

# Bracken Fern Nature Trail

This 1,500-foot accessible nature trail winds through pine flatwoods and hardwood hammock habitats. Be on the lookout for red-bellied woodpeckers and gopher tortoises!



## 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.

## 2 A Tale of Tall Trees

The tallest living things in Limestone Creek are the South Florida slash pines. Prized for their high-quality lumber, these trees can reach heights of 100 feet or more. South Florida slash pines are a main component of the mesic (moderately moist) flatwoods. Also found in this habitat are saw palmettos. These native palms have rows of razor-sharp, curved spines lining the leaf stalks. Early settlers compared these spines to the teeth of a saw blade, thus giving the plants their name. Animals found living among the pines and palmettos include the zebra (butterfly), gray catbird, and gopher tortoise. This reptile uses its strong front legs to dig a burrow up to 30 feet long. These cool underground tunnels shelter many other animals, including insects, snakes, lizards, and small mammals.

## 3 Keeping it Healthy

It takes a lot of work to keep the woods of Limestone Creek Natural Area healthy and vibrant. Flatwoods are fire-dependent. The plants growing here require periodic fires to sweep through the area to remove dead vegetation, create open areas for new growth, and recycle nutrients back into the soil. The natural area is divided into management units, each of which is prescribed burned every 8 to 16 years. The maintenance accessways in Limestone Creek serve as fire breaks to protect adjacent areas from fire. They also enable management staff to move easily about the site to remove invasive exotic plants and perform repairs on fences and other structures. Another issue land managers must deal with is illegal dumping. It is not uncommon for natural areas to contain pockets of household and construction trash, including washing machines, car parts, and drywall. Thanks to the dedication of many volunteers, Limestone Creek is clean and green. Volunteers have removed more than 6,300 pounds of trash from this natural area since 2003.



## 4 Walking Uphill

Did you notice the elevation change? Probably not. The slight rise in elevation makes a big difference to the plants along the trail. This higher and drier habitat is known as scrubby flatwoods. The South Florida slash pine canopy is much thinner and short, stunted scrub oaks are found among the saw palmettos.

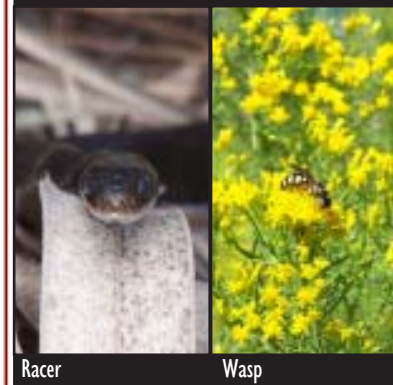


## 5 Hammock Shelter

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 is located along the remnants of a blackwater stream. Water is present during the rainy season (summer/fall). The dark color of the water is due to tannins leached from decaying vegetation. Laurel oaks tower over everything, and shade-loving plants such as swamp fern and wild coffee cover the ground. The water and shade found here attract many animals, including dragonflies, butterflies, and birds.



American Kestrel



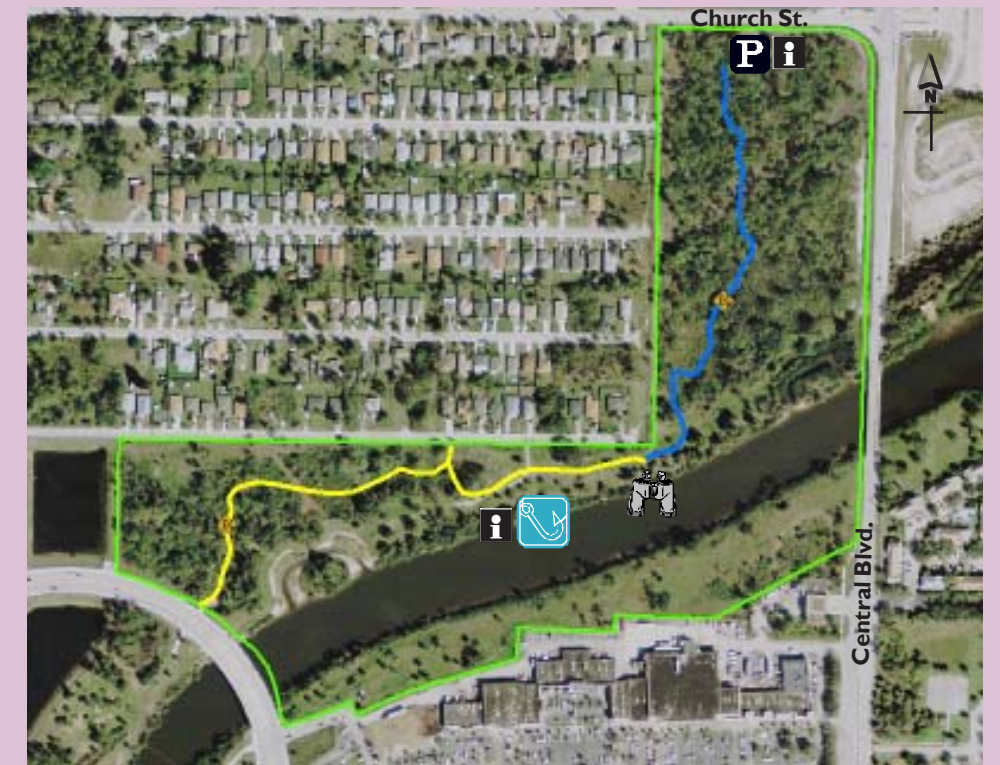
Racer

Wasp

## 6 Creatures Great & Small

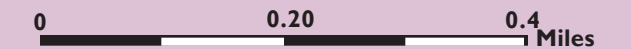
Limestone Creek Natural Area is an island of wilderness amid the hustle and bustle of the Town of Jupiter. Animals of all shapes and sizes can be found on the ground and in the air within the natural area. The American kestrel is Florida's smallest bird of prey. Less than 12 inches in length, these colorful members of the falcon family feed on insects and small rodents. Listen for their shrill *killy killy* call as you walk along the trail. While searching the skies for birds, don't forget to scan the ground for racers. Most people only catch a glimpse of a black tail as these snakes make speedy getaways when threatened. Racers are nonvenomous and prey on small lizards. Many of Limestone Creek's tiniest creatures go unnoticed by visitors. Insects burrow into the earth, crawl among the trees, and fly from flower to flower. Wasps and bees are usually not the cutest or cuddliest critters in the natural area. However, they play a vital role in pollinating everything from 1-foot-tall wildflowers to 80-foot-tall oak trees.

# Limestone Creek Trail System



- Parking
- Information
- Observation Platform
- Fishing Pier

- Natural Area Boundary
- Bracken Fern Nature Trail 0.28 mile
- Gallberry Hiking Trail 0.35 mile



## 7 Oxbows and Tidal Swamps

Tidal swamps are characterized as dense, low forests growing along relatively flat, low-energy shorelines. The most common trees found along the water's edge are white, black, and red mangroves. Tidal swamps are extremely valuable as nursery grounds for most of the commercially important fish and shellfish species. This swamp was artificially created by scraping down spoil piles and cutting oxbows into the shoreline. West Indian manatees, great egrets, and fiddler crabs are just a few of the animals living in Limestone Creek's tidal swamps.

## 8 Recycle Your Fishing Line

The fishing pier offers natural area visitors a place to drop a baited hook into the water and attempt to outwit the local fish. While enjoying the great outdoors, fishermen are reminded to deposit their monofilament line in the white plastic tube attached to the pier. Improperly discarded line poses a danger to local wildlife, including the best fisherman of all - the brown pelican.



# Limestone Creek Natural Area Trail Guide

**A Florida Communities Trust  
Florida Forever Project**



**Palm Beach County  
Board of County Commissioners**

**Palm Beach County Department of  
Environmental Resources Management**

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West Palm Beach, FL 33411-2743  
Phone: 561-233-2400  
www.co.palm-beach.fl.us/em

In accordance with the provisions of the American's with Disabilities Act, this brochure may be requested in an alternate format.

**The Limestone Creek Natural Area is home to hundreds of plant and animal species. One of the more unusual plants found in the natural area is ballmoss. These epiphytes, or airplants, do not need soil to survive and are typically found far above the ground, attached to rough-barked trees. Although ballmoss appear to be parasitic, they only use trees as a place to grow. These relatives of the pineapple survive by trapping moisture on small hairs.**



## Preserving Palm Beach County's Good Nature

Welcome to one of Palm Beach County's natural treasures. The Limestone Creek Natural Area preserves and protects pine flatwoods, hardwood hammock, and tidal swamp habitats. The upland areas contain South Florida slash pine, gallberry, and saw palmetto. The wetter areas contain swamp fern, laurel oak, and wild coffee. Red mangrove trees and cordgrasses line the tidal swamp.

The construction of the C-18 Canal through the natural area in 1956 and 1957 had the greatest impact on the site. The groundwater level in the Limestone Creek floodplain dropped from approximately five feet to around one foot. In 2002 and 2003, Palm Beach County purchased three tracts of land, totaling 22 acres. The County also manages 31 acres owned by the South Florida Water Management District as part of the natural area.

This 53-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.



## 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 Town of Jupiter Police Department at 561-746-6201.**

# Limestone Creek Natural Area Photo Album

## Plants



Giant Airplant  
(*Tillandsia usniculata*)



Shoestring Fern  
(*Vittaria lineata*)



American Beautyberry  
(*Callicarpa americana*)



Pinebarren Goldenrod  
(*Solidago fistulosa*)



Shortleaf Wild Coffee  
(*Psychotria sulzneri*)



Saw Palmetto  
(*Serenia repens*)

## Insects and Arachnids



Zebra  
(*Heliconius charithonia*)



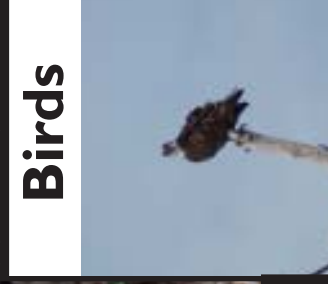
Carolina Wolf Spider  
(*Hogna carolinensis*)



Halloween Pennant  
(*Leitheimis eponina*)



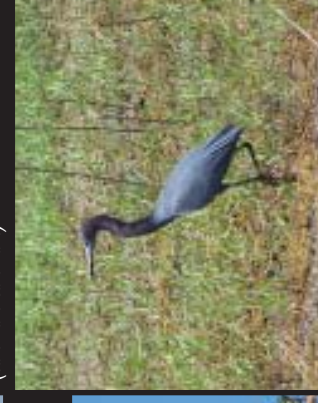
Banded Garden Spider  
(*Argiope aurantia*)



Osprey  
(*Pandion haliaetus*)



Northern Cardinal  
(*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

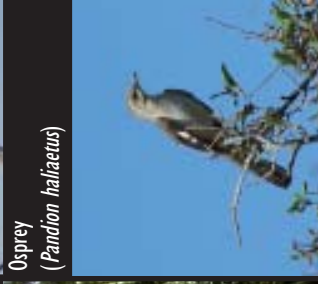


Little Blue Heron  
(*Egretta caerulea*)

## Birds



Great Egret  
(*Ardea alba*)



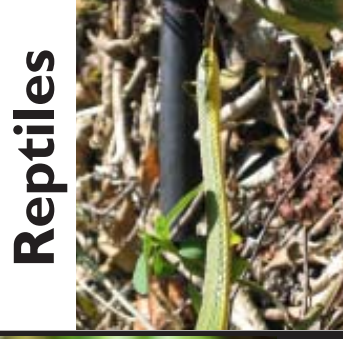
Pileated Woodpecker  
(*Dryocopus pileatus*)



Green Anole  
(*Anolis carolinensis*)



Eastern Gray Squirrel  
(*Sciurus carolinensis*)

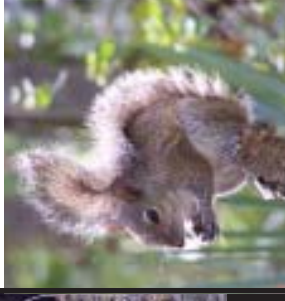


Rough Greensnake  
(*Opheodrys aestivus*)



American Alligator  
(*Alligator mississippiensis*)

## Mammals



West Indian Manatee  
(*Trichechus manatus*)



Florida Sensitive Briar  
(*Mimosa quadrivalvis var. floridana*)