Bend Boardwalks?

- There is an old 3,200' boardwalk plus 1,000' gravel path thru a swamp to an alligator pond. Lots of wildlife.
- The State had planned a major loop extension of the old boardwalk – and had started work on a small part of the extension plus new parking and visitors' center – when Hurricane Ian hit in Sept 2022.

Ian made the old boardwalk unusable.

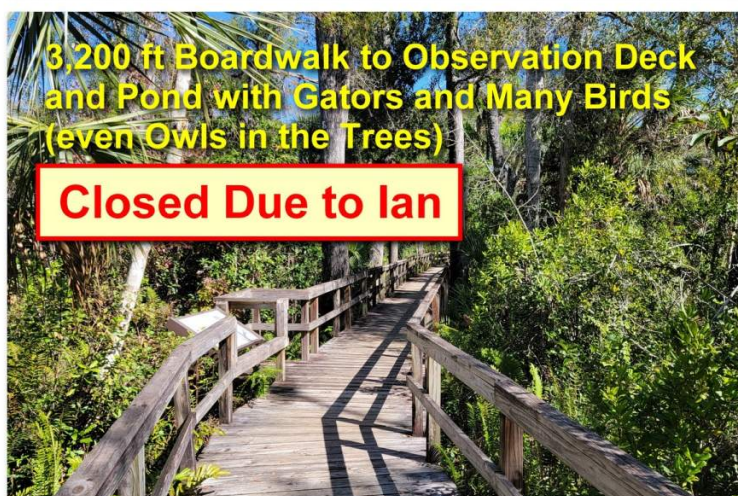
- The State had funding for only part of the new extension.
- Finally, in Feb 2024, about ½ mile of the new extension opened, along with a parking area and visitors' center.
- The State still needs funding for the rest of the new extension and also for repairs to the old boardwalk.

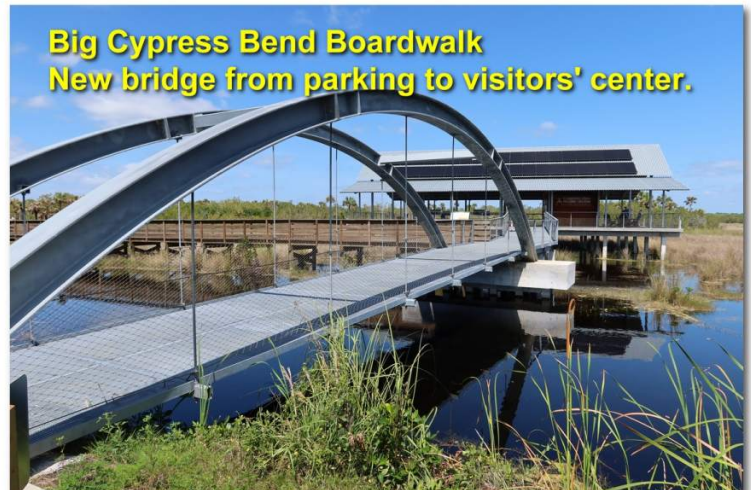
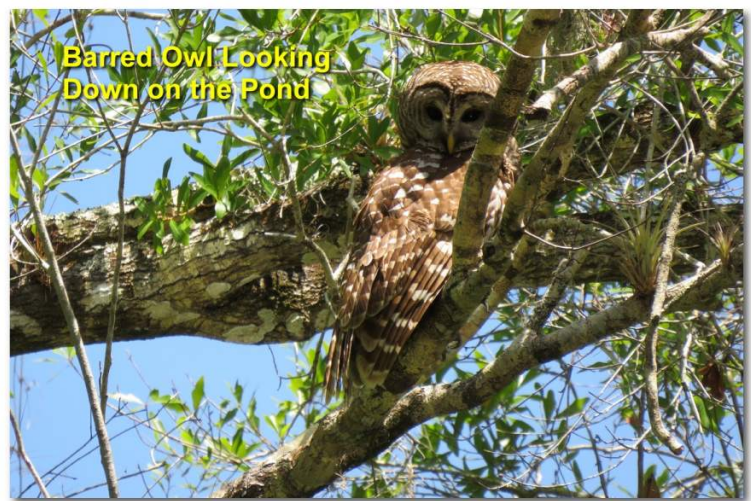
The map on the next slide illustrates all of this.



The next 4 slides show the OLD boardwalk and alligator pond.

- These are not currently accessible due to Hurricane Ian damage.
- After the old boardwalk is repaired, it will become part of the expanded hiking loop (including boardwalk, canopy walk, and trails) shown in the previous map.





Big Cypress Bend



Green Heron Lake - Snowy Egret



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



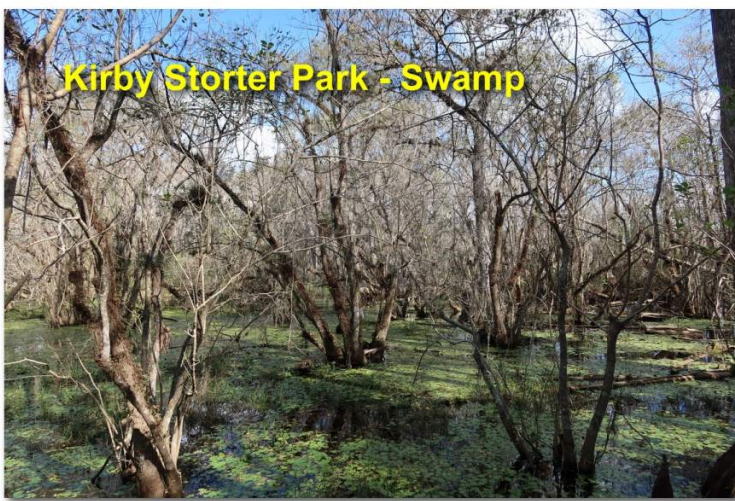
Kirby Storter Park Beginning of Boardwalk



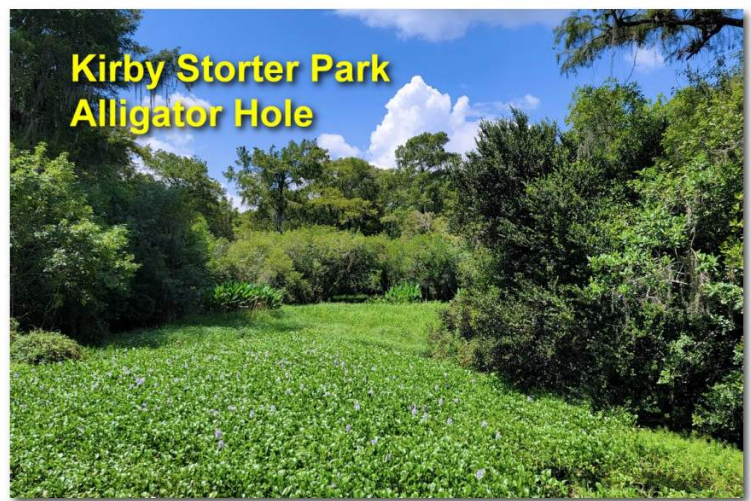
Kirby Storter Park

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

Immokalee
20 miles

Collier Blvd 21 miles

I-75 Exit 80

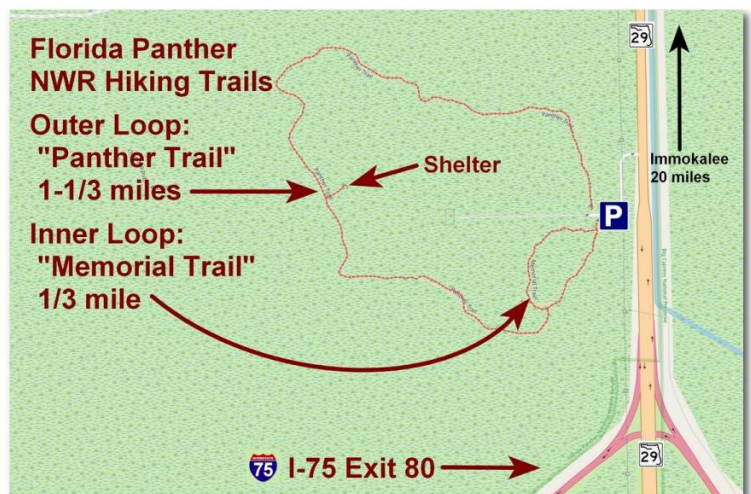
What: 26,400-acre refuge to protect panther habitat. Public access only on two trails in one corner. 12-16 Florida panthers den and roam there. Plus otters, alligators, birds.

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

Immokalee
20 miles

I-75 Exit 80

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

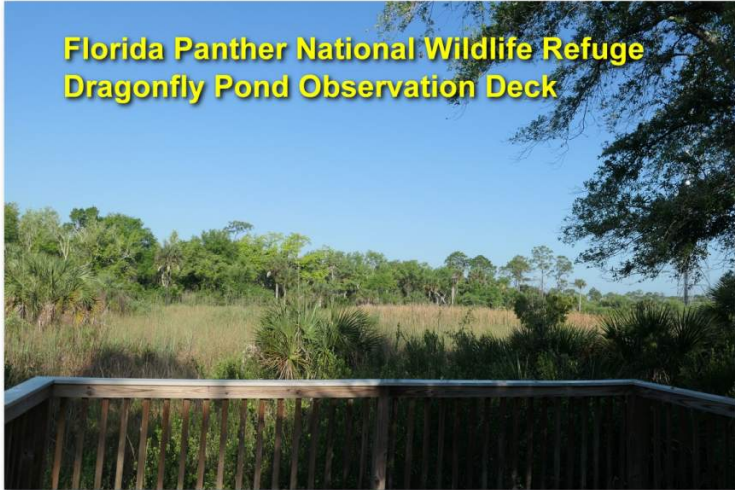
Orange: 1-1/3 Mile
Loop Trail

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



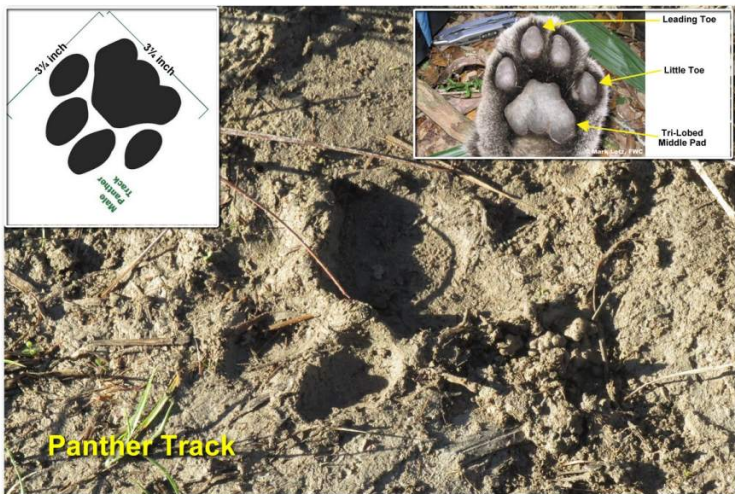
Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Trail Marker – Blue Loop Trail



Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Trail Marker – Orange Loop Trail



Fresh Panther Track Last Night or This Morning



Florida Purple Thistle
Wild. Occurs naturally in pinelands and
prairies. Some species like swamps.



