

CRADLE CREEK PRESERVE

Jacksonville Beach, Florida



The park is a 45-acre preserve that offers a canopy of old-growth live oak, magnolia, and water oak trees. It offers upland forests, saltwater marshes, and panoramic views of the creeks that feed the Intracoastal Waterway. The Preserve is situated between the Plantation Oaks and the Marshside subdivisions. The entrance and parking lot are located at the corner of 15th Street South and Fairway Lane in Jacksonville Beach.

The creation of Cradle Creek Preserve has protected the last large parcel of undeveloped land along the Intracoastal Waterway within Jacksonville Beach. The site was under threat of development as a residential subdivision. The Preserve includes upland forests, bottomland swamp, and saltwater marsh communities. Saltwater marshes provide important nursery habitat for many species of fish and invertebrates, which in turn provide food for birds, reptiles, and mammals. The Upland habitat provides foraging, roosting, and nesting habitat for these animals.

The preserve provides habitat protection for many federal and state identified endangered and threatened plant and animal species. The location and pristine condition of the preserve make it ideal for migrant songbirds and shorebirds. Endangered and threatened species inventoried within the preserve include the Eastern Indigo Snake, American Alligator, Least Tern, Bald Eagle, Wood Stork, and West Indian Manatee.

Cradle Creek Preserve allows the public to experience this special place through a system of nature trails and elevated boardwalks, educational signage, an observation platform overlooking Pablo Creek Estuary, and a canoe landing/pier. Surrounded by a lush tree canopy and tall marsh grasses, visitors can experience the Florida of its first inhabitants, enjoy the preserve's natural beauty, and learn about the natural surroundings and its rich history.

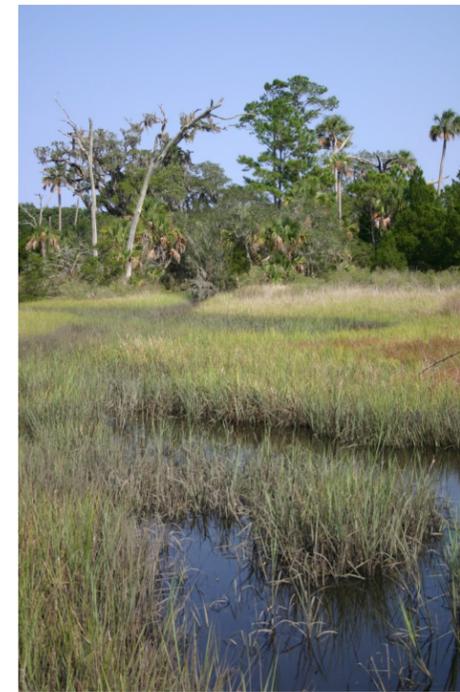
Visitors can access the Preserve via the Fairway Lane entrance. They can also enter by canoe or kayak from the Intracoastal Waterway via Cradle Creek, a natural creek that runs along the Preserve's southern boundary and connects with the Intracoastal Waterway at several points near Marker 37. Cradle Creek Preserve provides Jacksonville Beach an access point to the Jacksonville Blueways Network, a proposed canoe and kayak trail system linking various waterfront parks along the Intracoastal Waterway and St. Johns River.

The property within the Preserve is primarily undisturbed and in a natural condition. The only human disturbances of the site were selective timber harvesting of cypress and eastern red cedar trees in the 1920's and 1970's, and the construction of mosquito and drainage ditches. Most of the site remains an undisturbed forest and salt marsh. During construction of the trail system for the park, forty cypress trees were planted to replace the cypress cut from the site, and to enhance the existing wetland system.

FUNDING AGENCIES

The Florida Communities Trust Forever Florida Program, the Florida Inland Navigation District, the Trust for Public Land, and the City of Jacksonville Beach provided funding assistance for the acquisition of this environmentally sensitive land and the construction of this park.

This park contains environmentally sensitive land that would have forever been changed by development. Cradle Creek Preserve ensures this pristine area will be enjoyed by future generations. Our quality of life is dependent on continued stewardship of the environment and the plant, animal and marine life indigenous to our area.



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CRADLE CREEK PRESERVE NATURAL COMMUNITIES

SALTWATER MARSH

Marshes are wetlands dominated by herbaceous plants in shallow water that stands at or above the ground surface. Tidal saltwater marshes are subject to daily flooding by brackish or salty water. They are covered with a thick mat of grasses and other plants such as sedges and rushes that are adapted to the high salinity.

Saltwater marshes are among the most productive ecosystems on earth. A variety of wildlife species use saltwater marshes. Wading birds such as egrets, wood storks, roseate spoonbills and great blue herons use the marsh for feeding. Juvenile fish and juvenile sea turtles utilize the marshes as a nursery. The thick vegetation is ideal for feeding and protection from predators. Saltwater marshes are also home to alligators, manatees, fiddler crabs, shrimp, and snakes.

MARITIME FOREST

Maritime forests lay on the highest parts of Florida's barrier islands between the beach dunes and the more inland tidal marshes. Since maritime forests are coastal communities, they are influenced by stresses including wind, seasonal high tides, and salt spray. The wind and salt spray often produce a low, evenly pruned canopy when closer to the beach side of the barrier island. A taller canopy such as within this preserve evolves with increasing distance from the beach.

Typical of maritime forests founding Northeast Florida, the vegetation within this community is dominated by live oaks with dense saw palmetto in the under story. Many animals use maritime hammocks for food and shelter including migrating songbirds, owls, bobcats, raccoons, and snakes, including the poisonous eastern diamondback rattlesnake.

BOTTOMLAND SWAMP

Bottomland swamps are one of the lowest and wettest types of hardwood forests. Within the Cradle Creek Preserve, the bottomland swamp community is located in low-lying areas surrounding the maritime forest ridges. The water source for this community comes from rainfall and drainage from the surrounding areas. The bottomland swamp is dominated by a canopy of hardwood trees including red maple with an under story of shrubs and ferns.

Since bottomland swamps have many flowering and fruiting plants and an abundance of natural cover for animals year-round, a wide variety of birds including songbirds, hawks, and woodpeckers use bottomland hardwoods. Snakes, skinks, frogs, bobcats, raccoons, box turtles, white-tailed deer, and squirrels are just a few of the animals that use bottomland swamps. Wading birds use the bottomland swamp trees along the saltwater marsh as a resting place.

INVENTORY OF SPECIES FOUND WITHIN CRADLE CREEK PRESERVE

MAMMALS

Bobcat
Nine-banded Armadillo
Raccoon
Eastern white-tailed Deer
Marsh Rabbit
Eastern Gray Squirrel
West Indian Manatee

REPTILES

Saltwater Marsh & wetland Reptiles

American alligator
Cottonmouth
Diamondback terrapin
Alligator snapping turtle
Florida cooter
Eastern glass lizard
Southeastern five-linked skink
Eastern mud turtle
Red-eared slider
Musk Turtle
Green anole

Uplands Reptiles

Eastern box turtle
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake
Pygmy rattlesnake
Eastern ribbon snake
Florida pine snake
Eastern racer
Green anole
Six-lined racerunner
Broad-headed skink

INVETEBRATES

Salt Water Invertebrates

Fiddler crabs
Blue crab
Marsh periwinkle
Ribbed mussel

Fresh Water Invertebrates:

Pond crayfish
Common water strider
American bumblebee
Monarch butterfly
Golden-silk spider
Crablike spiny orb weaver



BIRDS

Wading Birds

Wood Stork
Roseate Spoonbill
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Tricolor Heron
Little Blue Heron
Cattle Egret
Black-crowned Night Heron
Yellow-crowned Night Heron
White Ibis

Ducks & Geese

Canada Goose
Mallard Duck
Common Goldeneye
Northern Pintail
American Widgeon
Blue-winged Teal
Green-winged Teal
Ring-necked Duck
Hooded Merganser

Gruiformes

Florida Clapper Rail
King Rail
Limpkin

Raptors

Turkey Vulture
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Bald Eagle
Osprey

Doves

Mourning Dove
Common Ground Dove

Owls

Great Horned Owl
Barred owl

Woodpeckers

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker

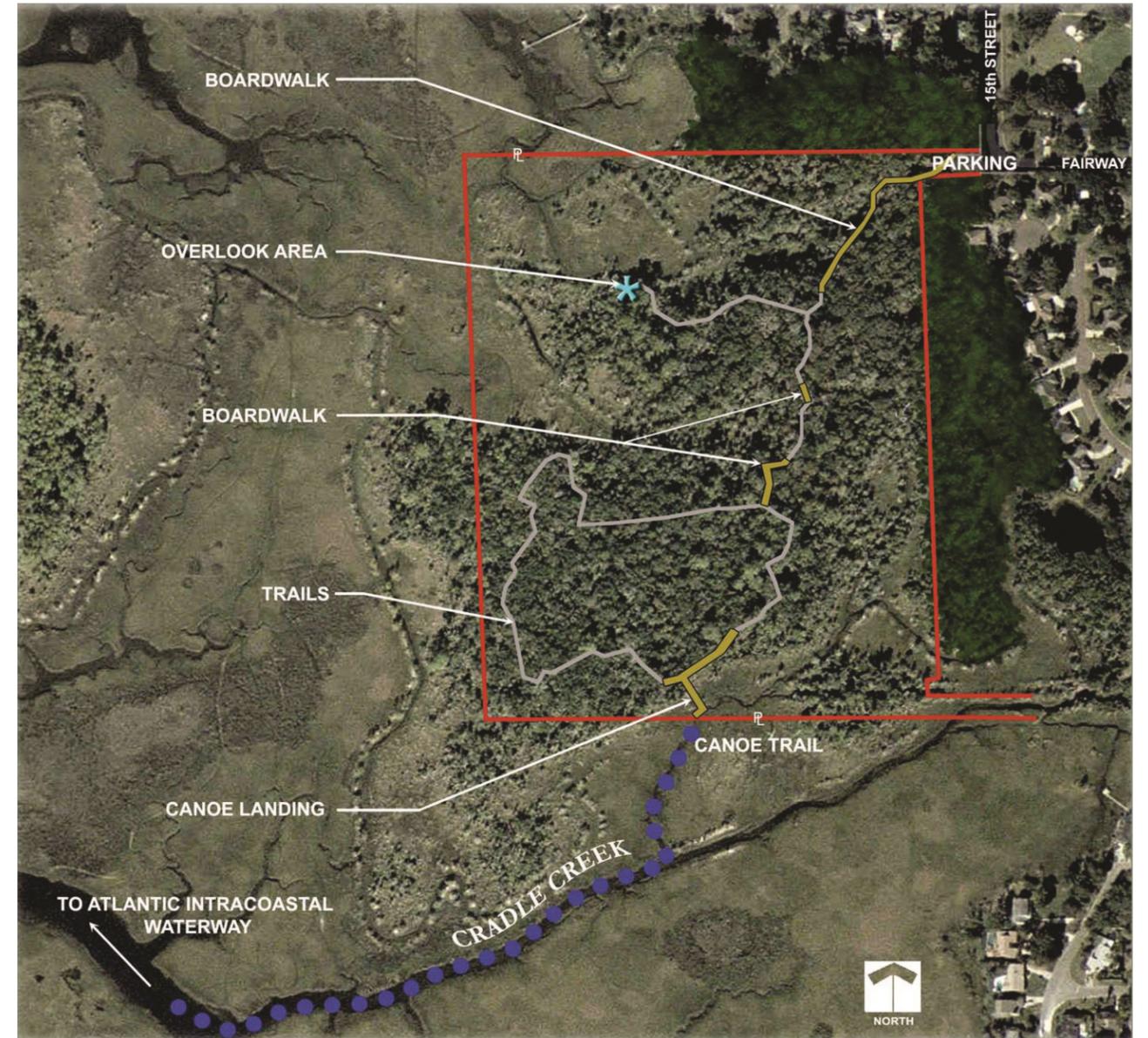
Passerine Birds

Northern Mockingbird
Grey Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Northern Cardinal
American Crow
Carolina Wren
Tufted Titmouse
Carolina Chickadee
Pine Warbler
Yellow Warbler
American Redstart
Eastern Towhee
Common Grackle



PLANT SPECIES

American Holly
Big Cordgrass
Blackgrum
Blue Flag Iris
Bracken Fern
Broom Sedge
Buttonbush
Cabbage Palm
Cinnamon Fern
Devil's Walking Stick
Dwarf Blueberry
Fetterbush
Green-fly Orchid
Glasswort
Greenbrier
Hearts-a-busting-with-love
Highbush Blueberry
Ironwood
Jack-in-the-pulpit
Live Oak
Lizard's Tail
Loblolly Bay
Loblolly Pine
Longleaf Pine
Marsh Elder
Myrtle-leaved Holly
Netted Chain Fern
Pignut Hickory
Pipestem
Poison Ivy
Red Maple
Royal Fern
Sabal Palm
Saltbush
Saltmarsh Cordgrass



Endangered and threatened species inventoried in and around Cradle Creek Preserve include the Bald Eagle, Least Tern, Wood Stork, American Alligator, West Indian Manatee and Eastern Indigo Snake.

CITY OF JACKSONVILLE BEACH

MAYOR
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COUNCIL MEMBERS

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FUNDING AGENCIES
The Florida Communities Trust Florida Forever Program
Florida Inland Navigation District
Trust for Public Land
City of Jacksonville Beach

CRADLE CREEK PRESERVE CULTURAL RESOURCES

THE ARCHAIC PEOPLE

Though no evidence has been found in the preserve, humans have inhabited this portion of northeast Florida since the Archaic period (7500 – 500 B.C.). Native Americans of the Archaic period were less nomadic than their Paleo Indian ancestors. While little evidence of Paleo Indian occupation has been found in this area, Archaic period sites occur often in the regional aboriginal settlement pattern.

In the region around Cradle Creek, Archaic period sites are mostly small and are interpreted as camps used for hunting, fishing, and gathering. The people who occupied these camps spent much of their time sharpening their stone tools or making new ones. The debris they left behind consists of "flintic debitage," or small flakes of chert stone chipped away from larger pieces or from the edges of dulled tools. The most common of these tools are projectile points (also known as arrowheads) that were hafted to spears, while some were used as hand-held knives.

THE ST. JOHNS CULTURE

The St. Johns Culture (also known as the Woodland Tradition) evolved from the Late Archaic culture around 500 B.C., and lasted over two thousand years until the arrival of Europeans in Florida in 1563, when the first settlement at what is now Fort Caroline was established, followed by St. Augustine in 1565. The French and Spanish who brought with them Christianity forever changed the Native American life ways of prehistoric Florida.

The St. Johns people were dominant in the north and central Florida, and based upon archeological finds, were quite active around Cradle Creek. Their pottery, called St. Johns Plain and St. Johns Check Stamped by the archeologists, can be found mixed in oyster shell middens along the Intracoastal Waterway. Their campsites and villages are found within the uplands overlooking the floodplain of the St. Johns River and its tributaries. The extensive middens (trash heaps), comprised of oyster shells and other mollusks, as well as animal bones, left behind by these people are still visible in many areas near the mouth of the St. Johns River.

During the months when the salt marshes did not have sufficient food supplies, the St. Johns peoples moved inland to hunt deer, turkey, and other game, as well as to gather nuts and berries. The St. Johns people also constructed sand mounds in which their buried their dead. They developed a hierarchical society with an elite class who were afforded more formal mortuary practices, with the more common people often put to rest in mass burials. They lived in villages with outlying hamlets, and depended on hunting, fishing, and gathering to survive. Some agriculture was practiced, but not to a great extent.

THE TIMUCUAN INDIANS

The era of the ancestors of what we now call the Timucuan Indians, also known as the Mississippian Tradition, began around A.D. 750 or A.D. 800 and was brought to an end when the Spanish founded St. Augustine in 1565. In the region around Cradle Creek, it is represented by two distinct cultures: the St. Johns II Culture east and central Florida and the Savannah culture of coastal Georgia. How the St. Johns and Savannah groups relate in the region is not yet fully understood as recent archeological investigations have led some researchers to believe the two groups occupied the same area at different times while other argue that one group was sharing the traits of their neighbors to the north and south.

Whichever the case may be, within northeastern Florida many late prehistoric sites contain a mixture of the sand-tempered cord marked pottery of the Savannah culture and the "chalky" check-stamped ware (called St. Johns Check Stamped) of the St. Johns II Culture.

Both of these groups were present in the Cradle Creek region. The Mississippian Tradition in northeastern Florida represents a time of greater cultural and religious complexity and more permanent settlements, especially near the coast and along the St. Johns River. The Timucuan Indians got their name from early European explorers.

During Timucuan times, the Native American populations in the region continued to hunt, fish, and gather food from the uplands and wetlands environments typified by this preserve. By 1702, most Timucuan Indians had died of diseases brought into the midst by European explorers and settlers.