



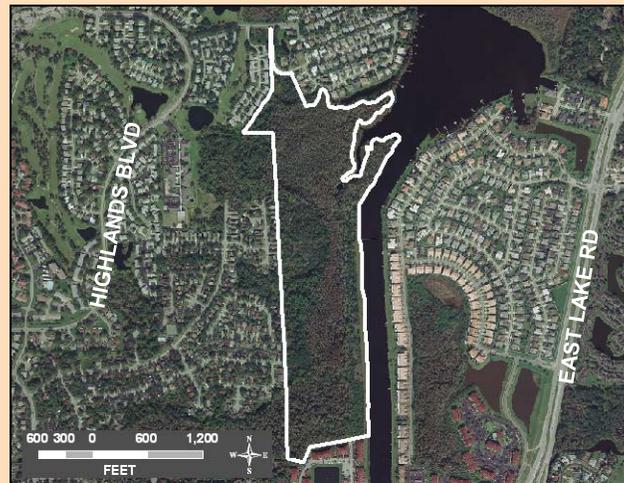
Our Natural Places

Management Brief

Cow Branch Management Area

At A Glance...

- 86 acres in size
- Located near Palm Harbor, FL
- Supports flatwoods, floodplain swamps, and hammocks



Background

The Cow Branch Management Area is located in the Palm Harbor area of unincorporated Pinellas County directly south of Lake Tarpon. The region has experienced dramatic changes over the years. Historic aerial photographs indicate that the management area was once part of a large wetland floodplain complex that drained from Lake Tarpon to Tampa Bay. While some natural communities were cleared for citrus and other

agricultural activities, changes in this region were associated with extensive residential and commercial development. For example, in the late 1960's the Lake Tarpon Outfall Canal was constructed to facilitate water flow from Lake Tarpon to Tampa Bay. The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners acquired the property in 1990 and 1993. This natural area is managed by the Department of Parks & Conservation Resources.

Characteristics

Located within the Lake Tarpon Drainage Basin, this management area is dominated hydrologically by Lake Tarpon and the Lake Tarpon Outfall Canal. Spoil from the canal's construction was piled on both sides to form berms that restrict the natural flooding of wetlands. The topography of this area includes a small ridge with elevations ranging from 2 to 25 feet above sea level. The soils are generally fine sands and flooded mucks. The dominant natural communities include floodplain swamp with bald cypress, red maple, and a variety of understory ferns as well as flatwoods with longleaf pine, hollies, bays, palmetto, and American beautyberry. Ruderal areas have resulted from human disturbances such as dumping of trash and maintaining



Dominant natural communities of the Cow Branch Management Area.

Cow Branch Management Area

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the canal. These disturbances have encouraged the spread of invasive exotic species, including Brazilian pepper, air-potato, Boston fern, camphortree, and arrowleaf elephantear. A variety of birds, white-tailed deer, and other wildlife have been observed utilizing this management area.



View within the Cow Branch Management Area.

Management



Exotic species are periodically removed to maintain this natural area.

Since assuming management of this area, the county has focused its efforts on controlling exotic species through the use of chemical treatment. To date this has involved small-scale projects, but eventually could include more extensive clearing along the canal and behind neighboring residences. As with all small natural areas surrounded by development, exotics will be an on-going challenge. The boundary of Cow Branch Management Area has not yet been secured with fences though signs have been posted to identify the area. Returning fire to the naturally pyrogenic flatwoods communities is not currently a viable management strategy; though, as firebreaks are added and exotic vegetation is cleared, this option will be explored. Additional efforts to restore the Cow Branch Management Area may include improving the hydrology and planting native species.

Value

The Cow Branch Management Area has special significance to local residents and provides economic and environmental benefits to its neighbors. However, this natural space, similar to others within Pinellas County, provides valuable services to all residents and visitors to the region. By enhancing native biodiversity, it supports countless organisms ranging from microbes to mammals. For example, a variety of birds, white-tailed deer, and other wildlife utilize this management area. It also makes important contributions to the region's hydrology by improving the quality of surface water and by promoting the recharge of groundwater.



The Cow Branch Management Area provides habitat to many native species.

For additional information:

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