

# Silkgrass Nature Trail

This 1,300-foot accessible nature trail winds through dry scrub and scrubby flatwoods habitats. Keep a sharp eye out for northern cardinals and gopher tortoises!



and 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 public use facilities are constructed in previously disturbed areas that usually contain large numbers of invasive nonnative plants. Great care is taken to save the native vegetation.



## 1 Entryway to the Scrub

The Palm Beach County Natural Areas System protects historic native ecosystems and their biological diversity. The natural areas are open to the public for passive, resource-based recreation, environmental education, and scientific research. How do we solve the problem of saving the land

## 2 Managing Nature

The High Ridge Scrub 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 (they are used as firebreaks), and access for monitoring of animal and plant species within the natural area. The roads also serve as hiking trails and enable management staff to move easily about the site to remove invasive exotic plants and perform maintenance repairs on fences and other structures.

## 3 Seeds of the Scrub - Pine Cones and Acorns

Sand pines are the most numerous pines present in scrub habitat. They have shorter needles, smaller cones, and a shorter life expectancy than most pines. Sand pines depend on fire for their very existence. Like all pines, they reproduce by dispersing seeds from their cones. However, sand pines have closed cones that typically require heat from a fire to open them so that the seeds can drop to the ground. Sand live oaks are small and compact. They appear to be "evergreen" but are not. Sand live oaks do not drop all their leaves in the fall. Old leaves are shed in the spring and replaced with new leaves. Oaks are important components of the scrub habitat. Their acorns provide food for wildlife and their dense branches provide nesting areas for birds.



Sand Pine Forest

Sand Pine Cones

Scrub Live Oak Acorns

## 4 Incredible Insects

The High Ridge Scrub Natural Area is home to a wide variety of insects. That is not surprising, considering that there are over a million different species of insects - more than all other animals combined. Some insects burrow underground, some live among the scrub plants, and others fly through the air. Not all these insects are obvious to the casual visitor. Many insects are small and easily missed among the background of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. However, some insects seem to beg for attention through their use of sound or color.



The cicada is a large insect, up to 2 inches long, that is often confused with crickets and grasshoppers. Cicadas are nonjumpers, unlike those other ever-hopping insects. Cicadas spend most of their lives underground, feeding on the roots of trees. They emerge as adults and climb up trees to find mates. Male cicadas have sound-producing organs below the base of their abdomens. They produce a loud buzz sound to attract female cicadas to their branch. This sound is commonly heard throughout the natural area on hot summer days.



Butterflies are members of the order Lepidoptera. *Lepidoptera* means "scale-winged," and refers to this brightly-colored insect's minute wing scales. The gulf fritillary is a common visitor to the High Ridge Scrub. The caterpillars of this species eat the leaves of passionflowers, which contain a poisonous chemical. The chemical remains inside the adult butterfly and is a strong deterrent to predators looking for a good-tasting meal.



Dragonflies, in one form or another, have been zooming through the air for more than 300 million years. Their four powerful wings move independently, allowing them to fly forward and backward. Dragonflies are voracious eaters of insect "pests" such as mosquitoes during all stages of their life. The Halloween pennant is often seen perched atop grass stems in the more open areas of the natural area.

## 5 Up in the Air

The natural area is home to several species of epiphytes or airplants. These plants do not need soil to survive and are typically found far above the ground, attached to rough-barked trees. Although airplants appear to be parasitic, they only use trees as a place to grow. These relatives of the pineapple survive by collecting rain water in leaf bases or trapping moisture on small hairs. One of the smaller airplants found on the site is the ball moss. It rarely grows larger than 6 inches tall. Many of Florida's airplants are threatened by the Mexican bromeliad weevil. Efforts are underway to stop the spread of the weevil and to increase decimated airplant populations.



## 6 The Spark of Life

The use of fire as a land management tool provides many benefits to plants, animals, and people. Periodic fires reduce hardwood competition, improve wildlife habitat, and remove excess underbrush and dead vegetation. Plants such as saw palmetto burn quickly and intensely, but their roots remain alive. Days after a fire, fresh green shoots make an appearance in the charred landscape. The natural area is divided into management units, which are prescribed burned periodically to maintain the community and to reduce the possibility of destructive wildfires.



# High Ridge Scrub Trail System



The High Ridge Scrub Natural Area is located on the east side of High Ridge Road, just south of Hypoluxo Road, in unincorporated Palm Beach County. The site was acquired to preserve habitat for protected plant and animal species.

The entrance is off of High Ridge Road at the north-west corner of the natural area. Public use facilities include a parking lot, shade shelter, informational kiosk, bicycle rack, hiking trail, and an accessible nature trail. There are no restrooms or drinking water available at this site.

Please use the designated nature and hiking trails as you explore the natural area. Do not feed the animals. Please dispose of your trash responsibly.

**P** Parking  
**i** Information  
 Shade Shelter

**Natural Area Boundary**  
**Silkgrass Nature Trail 0.25 miles**  
**Gulf Fritillary Hiking Trail 1.5 miles**

0 0.25 0.5 Miles

## 7 A Splash of Color

At first glance the scrub appears to be a dull landscape of tan sand, brown grasses, and gray-green trees. If you look closer, patches of bright color can be found, courtesy of scrub wildflowers. The purple-blue petals of the whitemouth dayflower are extremely delicate. The blooms usually last only one day - hence the name dayflower. The show-stopper of the scrub is the pricklypear. Its bright yellow flowers bloom in the spring.



Whitemouth Dayflower



Pricklypear

## 8 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 cool underground tunnels shelter many other animals, including insects, snakes, lizards, and small mammals.



Love Vine (covering Sea Grape)  
*Cassytha filiformis*



Gopher Apple  
*Lycania michauxii*



Florida Rosemary  
*Ceratiola encoides*



## Plants

Narrowleaf Silkgrass  
*Pityopsis graminifolia*



Fey's Palatou  
*Palatouia feyi*



Saw Palmetto  
*Serenoa repens*



Muscadine Grape  
*Vitis rotundifolia*



American Kestrel  
*Falco sparverius*



Blue Jay  
*Cyanocitta cristata*



## Birds

Gracka  
*Tibicen sp.*



Yellow Garden Spider  
*Argoppe aurantia*



## Insects & Arachnids

Northern Cardinal  
*Cardinalis cardinalis*



Monarch  
*Danaus plexippus*



American Grasshopper  
*Chriosteera americana*



Red-bellied Woodpecker  
*Melanerpes carolinus*



Osprey  
*Pandion haliaetus*



Green Anole  
*Anolis carolinensis*



Six-lined Racerunner  
*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*



## Reptiles

Virginia Opossum  
*Didelphis virginiana*



Eastern Gray Squirrel  
*Sciurus carolinensis*



Eastern Racer  
*Coluber constrictor*



Coatwhip  
*Masticophis flagellum*



## Mammals

# High Ridge Scrub Photo Album

Welcome to one of Palm Beach County's natural treasures! The High Ridge Scrub Natural Area preserves and protects scrub habitat - one of Florida's most endangered natural communities. The natural area is a fragment of a large ridge of scrub habitat that ran north-south between Lake Worth and an inland lake/marsh system that contained Lake Osborne and the former Lake Webster.

A mango orchard was planted in the southern portion of the natural area during the 1920s. By 1953 the mango orchard had been cleared and replaced by a sand mining operation. The mined areas were excavated to roughly 20 feet above sea level. Up to 30 feet of sand may have been removed in some areas. The sand mining operation ended by 1965. During the mid 1990s neighborhood residents mounted a campaign to have the High Ridge Scrub purchased as a County environmentally-sensitive lands preserve. The lands that form the natural area were purchased in four separate acquisitions from April 1998 to January 1999.

This 39-acre natural area is part of a countywide 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 High Ridge Scrub Natural Area is home to hundreds of plant and animal species. The netted pawpaw is one of many scrub plants that have adapted to this harsh, dry environment. The fleshy, yellow fruits of the pawpaw are eaten by many scrub animals, including the protected gopher tortoise. Look for the white flowers of the pawpaw in the spring and the fruit in the summer.



## Rules and Regulations

### Prohibited on the Site:

- Smoking
- Hunting
- Firearms
- Feeding wildlife
- Alcoholic beverages
- Pets or domestic animals
- Bicycles or motor vehicles
- Collecting plants or animals

Use only existing trails. This is a "no trash" area. All items taken in must be taken out.

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 County Sheriffs Office at 561-688-3000.**



Palm Beach County  
Board of County Commissioners

In accordance with the provisions of ADA, this brochure may be requested in an alternate format.

Palm Beach County Department of  
Environmental Resources Management

2300 N. Jog Road - Fourth Floor  
West Palm Beach, FL 33411-2743  
Phone: 561-233-2400  
www.co.palm-beach.fl.us/sem

# High Ridge Scrub Natural Area Trail Guide



A Florida Communities Trust  
Florida Forever Project