

BROOKER CREEK PRESERVE

Brooker Creek Preserve is managed by Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management's Environmental Lands Division.

Our mission is to provide sound stewardship to the County's wild lands and waterways and opportunities for the appreciation of their intrinsic value. Established in the early 1990s by the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, Brooker Creek Preserve remains the largest natural area in the County. At approximately 8,700 acres, the Preserve protects a wide diversity of natural communities and provides vital habitat for many species of plants and animals. Managing the lands adjacent to Brooker Creek also protects the water quality of Lake



Tarpon. Since 1999, this trail has provided visitors an opportunity to experience the Preserve. In 2001 this trail was renamed The Friends Trail in honor of The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc., a not-for-profit citizen support group dedicated to the long-term conservation of the Preserve. To learn more about the Friends visit www.friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org.

We also offer:

Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center

- Interactive exhibits
- Hikes – both guided and self-guided
- Workshops and special events
- Resource center and programs
- A nature store
- Picnic facilities

Call (727) 453-6800 for more information.

Scenic Horse and Exercise Horse Trails
Approximately 9 miles of equestrian trails
Open daily, sunrise to sunset

Call (727) 453-6900 for more information.

WELCOME TO THE FRIENDS TRAIL

Please help us manage this trail for your enjoyment and the protection of our natural resources.

Please:

- Remain on the designated hiking trail (marked with red-topped posts).
- Yield to horses where the path intersects with the Exercise Horse Trail.
- Properly dispose of all trash.

The following are PROHIBITED:

- All domesticated animals, except trained guide animals
- Unauthorized vehicles, including bicycles, motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles
- Alcoholic beverages
- Glass containers
- Fireworks
- Smoking

Trail Hours

Open daily, sunrise to sunset

About this Trail

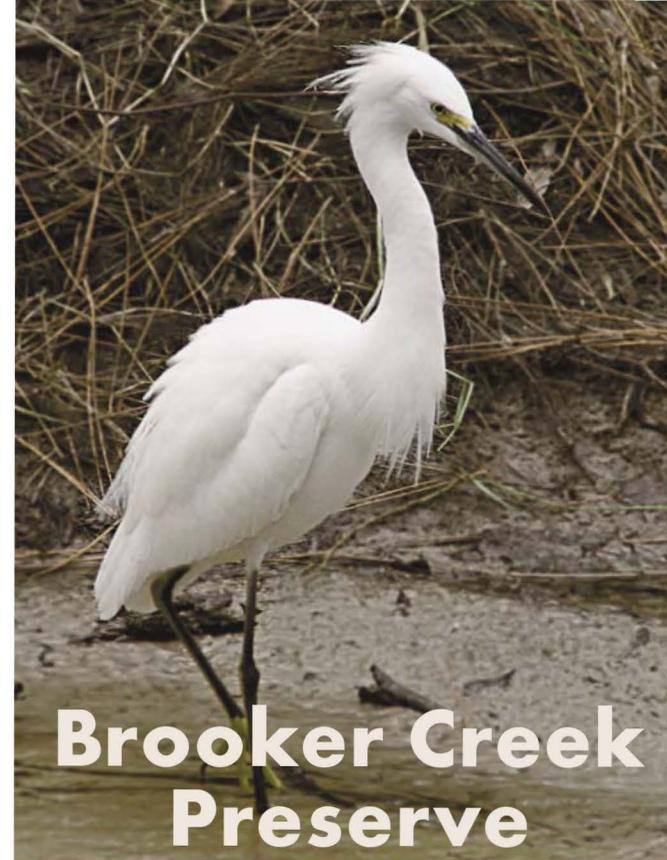
This hiking trail has been left in its natural state to minimize the impact of our presence in this area. Some portions of the trail may have standing water during the rainy season. No restrooms or picnic facilities are available. A small footbridge allows hikers easy access over the steep banks of a drainage ditch that bisects the trail. An elevated wildlife observation deck with benches is located just a short distance from the footbridge.

Please Note

Under the Pinellas County Preserve Ordinance 08-29, all plants and animals are protected. Feeding of wildlife is not allowed.

Volunteer Opportunities

Brooker Creek Preserve is strongly supported through volunteerism, including trail maintenance. If you are interested, please call (727) 453-6900.



Brooker Creek Preserve

For additional information, please contact us:

General Information: (727) 453-6900

Guided Hike Reservations: (727) 453-6910

ENVLDS 08/09

Brooker Creek Preserve
3620 Fletch Haven Drive
Tarpon Springs, FL 34688



www.pinellascounty.org/environment

Pinellas County complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To obtain accessible formats of this document, please contact us at (727) 453-6900/TDD-Text Phone (727)464-4062.

BROOKER CREEK PRESERVE

The Friends Trail

Visitors will enjoy getting back to nature along this 1.75 mile, self-interpretive hiking trail at Brooker Creek Preserve. This natural path takes hikers through pine flatwood communities, past a swamp under restoration, and eventually to the banks of Brooker Creek. There are 15 stops along the way, which correspond to the numbered highlights within this guide. Watch for them along this trail through "Our Wildest Place."



1 LAYERS

We often describe habitats based on layers or strata. Look upward to the slash pines that form the overstory or canopy. The shorter trees and bushes that grow below the canopy are called the understory, dominated by saw palmetto. The lowest layer is called the groundcover, a mix of pine needles and grasses. Many animals prefer certain layers. The great crested flycatcher is almost always found high in the canopy while the Eastern towhee prefers feeding in the saw palmetto. Eastern cottontail rabbits like to eat the tender grasses found in the groundcover.

2 OBSERVATION DECK

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc., using funds from a generous donation and help from the Preserve staff, constructed this observation deck. Climbing just a few feet higher gives you a different perspective as you look over this restored swamp. The small cypress and other wetland trees you see were planted as part of a mitigation project. Mitigation occurs when developers are required to enhance, restore, or create wetland habitat because their construction activities resulted in a loss elsewhere. When mitigation occurs in a place that is different from the construction site, as in this case, it is called off-site mitigation.

3 FOOTBRIDGE

You might think the channel below this bridge is Brooker Creek, but it is not. Brooker Creek is a collection of 13 channels that meander through the Preserve toward Lake Tarpon. All of these channels eventually converge into one main channel, which is about a half a mile from this point. This ditch is part of our local drainage program that diverts water away from nearby neighborhoods into the wetlands of the Preserve and eventually into Brooker Creek.

4 PINE FLATWOODS

The different natural features within an area, such as elevation, soil type and moisture, determine habitat. Each habitat has unique features that make it home to different species of organisms. This habitat is called pine flatwoods, characterized by a canopy of slash and longleaf pine and an understory of saw palmetto. Many different grasses and wildflowers also are found here. Pine flatwoods in Florida evolved as a fire dependent community with lightning strike fires clearing out the understory every 3-5 years.

5 TRACKS AND SCAT

While it is a thrill to see a wild animal along the trail, more often the only evidence you'll find of their presence is through tracks and scat. Scat is a scientific term for a mammal's droppings and, like ours, should not be handled without proper protection. As you walk the trail, look for tracks in the sandy and muddy areas. Deer, raccoon and armadillo tracks are common.

6 LICHENS

Goodness! Did paint balls hit those trees? No, the pink and white splotches on many tree trunks and branches are baton rouge, a species of lichen. When algae and bacteria team up, they form lichen. Scientists call this a mutualistic relationship because both organisms benefit from the interaction. Lichens do not harm the tree and certainly add color to this already beautiful landscape.

7 BROOKER CREEK

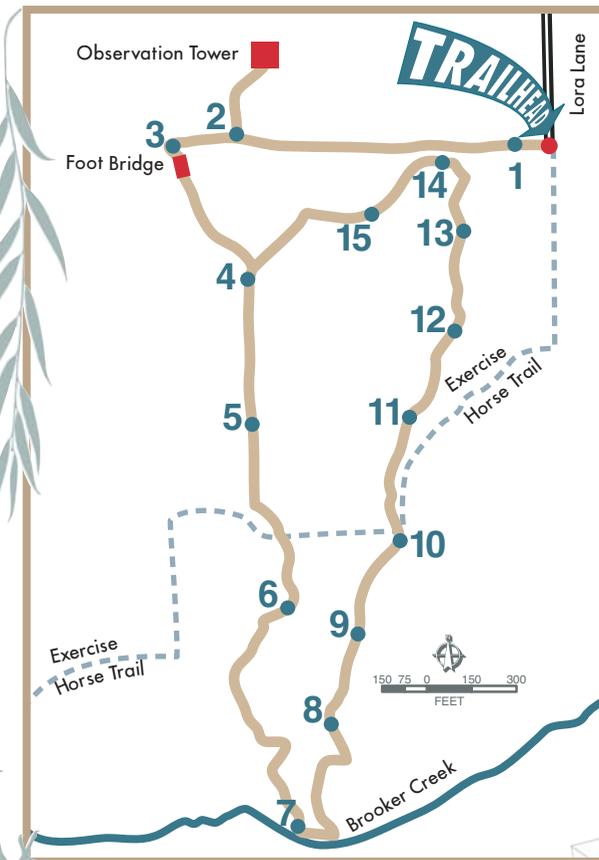
This is the main channel of Brooker Creek. The headwaters of this creek are a series of cypress domes in northwestern Hillsborough County. This channel travels 15 miles from the headwaters to Lake Tarpon and is fed by 12 other smaller channels within the Brooker Creek watershed. During the dry months it's not unusual for all channels to dry up, which is why scientists call this an ephemeral system. The word ephemeral means "lasting a short time," and indeed water sometimes flows within the Creek for only a few months. Over 500 species of plants, more than 20 species of amphibians, 50 species of reptiles, and 40 species of mammals live within the watershed. The Preserve protects approximately 33% of the Brooker Creek watershed.

8 INVASIVE EXOTICS

"Exotic" sounds like a good thing, doesn't it? However, in this case, an "exotic" refers to a species that is brought in from another part of the world and is not normally found here. Exotic species often have no natural control measures, such as predators or diseases, to keep their numbers in balance with the rest of nature. As a result, some exotics grow out of control and become problematic or invasive. Exotic vegetation can choke our native flora, which provide food and shelter for birds and mammals. Our managers work diligently to keep invasive exotics under control on the Preserve.

9 PRESCRIBED FIRE

Fire is a very important factor that shapes ecosystems in Florida. A fire-adapted community needs fire to maintain the



ecological balance between the species that reside within the community. Before Florida was developed, lightning strikes were the source of most fires. Now, managers use prescribed burns in areas that used to burn naturally. Prescribed fire improves wildlife habitat, sometimes helps remove exotics and reduces the potential for catastrophic wildfires. See if you can spot heavy understory in this area that has become overgrown due to fire suppression. Prescribed burns are conducted on a regular basis on the Preserve.

10 EQUESTRIAN TRAIL

The trail to your left and right is part of the Exercise Horse Trail. This trail offers local riders about three miles of riding pleasure. Because hikers and horses don't mix well, it's important for safety reasons for hikers to yield to horses and always stay on the hiking trail.

11 LISTED SPECIES

Listed species are those that have special protection under Federal and/or State laws. Generally speaking, a species

becomes listed when so few individuals remain that the survival of their species is uncertain. Listed species include those that are endangered, threatened or are a species of special concern. Brooker Creek Preserve provides a haven for protected species such as Catesby's lilies and gopher tortoises.

12 RESTORATION

Restoration is a process where managers work to bring an area back to conditions similar to those that occurred naturally at some point in recent history. Efforts are currently underway to restore portions of the Preserve that have been impacted by past land uses. These efforts include planting native trees and grasses, repairing old jeep trails and firebreaks that alter overland flow of water, and opening up blocked creek channels.

13 NATIVE AMERICANS

Native Americans lived in this area long before modern humans called Florida home. They used many of the plants you see today within the Preserve for food, shelter, transportation, clothing and more. Pine tree trunks were used to make dugout canoes for travel on creeks and bays. Saw palmetto and palm fronds were used as thatching for roofs. Parts of the palm and palmetto were twisted into ropes. Look around you and imagine how you might use the plants around you to survive!

14 BUGS AND OTHER CREEPY THINGS

Shouldn't we try to get rid of all these bugs? No! The importance of insects to the ecological health of all habitats is often overlooked when we are only thinking of our comfort. Insects pollinate over 80% of the flowering plants in Florida. They also are important food sources for other animals, and they help decompose dead matter. We need these invertebrates. Stand very still and see if you can see or hear the insects around you.

15 TRANSITIONS

The open area to the south was once a planted pine plantation where trees stood in straight rows. When it was logged, several "seed" trees were left behind to repopulate the area naturally. If you look closely, these trees line up with each other in straight rows. Areas that have been recently logged or timbered do not have much of an overstory. However, 20 years from now, as the overstory fills in and the site is re-colonized by native herbaceous vegetation, it will look like any other pine flatwood community within this region.