

Great Nature Hikes Within an Hour from Naples Presentation by Paul Pacter For Collier County Public Library

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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 Currently closed due to Hurricane Damage
- Kirby Storter Park
- Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
- Big Cypress Preserve Oasis Visitor Center

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.

Bring:

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



About the photos:

- I took them all.

Download PDF:

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Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

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.

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 is home to a wide variety of plants and animals

Fish: Nearly 200 species, including tarpon, snook, red drum, spotted sea trout, goliath grouper, smalltooth sawfish.

Birds: More than 200 species, including least tern, black skimmer, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, wood stork, brown pelican, mangrove cuckoo, red knot.

Reptiles: Including anoles, loggerhead sea turtles, green turtles, Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, alligators, a few crocodiles.

Animals: Including raccoon, river otter, bottlenose dolphin, Florida manatee.

Plants: Innumerable species, including mangroves, sea oats, cordgrass.

Invasive plants: Including latherleaf and Brazilian pepper.



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



**Spectacular View from Observation Tower
Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge**

This is between rainy and dry seasons.
Rainy: Cannot see mangrove roots at all.
Dry: Mangrove islands have land around them.



**Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge**



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

**Same place at
Ten Thousand Islands
National Wildlife Refuge
Observation Tower**

April 2022



March 2023



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

Past the observation tower, the paved trail becomes gravel.



In addition to the tower, there are several benches where you can sit and watch.



**Three Gators Sunning
Ten Thousand Islands NWR**



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



Today's Lunch Menu: Tilapia



Cormorant Eating
A Fish



Blue Heron



Ten Thousand Islands NWR
Anhinga



Limpkin

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



Ten Thousand Islands NWR
Tricolored Heron





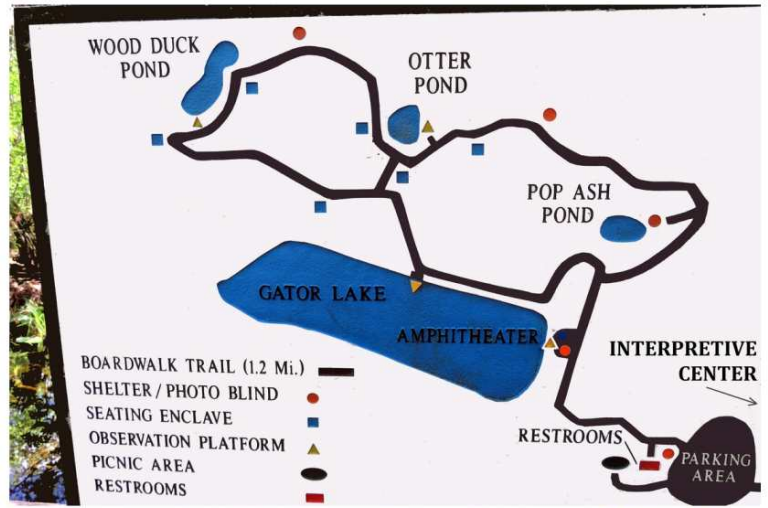
Six Mile Slough Preserve "Sloo"
Website: www.leegov.com/parks/preserves/sixmilecypress
Friends of Six Mile Slough:
www.sloughpreserve.org/
Where: 7751 Penzance Blvd at 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy, Fort Myers, FL. 33966.
Get There: I-75 Exit 131 Daniels Pkwy. West 2.7 mi to 6 Mile Cypress Pkwy. Right onto 6 Mile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

Most of Six Mile Cypress Slough is 2 to 3 feet of water



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

An educational sign titled "Butterflies in the Slough" and "Many interpretive signs along the walk". The sign features several sections:

- Eastern Tiger Swallowtail**: Describes its bright yellow color and black stripes.
- Roddy Daggerwing**: Notes its striking orange color and dark stripes.
- White Peacock**: Mentions its dark eye spots on the wings.
- Palamedes Swallowtail**: Describes its large, graceful form and search for swamp bay plants.
- Wetland Plants & Butterflies**: Lists plants like Slough Fly, Ruddy Duck, and Carolina Willow, and explains how they support butterfly life cycles.

Gator Lake



Man-made in the 1970s

Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Gator Lake



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



Each pond has a viewing platform

Great Blue Heron



Head to tail 36-54 inches.
Wingspan 66-79 inches.
Weight 4-8 lbs.

Another viewing platform at Gator Lake.
Also several resting platforms for gators and
birds in the lake:



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

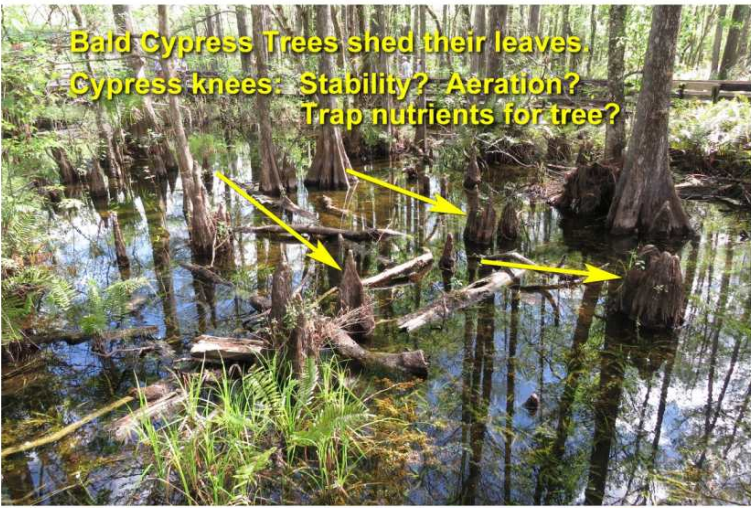


The white blotches on many trees are lichen



Most of the slough is covered in
water year round.





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



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Alligator at Wood Duck Pond

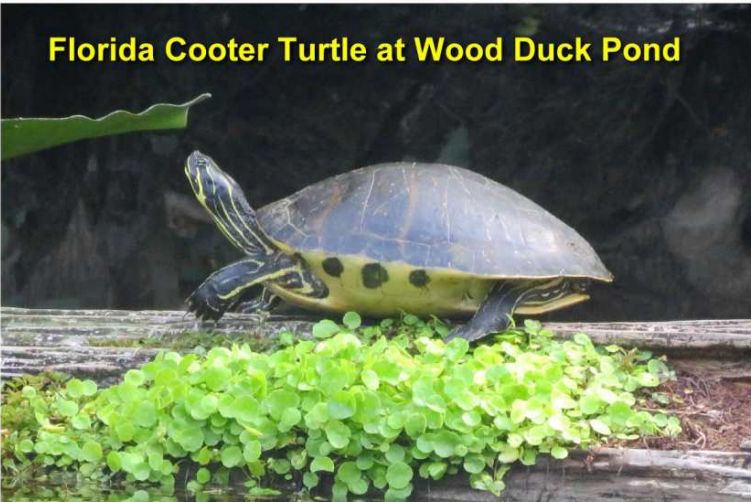


Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Juvenile Alligator Sunning - Wood Duck Pond

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



Alligator at Gator Lake

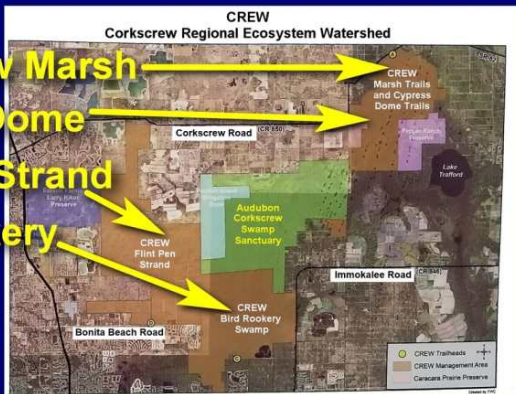


**Corkscrew Regional
Ecosystem
Watershed (CREW)**



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

Florida state record for length: 14-foot 3½ inch male from Lake Washington in Brevard County.
Florida record for weight: 1,043 pound (13 feet 10½ inch) male from Orange Lake in Alachua County.

CREW Bird Rookery Swamp



Before you start walking on the trail, read...

Sharing the Trail with Alligators

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

If you come across this ancient species, enjoy the moment. Not everyone gets to see alligators in the wild. The alligator is a large carnivorous reptile related to crocodiles, caimans, and even dinosaurs. Alligators live in fresh and brackish water throughout Florida, including this swampy area. Consider yourself lucky if you see an alligator here at Bird Rookery Swamp and please remember to keep a safe distance and never try to interact with or feed one.

Keep You and the Alligators Safe

- Do not feed or approach alligators or other wildlife.
- Alligators are a natural part of our environment and can be dangerous.
- A fed gator is a dead gator. If fed, alligators can lose their natural fear of humans. Once this happens, they must be trapped and euthanized.
- Observe and photograph alligators only from a safe distance.
- Respect their space as you would the space of any other animal.

Did you know?

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- A fed gator is a dead gator. If fed, alligators can lose their natural fear of humans. Once this happens, they must be trapped and euthanized.
- Observe and photograph alligators only from a safe distance.
- Respect their space as you would the space of any other animal.



0020-0000
Want to start YOGA?
Check out
"Swamp and Shore"
at the
Swamp and Shore
at the
Swamp and Shore

CAUTION
The walking of
dogs and pets
is not
recommended
along the trail
due to the
presence of

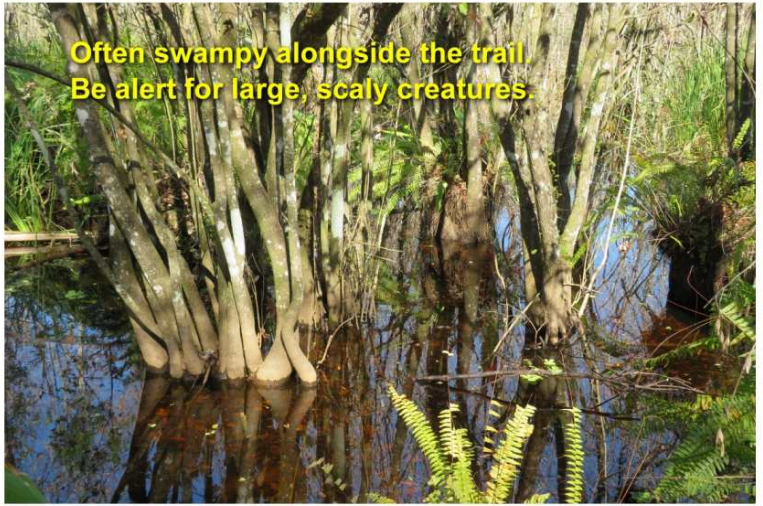
CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail
From Parking to Boardwalk
*Sometimes small gators and turtles
in the marsh on the left*

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

CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail
Boardwalk 1500 Feet

CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail Boardwalk

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





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
Red-shouldered Hawk
2021



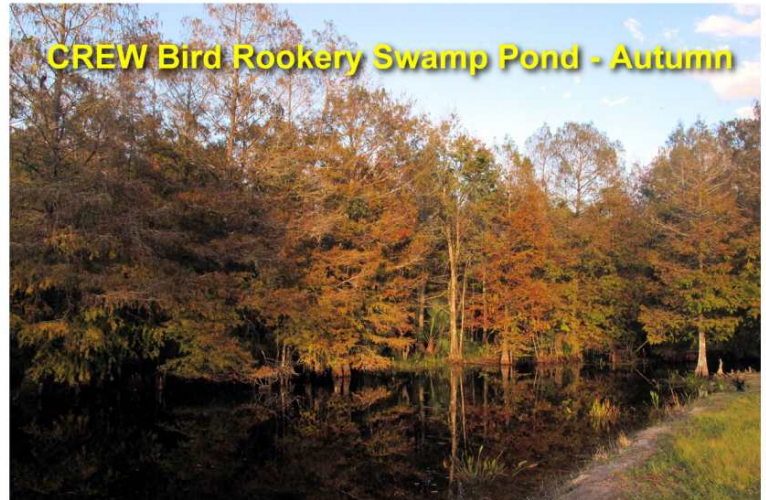
John James Audubon
Drawing 1839

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.

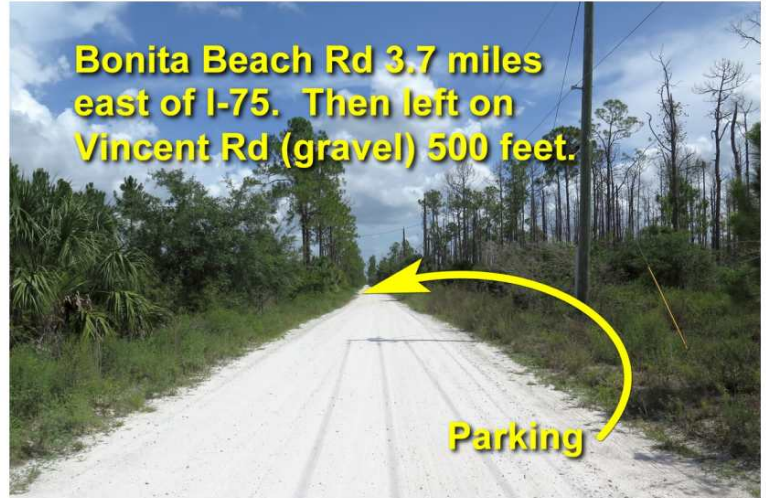
What: 14,000 acres of hiking trails and more. Trails:

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



Activities:

- Hiking. Some trails may be wet in rainy season.
- Biking.
- Nature study/photography.
- Birding.
- Running.
- Horseback Riding (special license needed, yellow trails).
- Hunting (seasonal with license, special areas).





**August 2020
Red**



**August 2020
Yellow**



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
Orange Trail**



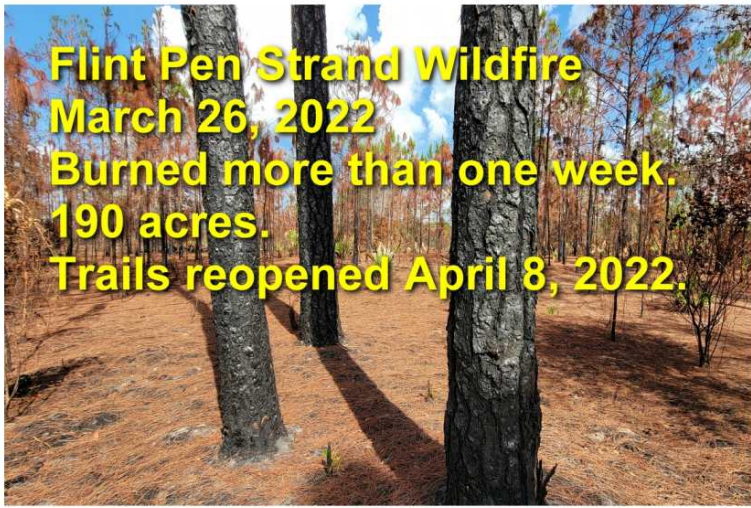
**CREW Flint Pen Strand
Slash Pines**



CREW Flint Pen Strand Trail Marker



**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.

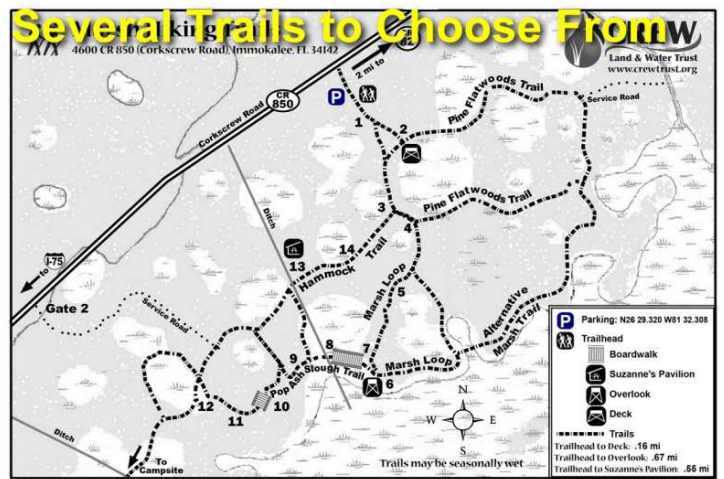
Admission: Free.

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



CREW Marsh Trails
Saw Palmettos



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 Marsh Trails

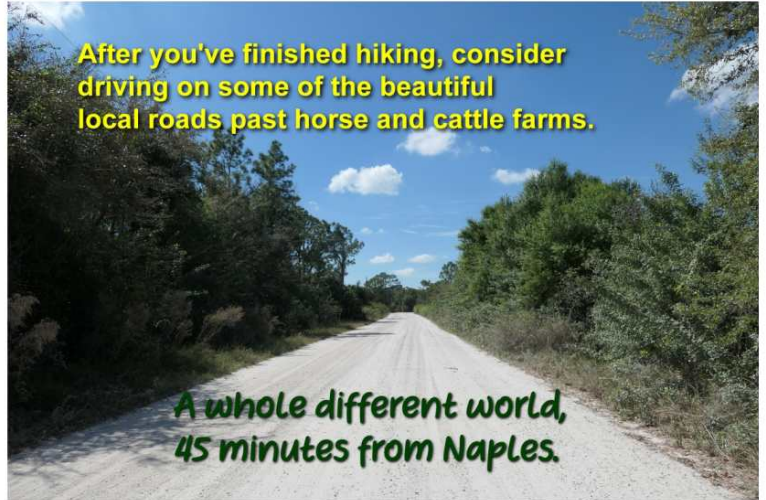


CREW Marsh Trails

CAUTION:
WATCH FOR ALLIGATORS



After you've finished hiking, consider driving on some of the beautiful local roads past horse and cattle farms.



*A whole different world,
45 minutes from Naples.*

**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**

**CREW Cypress Dome
Corkscrew Road
14 Miles East of I-75 Exit 123**



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.





At Cypress Dome, the Hiking Trails Are Generally Wide and Well Maintained
A Few Benches Along the Way



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



There Are Usually a Few Other Walkers
But Not Many



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



Controlled Burns at Cypress Dome. Maintains forest health.



End of the Green Loop Back at Parking Area



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 donation.

Temporarily closed due to Hurricane Ian

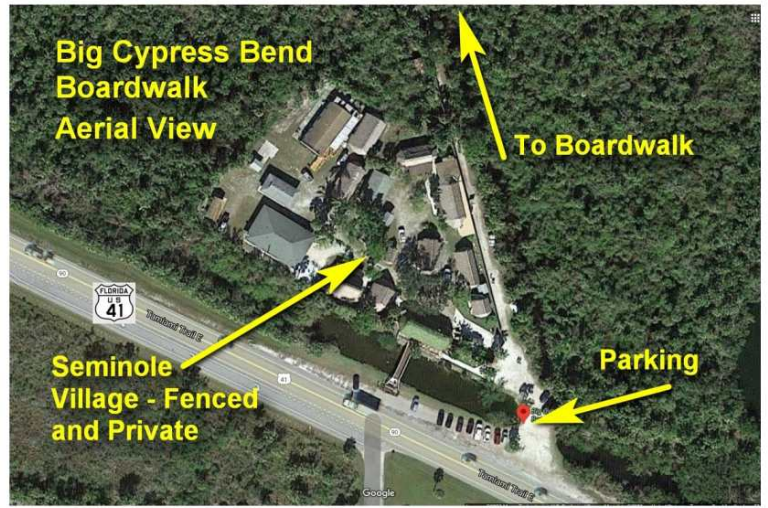
What: Fakahatchee Strand Preserve is the largest State Park in Florida (out of 175 parks).

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk is one feature of the Preserve.

3,200 feet long.

Winds through a beautiful, pristine section of Fakahatchee Strand swamp.

Ends at an alligator pond and observation deck.





Blue Heron Wading in the Stream



3,200 ft Boardwalk to Observation Deck and Pond with Gators and Many Birds (even Owls in the Trees)



Lunch Time Along the Boardwalk

Wood Stork

Florida White Ibis

Great Egret



Green Heron

"Typically stand still on shore or in shallow water and await prey"



Two Very Large Bald Cypress Trees
6 foot diameter at the base
Can be 500 years old (or more)*

*One in North Carolina is "at least 2,624 years old"

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



Mama Gator and 2 Babies



Lake at the End of the Boardwalk
One of the most beautiful spots in or near Naples!



Lake at the End of Big Cypress Boardwalk
There's a large observation deck with benches.



Barred Owl Looking Down on the Pond



Sometimes Two Barred Owls

Monogamous Mate for Life



Big Cypress Bend Observation Deck Benches to Sit and Watch



Big Cypress Bend Gators Cuddling



Alligator Mating Season May and June Big Cypress Bend



Large Alligator Sunning in the Pond



Banded Water Snake (Non-venomous) Often Mistaken for Cottonmouth



Vulture (aka Buzzard) May be a Turkey Vulture Wing Span 6 Feet Scavenger

Vulture

Turkey Vulture





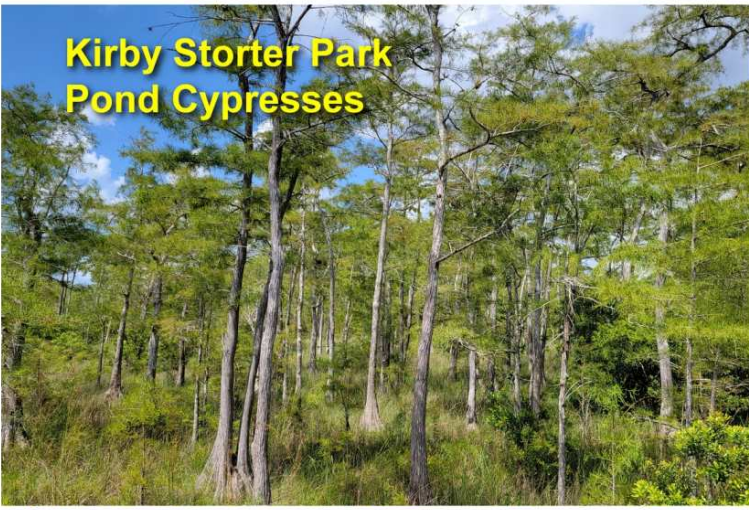
Kirby Storter Park
 Part of Big Cypress National Preserve
 Website:
www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/kirby-storter-roadside-park.htm
Where: 48900 Tamiami Trail E, Ochopee, FL 34141.
Get There: On US-41 (Tamiami Trail) 37 miles east of Collier Blvd. Or take I-75 to State Rd 29 exit then down to US-41.
Admission: 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.



**Kirby Storter Park
Pond Cypresses**



**Kirby Storter Park
Sawgrass Prairie**



**Kirby Storter Park
Now Entering Cypress Swamp**



**Kirby Storter Park
Cypress Swamp**



**Kirby Storter Park
Cooter Turtle**



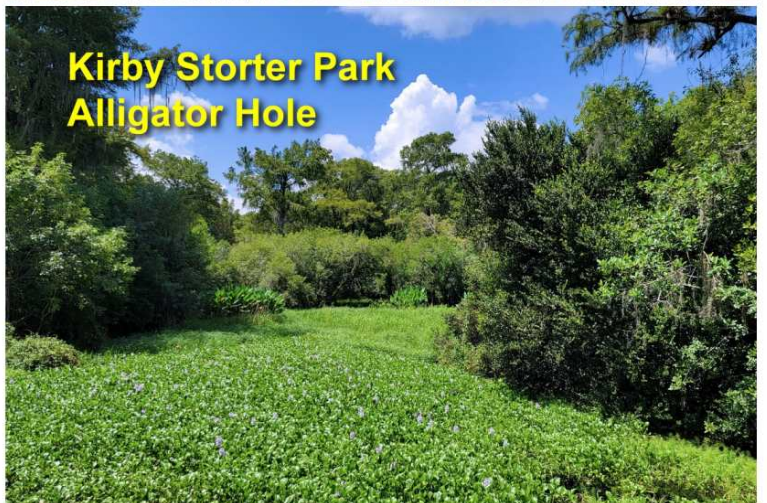
**Kirby Storter Park
Cypress Swamp**



Kirby Storter Park - Softshell Turtle



**Kirby Storter Park
Alligator Hole**



Kirby Storter Park Juvenile Alligator



Kirby Storter Park Cooter Turtle



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.

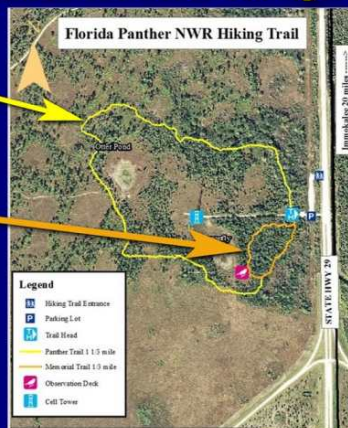


There are only around 250 Florida panthers in the wild in all of Florida. (In 1970s there were only 20.)

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

Outer Loop:
 "Panther Trail"
 1-1/3 mile.

Small Loop:
 "Memorial Trail"
 1/3 mile.



Adult Florida panther:

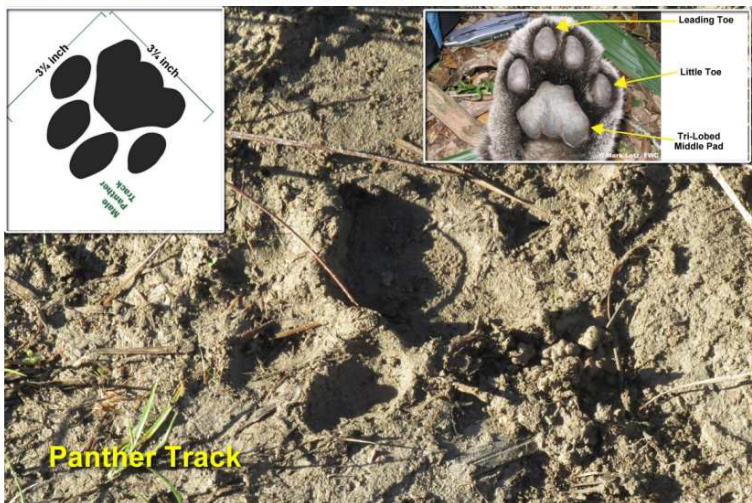
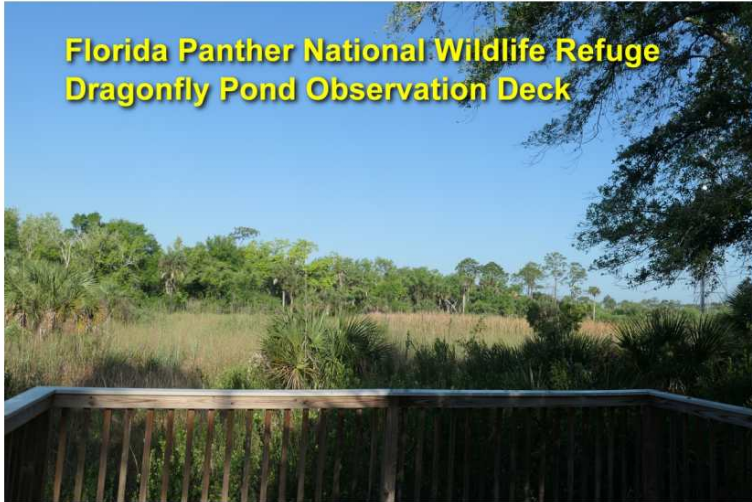
Unspotted.
 Typically tan overall.
 Underside is dull white
 Tip of tail, back of ears,
 and sides of muzzle blackish.



Kittens:

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





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



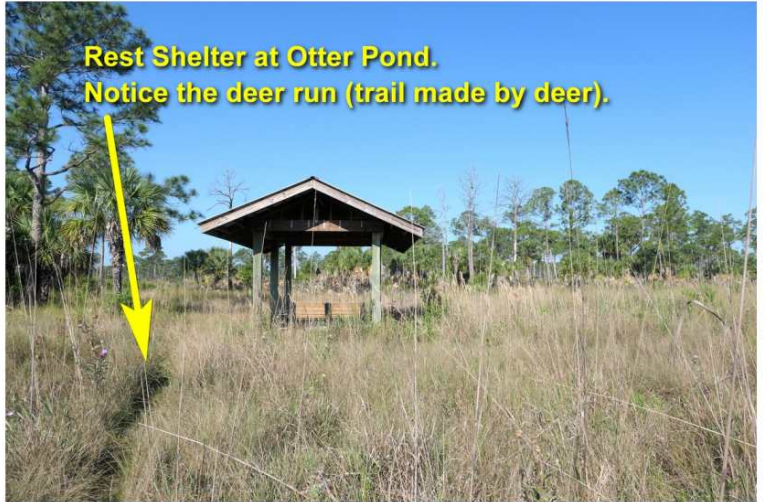
**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Slash pines**



**Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
This is called Otter Pond.
But no otters and no water in sight (March 2020).**



**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
aka Cherokee Bean**



**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.



National Geographic Movie



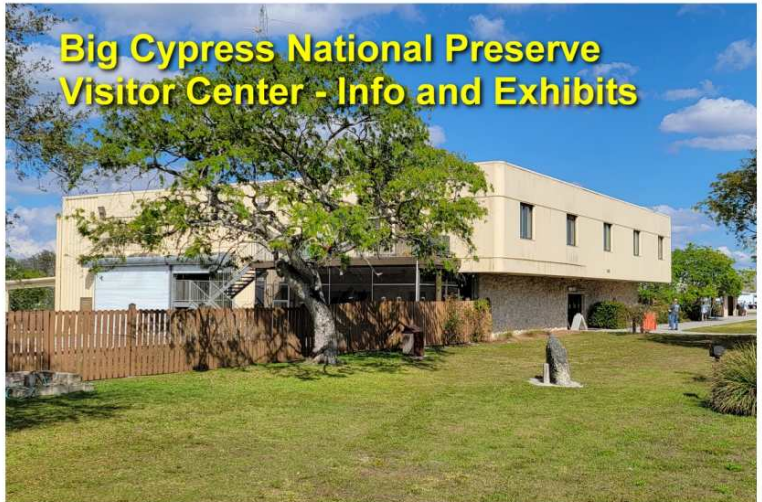
PATH OF THE
PANTHER

"Path of the Panther, a new nature documentary about the fight to preserve the Florida Everglades and its titular feline, never lets you forget that the clock is ticking." www.rottentomatoes.com



**Oasis Visitor Center
Big Cypress
National Preserve**

**Big Cypress National Preserve
Oasis Visitor Center
33100 Tamiami Trail East
Ochopee, FL 34141
Not a hike.
Great boardwalk to see
lots of alligators
swimming in a canal.
On US-41
45 mi East of Collier Blvd.**



**Big Cypress National Preserve
Visitor Center - Info and Exhibits**

**Big Cypress
National Preserve
Boardwalk
Oasis Visitor
Center**



Views from the Boardwalk



Big Cypress Bend



CREW Cypress Dome



CREW Flint Pen Strand



CREW Marsh Trails

THE END
I hope you enjoyed these
great hikes near Naples
ppacter@gmail.com
www.paulvisits.com
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Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve



Florida Panther NWR



Kirby Storter Park



CREW Bird Rookery



10,000 Islands NWR