

# Pinellas County Environmental Lands

In addition to ‘traditional’ parks and recreation facilities, Pinellas County owns and manages a system of environmental lands that provides specialized resource-based recreational opportunities in conjunction and in harmony with their primary purposes of protection and conservation. Environmental Lands are also tremendous resources of open space, which is vitally important in a mature, highly developed county. The following discussion describes each of the County's Environmental Lands. **Table 7** identifies the Environmental Lands and summarizes their acreages. **Figure 7** depicts the location of each Environmental Land, and **Table A-4** in **Appendix A** inventories their facilities. The Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management manages the Environmental Lands. For additional information on Pinellas County Environmental Lands, please see the *Natural Resources Conservation and Management Element*.

**TABLE 7**  
**PINELLAS COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS**

Environmental Land	Acreage
Allen's Creek	33
Alligator Lake	61
Anclote Islands	15
Brooker Creek Preserve <sup>1</sup>	8,285
Cow Branch South Bay	86
Joe's Creek	369
Lake Seminole By-Pass	97
Lake Tarpon Northeast	39
Long Branch	16
Mariner's Point	76
Mobbly Bayou Wilderness Preserve	396
Ozona	8
Shell Key Preserve <sup>2</sup>	2,181
Travatine Island	95
Weedon Island Preserve, including Gateway Tract <sup>2</sup>	3,678
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,435</b>

Source: Pinellas County Planning Department and Department of Environmental Management, 2006

<sup>1</sup> Includes 6,506 acres owned by Pinellas County, 1,618 acres owned by SWFWMD, and 174 acres owned by Progress Energy and managed by Pinellas County

<sup>2</sup> Includes Submerged Lands

## **Allen's Creek**

This area consists of about 33 acres along Allen's Creek, near its mouth on Tampa Bay in eastern Clearwater. Used historically as pasture for an equestrian operation, much of this site was restored through funding by the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Restoring the wetlands has improved water quality in Allen's Creek before it enters Tampa Bay. Upland restoration has also improved wildlife habitat.

FIGURE 7  
PINELLAS COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS

### **Alligator Lake**

This 61-acre tract is located on the edge of Alligator Lake in both Safety Harbor and Clearwater. Consisting primarily of oak-dominated uplands and lake-edge wetlands, this management area provides significant wildlife habitat. A major restoration effort with funding from the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Penny for Pinellas will improve the wetland system on the northeast portion of the property.

### **Anclote Islands**

Since 2000, approximately 15 acres of environmentally sensitive salt marsh and upland habitat in and along the Anclote River in Tarpon Springs have been purchased by the County using Endangered Lands funds generated by the Penny for Pinellas, local option sales tax. The Anclote Islands Corridor project area seeks to preserve important estuary and wildlife habitat between the Gulf of Mexico and Brooker Creek Preserve.

### **Brooker Creek Preserve**



Brooker Creek Preserve is the County's largest natural area at nearly 8,300 acres. Located in the northeastern corner but extending westward to the Anclote River, it is comprised mostly of pinelands and freshwater swamps. Native wildlife includes bobcats, red-shouldered hawks, wood storks, coyotes, white-tailed deer, and gopher tortoises. It also includes a significant portion of the watershed of Brooker Creek, a major input to Lake Tarpon.

The award-winning Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center opened to the public in June 2004, providing numerous interactive exhibits, gift shop, and resource center. The facility is open Wednesday from 9am to 8:30pm and Thursday - Sunday from 9am to 4pm (closed holidays). Boardwalks, trails (hiking and equestrian), and limited primitive camping are currently available for public use on the Preserve. Hikers looking for a quiet place to experience nature will enjoy the four-mile, four-loop, Wildlands Hiking

Trails located next to the Center. The Friends Trail, a 1.75-mile hiking trail, is located at the end of Lora Lane. Trail Conditions vary with the season.

### **Cow Branch South Bay**

Located at the southwestern end of Lake Tarpon, this 86-acre management area consists mostly of cypress swamp habitat and some upland hardwood forest. The northern portion of Cow Branch Creek flowing between Lake Tarpon and Lake St. George is included also.

### ***Joe's Creek***

Nearly 370 acres of pine-dominated uplands and coastal estuary habitat are protected within this management area. Located near the north end of Boca Ciega Bay in St. Petersburg, several major restoration projects have improved past disturbances and greatly improved coastal estuary habitat. An upland habitat restoration project currently is underway to remove areas of invasive plants and spoil piles of soil that have affected surface hydrology. An active eagle nest has been closely monitored for more than a decade.



### ***Lake Seminole By-Pass***

This linear 97-acre tract occurs along the northeastern edge of Lake Seminole and is not connected to the County's Lake Seminole Park. Comprised mostly of forested uplands, the management area also protects an active eagle nest.

### ***Lake Tarpon Northeast***

One of the Division's smallest management areas, this 39-acre forested wetland area at the northeastern end of Lake Tarpon protects one of the County's best examples of mature freshwater swamp habitats, including some large specimen trees.

### ***Long Branch***

Another relatively small management area, this 16-acre forested tract occurs along Long Branch Creek at its mouth into Tampa Bay in Clearwater. Large oaks line the Creek and significant estuary habitat protects fisheries and wildlife resources. This management area also helps protect water quality in this area of Tampa Bay.

### ***Mariner's Point***

Purchased in 2000, Mariner's Point is an ecologically diverse 76-acre parcel in south Tarpon Springs along the Gulf of Mexico. Excellent examples of coastal pineland forest, sand hill and scrub sloping towards mangrove and salt marsh habitats exist here. This management area also has great possibilities for future resource-based public uses.



### ***Mobbly Bayou Wilderness Preserve***

This nearly 400-acre preserve is managed through an interlocal agreement with the City of Oldsmar. Located at the north end of Upper Tampa Bay, this area encompasses a wide diversity of upland and coastal habitats. The City of Oldsmar is planning an education center and other public use facilities at the north end of the property. The County's Environmental Lands Division is responsible for management of the remaining natural lands. Hiking and canoe trails are planned as well as a public fishing pier.

### ***Ozona***

Pinellas County's smallest management area at eight acres in size, Ozona protects coastal forest and estuary habitat and preserves a region of cultural and historical importance to the local citizens.

### ***Shell Key Preserve***



Shell Key Preserve was established in 2000 with the cooperation of the State Department of Environmental Protection. Designed to protect sensitive marine habitats, this 2,200-acre Preserve includes one of the County's largest undeveloped barrier islands (Shell Key) as well as numerous mangrove islands and expansive sea grass beds. The Preserve also includes an upland area within Tierra Verde that is being restored for migratory songbird habitat.

Shell Key has been designated as one of the State's most important areas for shorebird nesting and wintering and it serves as an important study area for these species. It also is an important area for recreation. A balance for both uses was established by restricting public use to the northern and southern ends of the island. A central core area for conservation is off-limits to the public. Boating, camping, and beach-going activities are permitted in public use areas of the Preserve.

### ***Travatine Island***

Largely a human-made spoil island at the extreme north end of Boca Ciega Bay near the Town of Redington Shores, this 95-acre management area is the future target of an extensive restoration effort to improve habitat for coastal wildlife. Currently, the site hosts some habitat for coastal-nesting birds.

### ***Weedon Island Preserve***

The Weedon Island Preserve, including the associated Gateway Tract, is an expansive 3,700-acre region on Tampa Bay in north St. Petersburg comprised mostly of marine habitats with some uplands. Indigenous peoples, including those during the Weedon Island Cultural Period, occupied this site for thousands of years. A varied modern history also is part of the Preserve's legacy. Today, the Preserve protects this wide diversity of natural and cultural resources for future generations. An education center opened to the public in December 2002.

The Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center provides an overview of the rich marine resources of the Preserve and the interrelationship of the environment with the prehistoric, historic, and modern cultures that once inhabited the Preserve. The facility is open Wednesday - Sunday from 10am to 4pm (closed holidays) and includes a small gift shop. Visit the Weedon Island Preserve Cultural & Natural History Center and take a virtual tour of artifacts. Hiking and canoe trails, a fishing pier, limited primitive camping, kayak rentals, and an observation tower with over one mile of boardwalks through mangrove swamps are currently available for public use on the Preserve.