

Blazing Star Nature Trail

This 2,100-foot accessible nature trail was once part of a sawgrass marsh, but today consists of hydric (wet) hammock, a tidal swamp, and mesic (moderately wet) and wet flatwoods.



1 Entryway to the Forest

The natural areas protect historic native ecosystems and their biological diversity. They are also open to the public for passive recreation. How do we solve the problem of saving the land and also providing facilities for public use? We carefully design the parking lots and trails so that they have only minimal impact on the native ecosystems. The cabbage palms lining the entrance road are some of the 400 trees that were relocated to Frenchman's Forest from a construction site where they would have been destroyed.



2 A Shady Place

A hammock is a place of tall trees, lush ferns, and cool shade. Depending on the amount of moisture available, a hammock can be hydric (wet), mesic (moderately wet), or xeric (dry). It is believed the word "hammock" comes from the Native American word *hammocka*, meaning "shady place." This hydric hammock grew up on abandoned farm land, and was disturbed by clearing, grazing and dumping activities in the past. Majestic live oaks and cabbage palms tower over everything, leaving shade-loving plants such as swamp fern to cover the ground.



Insert: Wild coffee berries

3 Take a Coffee Break

One of the more common plants growing in the shady understory of the hammock is wild coffee. The plant is easily identified by its glossy green leaves and bright red berries that appear in the summer and fall. Wild coffee is related to the true coffees but it is not a substitute for them. Although birds can make a meal out of the berries, you will still have to go to your favorite coffee shop to get your caffeine fix!



Red mangroves

4 The Magic of Mangroves

Tidal swamps are characterized as dense, low forests growing along relatively flat shorelines. They are extremely valuable as nursery grounds for most of the commercially important fish and shellfish species. This swamp borders a tidal lagoon that was created in the 1960s when soil was removed for use as fill in adjacent residential developments. More than 5,000 red mangrove seedlings were planted along the shoreline as part of a habitat restoration project.



5 A Champion Digger

The gopher tortoise is found in areas with well-drained, sandy soils and an abundance of low-growing plants. It uses its strong front legs to dig a burrow up to 30 feet long. One tortoise may have several burrows scattered throughout the area. These underground tunnels shelter many other animals, including insects, snakes, lizards, and small mammals. The gopher tortoise is considered to be a key species because of this important role it plays in relation to other animals.



6 Managing Nature

The Frenchman's Forest Natural Area contains several dirt roads that might look out of place in the middle of a protected wilderness. These management roads provide numerous benefits, including more rapid access in the event of a wildfire, protection of adjacent areas from fire (used as firebreaks), and access for monitoring of animal and plant species within the natural area. The roads also enable management staff to move easily about the site to remove invasive exotic plants and perform maintenance repairs on fences and other structures.



Gayfeather

7 Beneficial Burning

This area of the trail winds through a mesic flatwoods forest. Mesic flatwoods occupy nearly half of this natural area. Black burn scars can be seen on the trunks of cabbage palms and slash pines - signs that a fire swept through the area. The Department utilizes prescribed burns to maintain a healthy forest ecosystem. Burns remove dead material and open areas to sunlight which increases plant diversity.

8 Wet Flatwoods Portrait

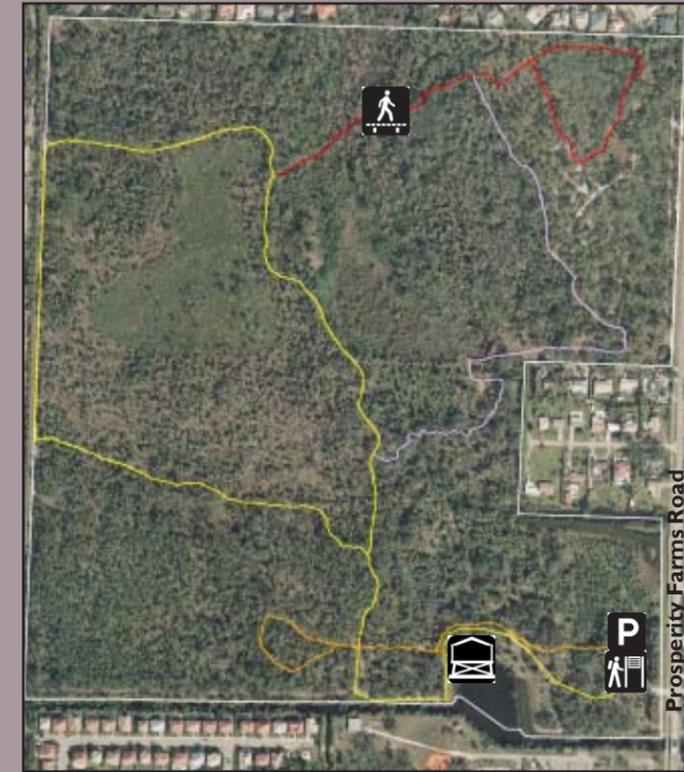
Wet flatwoods occur on flat, poorly-drained land. During the rainy season, water frequently stands on the surface, flooding the flatwoods for one or more months per year. The wet flatwoods of Frenchman's Forest were once small wet prairies, which transitioned to wet flatwoods because of the lowering of the water table due to development. The plants found here include slash pine, wiregrass, and gayfeather. Animals you may see include the oak toad, racer, and raccoon.



Racer

Oak toad

Frenchman's Forest Trail System



The Frenchman's Forest Natural Area is located at 12201 Prosperity Farms Road in Palm Beach Gardens. This 158-acre natural area protects pine flatwoods, strand swamp, hydric (wet) hammock, and tidal swamp. Public use facilities include an accessible nature trail with an observation platform, a 500-foot cypress swamp boardwalk, an informational kiosk, and hiking trails. There are no restroom facilities or drinking water on the site.

- Parking
- Information
- Observation Platform
- Cypress Swamp Boardwalk
- Natural Area Boundary
- Blazing Star Nature Trail 0.4 miles
- Saw Palmetto Hiking Trail 1.3 miles
- Staggerbush Hiking Trail 0.6 miles
- Archie's Creek Hiking Trail 0.6 miles



Insert: Cicada molt

9 Small Bug - Big Sound

Visitors to Frenchman's Forest during the hot summer months are often serenaded by cicadas while walking the forest trails. Male cicadas produce a saw-like clicking call to attract mates. Eggs are laid underground where the young feed off of tree roots. Upon maturity, the young crawl above ground and molt into winged adults.



Great horned owl

10 Birds of a Feather

Birds of all shapes and sizes can be found in the natural area. Large birds of prey, such as the great horned owl, make their nests in the tall slash pines. Red-bellied woodpeckers search dead trees for insects hidden just below the bark. Small songbirds such as cardinals and warblers flit among the understory searching for berries and seeds.



Firebush



Saw Palmetto



Oceanblue Morning-glory



Pond Apple



Pinebarren Goldenrod



Elderberry



Green Lynx Spider



Eastern Pondhawk



Red Admiral



Ruddy Daggerwing



Little Blue Heron



Red-bellied Woodpecker



Northern Cardinal



Prairie Warbler



Florida Softshell Turtle



Southeastern Five-lined Skink



Green Anole



Rough Greensnake



Virginia Opossum



Eastern Gray Squirrel



Raccoon



Gray Fox

Frenchman's Forest Photo Album

Plants

Insects and Arachnids

Birds

Reptiles and Amphibians

Mammals

Frenchman's Forest Natural Area Trail Guide



A Florida Communities Trust Preservation 2000 Project

Rules and Regulations

Prohibited on the Site:
 Smoking
 Hunting
 Fishing
 Feeding wildlife
 Alcoholic beverages
 Discharging firearms
 Pets or domestic animals
 Bicycles or motor vehicles
 Collecting plants or animals

The natural area is open from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week, including holidays.

There are no toilets or drinking water at this site.

In an emergency, call 911, or the Palm Beach Gardens Police Department at 561-799-4445.

This natural area is located in the Northeast Everglades Natural Area (NENA). NENA stretches from Southern Boulevard in Palm Beach County northward to Bridge Road in Martin County and from Lake Okeechobee to the Atlantic Ocean. NENA contains approximately 165,000 acres of conservation lands providing residents and visitors a wide range of nature-based outdoor recreational opportunities. For more information about NENA, visit www.pbcgov.com/ern/nena.



Connect with the Department of Environmental Resources Management and download our natural areas mobile map.



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Preserving Palm Beach County's Good Nature

Welcome to one of Palm Beach County's natural treasures. The Frenchman's Forest Natural Area preserves and protects large areas of pine flatwoods and strand swamp, along with smaller areas of depression marsh, hydric (wet) hammock and tidal swamp communities. The wet, low-lying areas contain giant leather fern, live oak, and maidencane. The drier ridges contain slash pine, coinvine, and coastplain staggerbush.

The natural area was part of the headwaters of the former Lake Worth Creek. Canal construction in the early 1900s lowered water levels, allowing farmers to grow vegetables on the southern half of the site. Palm Beach County purchased the natural area from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1995. State Preservation 2000 matching funds in the amount of \$2,868,282 were provided by Florida Communities Trust for the acquisition of a portion of the site.

This 158-acre natural area is part of a system of natural areas, protected to maintain the diversity of biological communities and species in Palm Beach County. The natural areas are open to the public for educational use and passive recreational activities such as hiking, nature photography, and bird watching.



The Frenchman's Forest Natural Area is home to hundreds of plant and animal species. One of the largest inhabitants is the pond-cypress. Reaching heights of over 100 feet, the pond-cypress has the distinction of being one of the few native Florida trees that shed their needles in the winter. The cypress "knees" support the tree in the soft soils of the strand swamp. Other plants found in the strand swamp include coastplain willow, common button-bush and strong-illy.