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 swamps, and saltwater marsh communities. Saltwater marshes provide important habitat for many species of birds and invertebrates which in turn provide food for birds, reptiles, and mammals. The upland habitat provides foraging, roosting, and nesting habitat for these animals.

Cradle Creek 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 migratory birds and shorebirds. Endangered and threatened species inventoried within the preserve include the Eastern Indigo Snake, American Alligator, Least Tern, Red 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 natural environment and learn about the local flora, fauna, 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.
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 community evolves with increasing distance from the beach.

Typical of maritime forests forming Northeast Florida, the vegetation within this community is dominated by live oaks with dense saw palmetto in the understory. Many animals utilize maritime hardwoods 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 understory 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-lined 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

Invertebrates
- 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
  - Yellow-crowned Night Heron
  - Little Blue Heron
  - Cattle Egret
  - Black-crowned Night Heron

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

- Raptors
  - Turkey Vulture
  - Sharp-shinned Hawk
  - Cooper’s Hawk
  - Red-shouldered Hawk
  - Bald Eagle

- Doves
  - 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
  - American Robin
  - 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
- Heath-a-bustin'-with-love
- Highbush Blueberry
- Ironwood
- Jack-in-the-pulpit
- Live Oak
- Lizard’s Tail
- Lobelloy Bay
- Lobelloy Pine
- Longleaf Pine
- Marsh Elder
- Myrtle-leaved Holly
- Netted Chain Fern
- Fignut Hickory
- Pipistrel
- 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

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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 the interpreted use was hunting, gathering, and fishing. 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 "lithic 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 or held with bone or antler. The oldest of these point styles are triangular - afact that has led some researchers to believe the two groups were present in the Cradle Creek region.

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 the months when the salt marshes did not have sufficient food supplies, the St. Johns people hunted deer, turkey, and other game, as well as gathering nuts and berries. The St. Johns people also constructed sand mounds in which they 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. It is possible that some of these practices have been transmitted through the years, but the exact details are not well understood.

THE TIMUCUAN INDIANS

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THE ST. JOHNS CULTURE

The St. Johns Culture, also known as the Woodland Tradition, was founded St. Augustine in 1565. In the region around Cradle Creek, Archaic period sites occur often in the regional aboriginal settlement pattern.

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