

Great Nature Hikes Within An Hour of Naples

Presentation by Paul Pacter

www.PaulVisits.com

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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
- Kirby Storter Park
- Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

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:

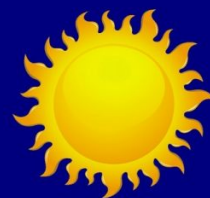
- Hat.
- Sunscreen.
- Insect repellent.
- Water.

About the photos:

- I took them all.

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Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Where: Visit by boat trip is best.

By car: US-41, 11 mi E of Collier Blvd.

Daily: Free.

What: 35,000 acres.

Mangrove islands.

Countless plants, wildlife.

1-mile hiking trail, observation tower.

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Marsh Trail → **P** 11 mi E of Collier Blvd
Hiking 1.2 mi x 2 = 2.4 mi

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

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Start of Marsh Trail 1.2 miles.
First 1000' paved. Then gravel.

Do Not
Forget!



Ten Thousand Islands NWR Red Mangroves



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Roseate Spoonbill Anhinga Cormorant



Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge Observation Tower



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



10,000 Islands NWR Brown Pelicans



Cormorant Eating A Fish



Limpkin

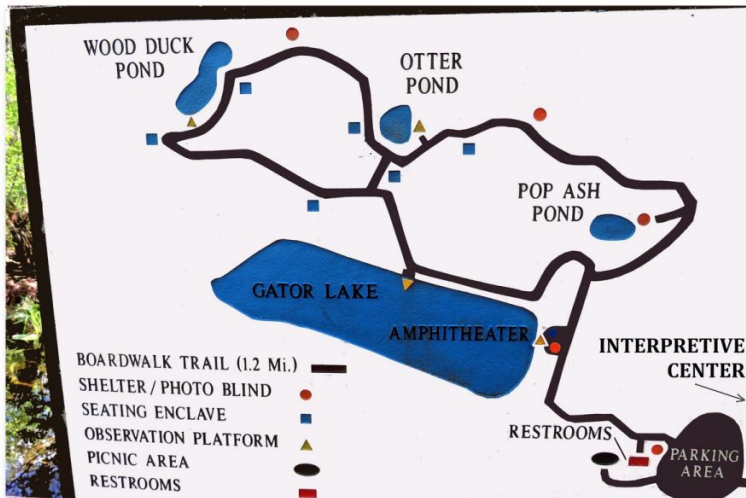
Their diet is dominated by apple snails. This one is at Collier-Seminole State Park next to Ten Thousand Islands.





Six-mile Cypress Slough ("Sloo") Preserve
Website: www.leegov.com/parks/parks/sixmilecypress
Lee County Park off Daniels Pkwy: I-75 Exit 131.

- 3,500 acres of protected wetlands.
- 11 miles long. 1/3 mile wide.
- 1.2 mile boardwalk over the water. Accessible.
- Four viewing platforms onto lakes.



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



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



Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Alligator at Wood Duck Pond

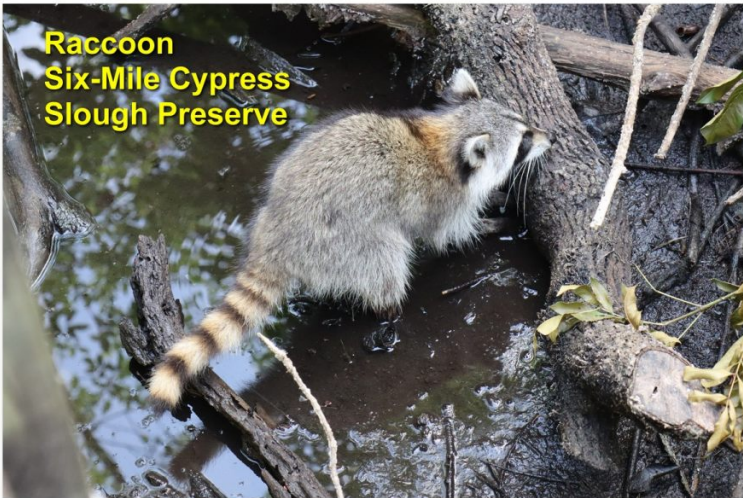


Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve
Juvenile Alligator Sunning - Wood Duck Pond

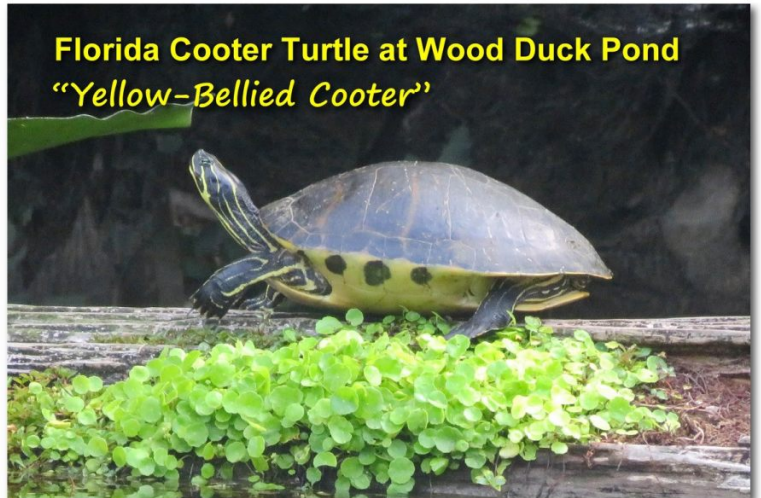


Gators are about 8 inches when they hatch.
Grow about 1 inch a month.

Raccoon
Six-Mile Cypress
Slough Preserve



Florida Cooter Turtle at Wood Duck Pond
"Yellow-Bellied Cooter"



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



Sleeping in a Tree

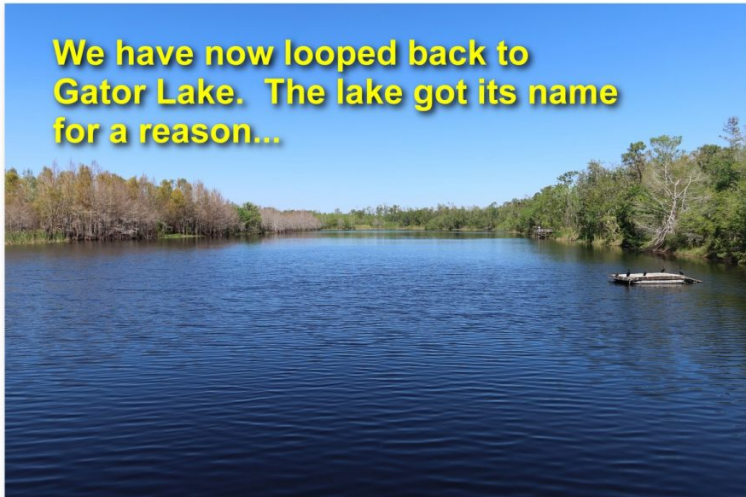
Otter Pond
(I wasn't lucky enough to see one)



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



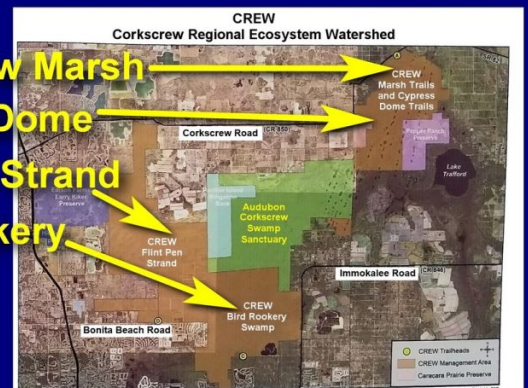
**About 5 million alligators in USA.
1.25 million in Florida.
Fresh water. Natatorial.
Cold blooded.**

**Corkscrew Regional
Ecosystem
Watershed (CREW)**



CREW Land and Water Trust

**Corkscrew Marsh
Cypress Dome
Flint Pen Strand
Bird Rookery**



**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. Off Immokalee Rd 11 mi E of I-75.

Get There: Immokalee Road then left (shortly past County Fair Grounds) on Shady Hollow Blvd. On the right shortly after Shady Hollow becomes gravel.

**CREW
Bird
Rookery
Swamp
Trails**

Complete loop
from Parking
and back 12 miles

Immokalee Rd

From Parking
to Here 1.2 mi.

Boardwalk

Parking

Shady Hollow Blvd W

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

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

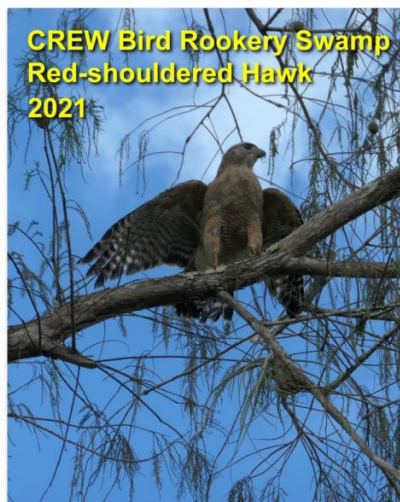
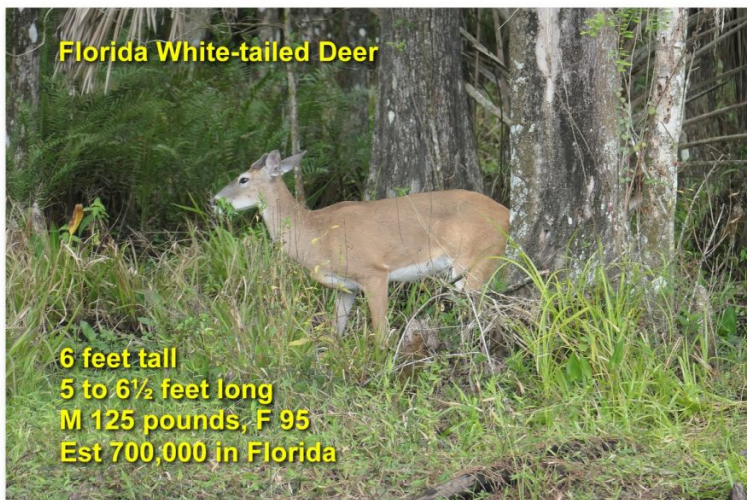
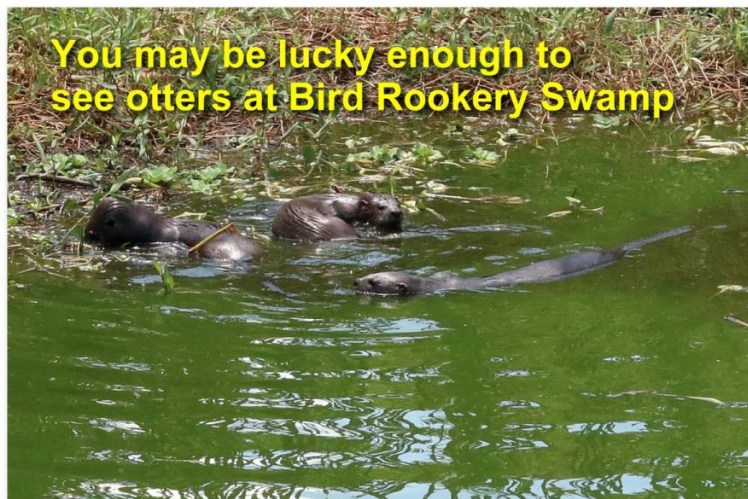
Sometimes small gators and turtles
in the marsh on the left

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.

In the canal next to the trail





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



Trails are well marked



Why do they have a water measure on this trail marker?

Occasionally, trails may be flooded in rainy season (summer).

Yes, the top of the gauge is 3.3 feet.



August 2020 Red



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



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

This is a hard pine. Used for construction lumber





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.



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.

Sawgrass Marsh Observation Tower



CREW Marsh Trails
Woodpecker Holes



CREW Cypress Dome Trails



Crew Cypress Dome Hiking Trails

(CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed)

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

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

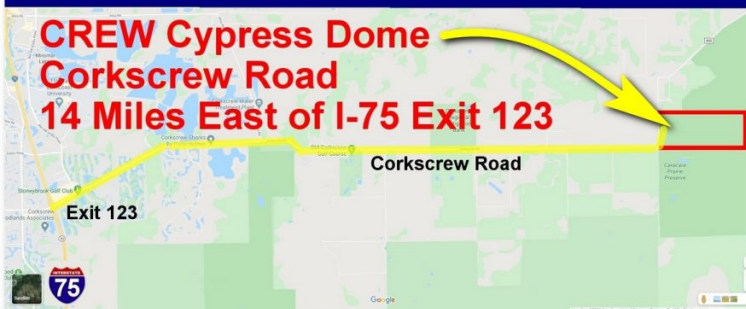
Get There: I-75 Exit 123 Corkscrew Rd. East on Corkscrew 14 miles.

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

Admission: Free. Donation box.

CREW Cypress Dome Hiking Trails - Immokalee

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.





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

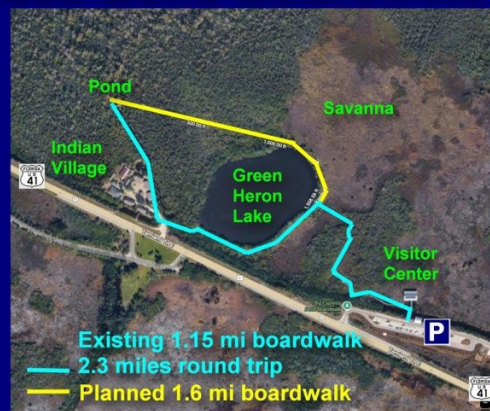
- Currently, the Boardwalk is 2.3-mile round trip walk from parking at US-41.
- An additional 1.6 mile Boardwalk is planned.
- Eventually will be a 2.7 mile loop.

Map on next slide...

Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk

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

Part of the yellow is planned as a canopy walk.



Big Cypress Bend – More Info

Website:

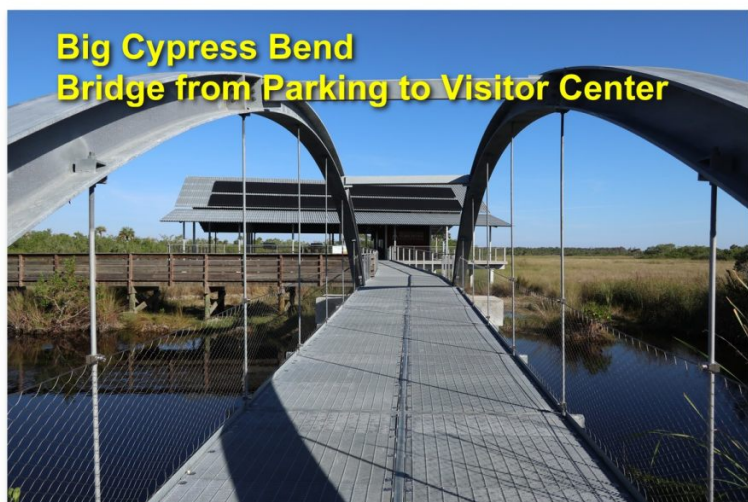
<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fakahatchee-strand-preserve-state-park>

Where: US-41, Copeland, FL.

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

When: 8am to sunset.

Admission: \$3.



Big Cypress Bend
Start of Boardwalk from Parking
Often wading birds and gators in water



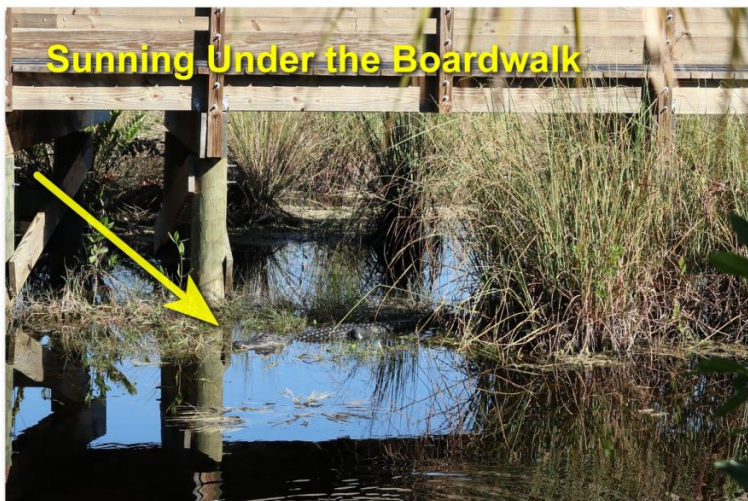
Big Cypress Bend



Florida Spotted Gar (Fish)



Sunning Under the Boardwalk



Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk



After first Boardwalk is a gravel path around part of Green Heron Lake.



Green Heron Lake
Big Cypress Bend



Snowy Egret at Green Heron Lake



Mama and 2 baby gators



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

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



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



Tricolored Heron

Blue Heron

Two Gators

Big Cypress Bend Pond



Barred Owl Looking
Down on the Pond



Kirby Storter Park Big Cypress National Preserve



Kirby Storter Park

Part of Big Cypress National Preserve.
On Us-41: 37 miles East of Collier Blvd.

Admission: Free, dawn to dusk.

Half-mile boardwalk through sawgrass
prairie, cypress swamp, alligator hole.

– Gators dig hole for deep water
in dry season.

– **Most of boardwalk temporarily closed!**

Wildlife: Includes birds, snakes, fish,
turtles, and alligators.

Map of Big Cypress National Preserve



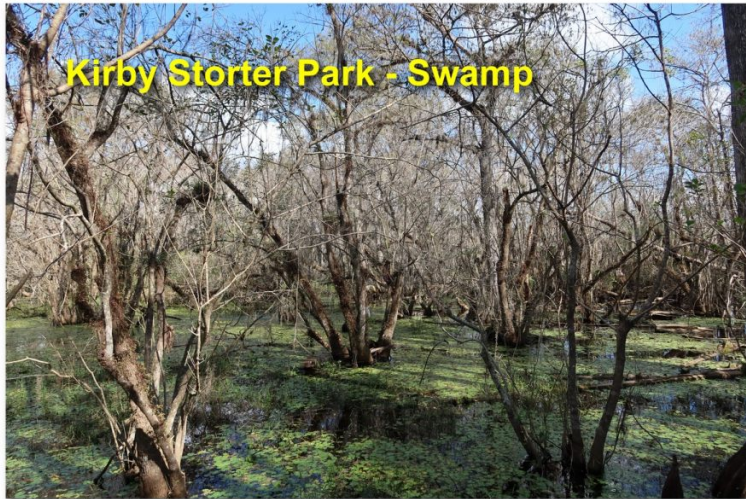


**Kirby Storter Park
Beginning of Boardwalk**



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**



**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.



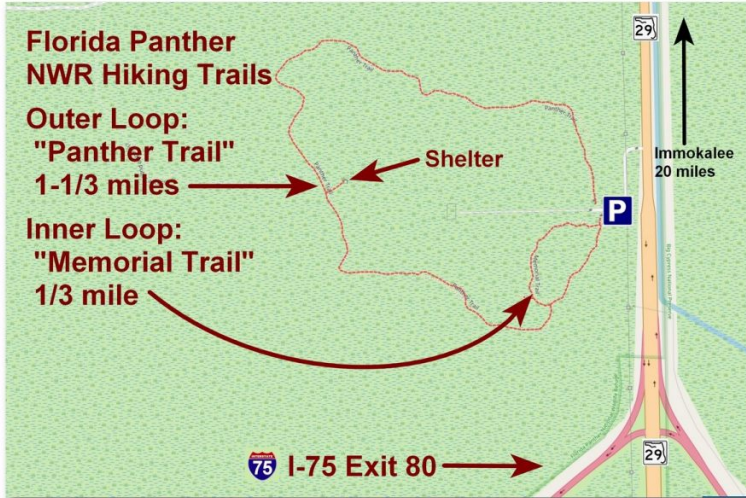
What: 26,400-acre refuge to protect panther habitat. Public access only on two trails in one corner. 12-16 Florida panthers den and roam there. Plus otters, alligators, birds.

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.)





Adult Florida panther:

Unspotted.

Typically tan overall.

Underside is dull white

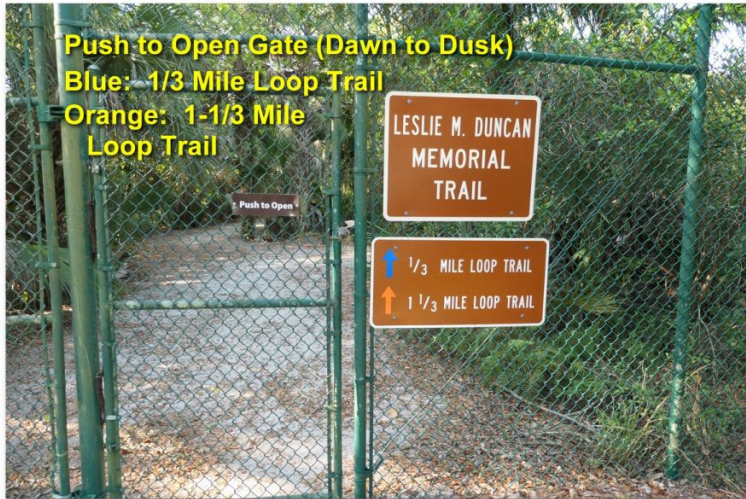
Tip of tail, back of ears,
and sides of muzzle blackish.

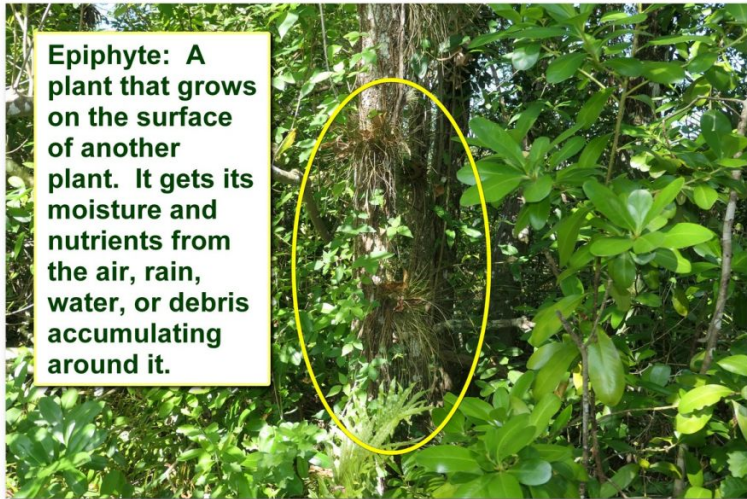
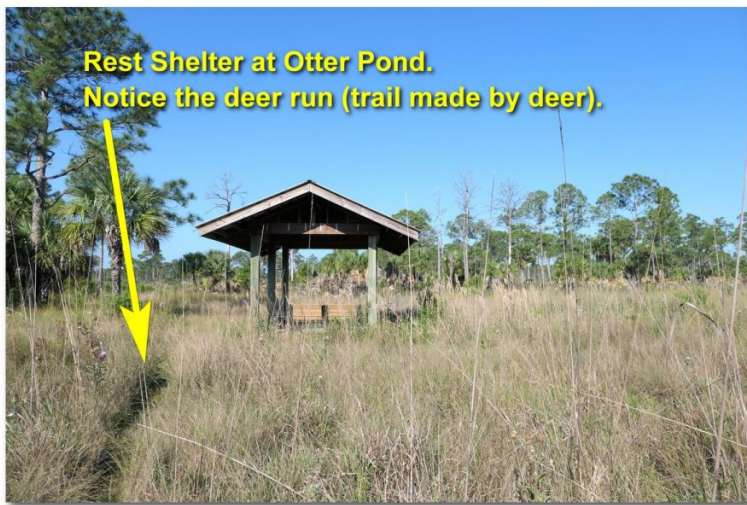


Kittens:

Gray with dark brown or
blackish spots and five
bands around the tail.

Spots fade as kittens grow older.





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