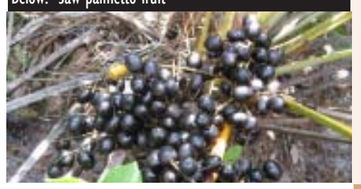
Blue Heron Nature Trail

This 825-foot accessible nature trail winds through pine flatwoods to a boardwalk overlooking a wet prairie. Keep a sharp eye out for sandhill cranes and eastern lubber grasshoppers!



Above: Saw palmettos resprouting after a burn
Below: Saw palmetto fruit

1 A Plant with Teeth

This low-growing member of the palm family often appears like it is "lying down on the job." The trunk sprawls across the ground, sending 3-foot-tall fan-shaped leaves skyward. Rows of razor-sharp, curved spines line the leaf stalks. Early settlers compared these spines to the teeth of a saw blade, thus giving the plant its name. Saw palmettos produce greenish-white flowers in the spring which attract bees, wasps, and flies. Saw palmetto honey is described as full-bodied, citrusy and herbal, with woody overtones. The flowers develop into oblong, black fruits which provide food for raccoons, opossums, and other wildlife.

2 Pine Flatwoods Plants

One of the more noticeable plants along the nature trail is the St. John's-wort. This shrub rarely grows taller than 3 feet. It has small, needlelike leaves and five-petaled yellow flowers that bloom April through September. It is commonly found in wet pinelands, hammocks, and prairies. More than 15 species of this small shrub grow throughout the state. They are quite similar in appearance and difficult to tell apart. Other plant species found here include beautyberry (look for the bush with bright purple berries), fetterbush, wild pennyroyal, and coastalplain staggerbush.

From top to bottom: red-tailed hawk, pileated woodpecker, eastern screech owl

3 From Death Comes Life

A dead pine tree (snag) mars the beauty of the flatwoods forest. It may have been struck by lightning or attacked by disease or insects. Its naked limbs offer no shade or color. It is lifeless - or is it? Dead trees are important to the health of the forest. Songbirds and predatory birds such as ospreys, hawks, and owls use them as nesting areas and as lookout perches. The bare limbs offer unobstructed viewing of the surrounding area, allowing the sharp-eyed birds of prey to easily see small mammals moving along the ground. Woodpeckers, and the insects they eat, make their homes inside the dead trees. The branches and pieces of bark that fall onto the ground decay and provide nutrients that other plants use to help them grow. This is recycling at its best!

4 Pine Tree Paradise

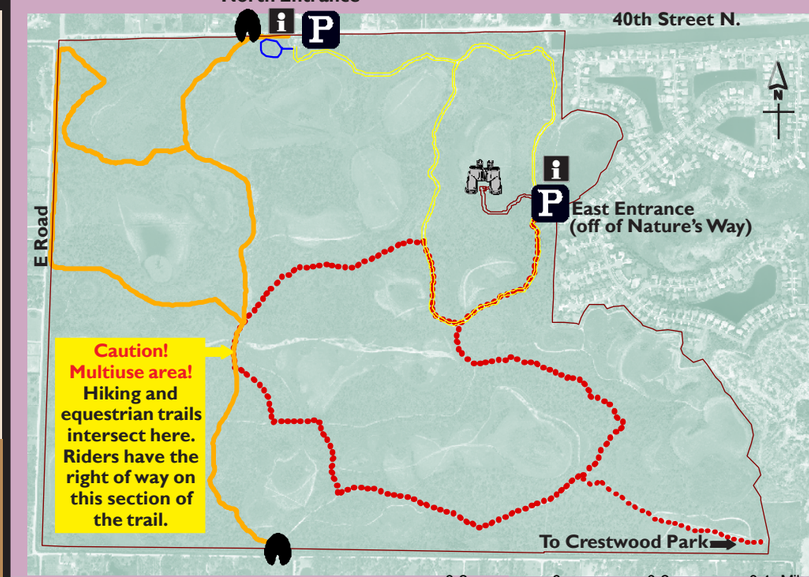
The pine forests of the Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area depend on fire to maintain their health and viability. Periodic fires reduce hardwood competition, improve wildlife habitat, and remove excess underbrush and dead vegetation. The thick bark of mature slash pines protects the trees from the worst of the fire, but the flames leave behind black fire scars. Plants such as gallberry, saw palmetto, and wiregrass 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.

5 A Summertime Wetland Wonderland

The wet prairie is characterized as a wet, treeless plain on sandy substrate, without a definite water flow, and with a sparse-to-dense ground cover of grasses and herbs. Water is present 50 to 100 days each year. Plants that thrive in this area include beakrushes, maidencane, and spikerush. Wet prairies are ideal habitats for several species of wading birds, including herons, egrets, and wood storks.

From left to right: great blue heron, hatpins, halloween pennant, spikerush, snowy egret

Royal Palm Beach Pines Trail System



- Parking
- Information
- Observation Platform
- Equestrian Entrance

- Natural Area Boundary
- Blue Heron Nature Trail *825 feet*
- Cabbage Palm Hiking Trail *850 feet*
- Pine Lily Hiking Trail *1.4 miles*
- Slash Pine Hiking Trail *2.4 miles*
- Equestrian Trail *2 miles*

The Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area is located east of E Road, north of North Road, south of 40th Street, and west of the Saratoga Pines development in the Village of Royal Palm Beach. This 773-acre natural area protects one of the best remaining examples of pine flatwoods and wet prairie habitat in Palm Beach County. Public use facilities include an informational kiosk, an accessible nature trail with a boardwalk and an observation platform, hiking trails, and portable toilets. The equestrian trail is accessed through the north entrance or through a southern equestrian-only entrance.

Riding Trail Rules

1. Equestrian use of this site is by permit only. To request an annual equestrian permit, contact the Department at 561- 233-2400.
2. Lock the gate immediately after entering or leaving the natural area. Do not give out the combination.
3. Stay on the designated riding trail. Lands adjacent to the trail are environmentally sensitive and can be easily damaged.
4. Horses are not permitted in the eastern portion of the site or on the hiking trails (except for the one portion of the trail system designated as multiuse).
5. Accompany your horseback-riding guests (maximum of two guests per permit) at all times.
6. Carry your permit card and proof of a negative Coggins test at all times, and present them upon request.
7. Do not tie or hitch horses to trees or shrubs, or allow horses to graze on vegetation.
8. Horses must be under control at all times. No galloping, running, or racing. Ride at your own risk.
9. All horses must walk when approaching or passing others. If riding abreast, one horse must yield to a passing horse. Horses known to kick must wear red ribbons on their tails.
10. If you see unauthorized vehicles or activities in the equestrian portion of the site, please contact the Palm Beach County Sheriff's office at 561-688-3000.

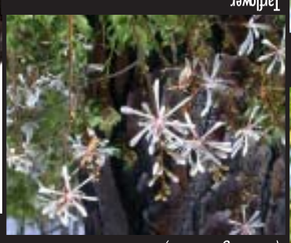
Compliance with these rules is necessary for continued equestrian use of the site. Failure to comply will result in permit revocation and possible withdrawal of the equestrian use permit.

Royal Palm Beach Pines Photo Album

Plants

Hairy Chaffhead
(*Carphephorus pseudovaccinium*)

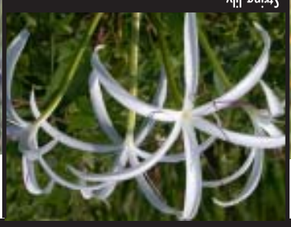
Leavenworth's Tickseed
(*Coreopsis leavenworthii*)


Tarflower
(*Bejaria racemosa*)

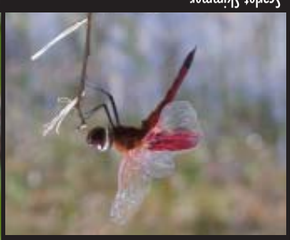
Dahoon
(*Ilex cassine*)

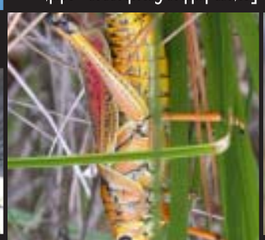
Largeflower Rosegentian
(*Sabatia grandiflora*)

Coastalplain Staggerbush
(*Lyonia fruticosa*)


Spring-lily
(*Crinum americanum*)

Insects


Queen
(*Danaus gilippus*)


Scarlet Skimmer
(*Crocothemis servilia*)

Eastern Lubber Grasshopper - adult
(*Romalea guttata*)

Eastern Lubber Grasshopper - juvenile
(*Romalea guttata*)

Birds

Northern Cardinal
(*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

Turkey Vulture
(*Cathartes aura*)

American Kestrel
(*Falco sparverius*)

Red-shouldered Hawk
(*Buteo lineatus*)

Osprey
(*Pandion haliaetus*)

Bald Eagle
(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Reptiles

Green Anole
(*Anolis carolinensis*)

Six-lined Racerunner
(*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*)

Eastern Racer
(*Coluber constrictor*)

Gopher Tortoise
(*Gopherus polyphemus*)

Mammals

Eastern Gray Squirrel
(*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Bobcat
(*Lynx rufus*)

Preserving Palm Beach County's Good Nature

Welcome to one of Palm Beach County's natural treasures. The Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area preserves and protects pine flatwoods and wet prairie habitat. More than 40% of the site is wetlands. These areas contain St. John's-wort, sawgrass, and wax myrtle. The pine flatwoods are covered with tall stands of South Florida slash pine. Smaller plants found among the pines include gallberry, pink sundew and the threatened Catesby's lily.

The natural area was logged in the 1940s. A portion of it was ditched and furrowed for agricultural use in the late 1970s. The county purchased 328 acres in 1992 and 323 acres in 1993. An additional 111 acres were added in 2000 as part of a mitigation settlement. The remaining acres are leased from the Saratoga Pines Home Owners Association.

This 773-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 Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area is home to hundreds of plant and animal species. Many are listed as endangered, threatened, or species of special concern in Florida. One of the protected species living here is the Florida sandhill crane. It stands 3 1/2 feet tall and has a wingspan of 6 feet. The loud, rattling calls (*kar-r-r-o-o-o*) of the cranes are frequently heard as they roam the prairie and open woods. They feed mainly on seeds and tubers.

Rules and Regulations

Prohibited on the Site:
Smoking
Hunting
Firearms
Feeding wildlife
Alcholic 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 is no drinking water at this site.

In an emergency, call 911, the Village of Royal Palm Beach Police at 561- 790-5170 or the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office at 561-688-3000.

Palm Beach County
Board of County Commissioners
Tony Masilotti, Chairman
Addie L. Greene, Vice Chairperson
Karen T. Marcus
Jeff Koons
Warren H. Newell
Mary McCarty
Burt Aaronson

County Administrator
Robert Weisman

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

Palm Beach County
Board of County Commissioners
Dept. of Environmental Resources Management
3323 Belvedere Road, Bldg. 502
West Palm Beach, FL 33406-1548
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www.co.palm-beach.fl.us/erm

Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area Trail Guide