

Our Natural Places

Pinellas County

Management Brief

Long Branch Management Area

At A Glance...

- 8 acres in size
- Located near Largo, FL
- Supports flatwoods and tidal swamp natural communities



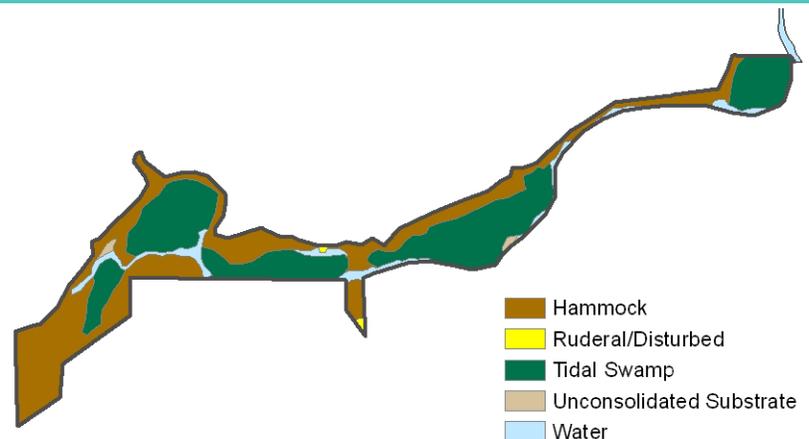
Background

The Long Branch Management Area is located between the cities of Largo and Clearwater in unincorporated Pinellas County. This area of the county has experienced dramatic changes over the years due to surrounding urbanization. Historic aerial photographs show the area once supported an extensive tidal creek. The wetlands have remained largely natural with the exception of minor ditching for mosquito control and dredging to

straighten the channel. In contrast, the surrounding uplands have undergone major changes since the 1980's related to extensive urban development. The Board of County Commissioners acquired these parcels in 1986 and 1996. This natural area is managed by the Department of Parks & Conservation Resources.

Characteristics

Located within the Long Branch Drainage Basin, this management area is dominated hydrologically by the creek that flows to Old Tampa Bay. The creek system is tidally influenced, and low-lying areas in the region flood frequently. Elevation ranges up to 10 feet above sea level. The soils are predominantly classified as frequently-flooded fine sands. Natural communities include tidal swamps dominated by mangroves and oak hammocks dominated by live oak, laurel oak, longleaf pine, palmetto, American beautyberry, and greenbriar. Human disturbance has resulted in ruderal areas and has encouraged the spread of invasive exotic species, including Brazilian pepper, air-potato, and Chinaberrytree. The spread of other exotics,



Dominant natural communities of the Long Branch Management Area.

Long Branch Management Area

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such as carrotwood and camphortree, has been promoted by the surrounding landscaping of nearby residential areas.



View within the Long Branch Management Area.

Management



Overgrown areas may be mechanically thinned.

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 relatively small-scale projects, but eventually could include more extensive clearing behind neighboring residences and along the creek. As with all small natural areas surrounded by development, exotics will be an on-going challenge. The boundary of Long Branch Management Area has not yet been secured with fences, though signs have been posted. Re-introduction of fire to the naturally pyrogenic flatwoods communities is not a viable management strategy given the small size of this area and the proximity of neighboring residences. Instead, mechanical thinning may be used to reduce fuel loads in overgrown upland areas. Additional efforts to restore this management area may include improving the hydrology and planting native vegetation.

Value

The Long 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 area. This management area also makes important contributions to the region's hydrology by improving the quality of surface water and by promoting the recharge of groundwater.



The Long Branch Management Area supports many native species.

For additional information:

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