Victoria Gardens

The Preserve

South Preserve

Ecosystems:

An ecosystem consists of a community of coexisting species (biotic) together with the nonliving (abiotic) parts of their habitat. In a healthy ecosystem these biotic and abiotic components provide a framework through which energy from the sun is transferred and within which nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus circulate. Various kinds of plants, animals, and microorganisms are included in a typical ecosystem such as a particular kind of forest, prairie, swamp, lake, stream, or reef.

Their Value:

The natural ecosystems are especially valuable because a surprisingly high percentage of Florida's plants, fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammal species (and important subspecies) are found nowhere else in

Our Challenge:

Perhaps the major challenge of the next century is to create an environmentally, as well as economically, sustainable way of living. The St. Joe Company has embraced this challenge and Victoria Park reflects that commitment to our environment.

Your Community:

The St. Joe Company believes that human activities in the vicinity of preserves should contribute to protection of biodiversity in the preserves, and Floridians everywhere must live in closer harmony with their natural heritage. That is why, at Victoria Park, you will notice that we manage these preserved communities to enhance the habitat value that was previously

Freshwater Lakes

Florida has 3 million acres of freshwater lakes and 12,000 miles of streams and rivers. The vast majority of the lakes in Florida are “sinkhole” lakes. These lakes are formed through a process where water dissolves the underlying limestone to form subterranean caverns. During drought, the roof of the cavern collapses, resulting in a circular depression at the surface as the surface soils fall into the hole. When these depressions fill with water they become lakes.

Most lakes along Florida’s central ridge lack an outfall and do not drain to the sea. Instead, these lakes lose water either through evaporation or through downward percolation. The water that percolates down is filtered by the sand and recharges the Floridan aquifer (the source of our drinking water) with clean fresh water.

Freshwater Marsh

The marshes that are found here at Victoria Park were formed in much the same way as the lakes, the difference being the depth of the surface depression that results from the sinkhole collapse. Marshes generally have water depths of less than 3 feet, and may dry completely during the dry winter months.

As with the dryer scrub community, these herbaceous marshes rely on fire to maintain their vegetative characteristics. Without occasional fires, the herbaceous vegetation would be replaced by woody shrubs and brush, and eventually trees.

Marshes provide important foraging, breeding and nesting areas for a wide variety of wildlife, including numerous species of insects, sandhill cranes, great blue herons, raccoons and frogs.

Historically, this region was dominated by a pine flatwoods community. However, in the late 1800s this area was converted to an improved pasture for use as a cattle ranch. The land was cleared, tilled, re-seeded with grass and improved with grazing cattle and fertilizer application. The cattle operation continued throughout the 1900s until the cows were removed in the late 1990s.

Currently, this pasture area is managed and maintained as foraging habitat for Sandhill Cranes. This land is periodically mowed and maintained to reduce the invasion of shrub species such as saw palmetto. Cranes utilize pastureland as a primary habitat to forage for insects. Cranes utilize open areas with minimal canopy and shrub coverage. Other animals that utilize this type of habitat include: bobcat, cotton rat, cotton mouse, bobwhite, loggerhead shrike, sparrows, and hawks.

Pine Flatwoods/ Hydric Pine Flatwoods

Pine flatwoods occur throughout the southeastern coastal plain and cover approximately 50% of the land area of Florida. It is the most extensive terrestrial ecosystem in Florida. This community evolved under frequent fire both lightning and human-caused, and seasonal drought and flooded soil conditions.

Pine flatwoods are characterized by a low, flat topography; an open overstory of pines; an extensive shrub layer; relatively poorly drained, acidic, sandy soil; and in the past, by open pine woodlands with frequent fires. Hydric pine flatwoods retain water for longer periods than pine flatwoods! The vegetation observed in this type of habitat generally include: slash, pond, or longleaf pines, saw palmetto, wax myrtle, gallberry, fetterbush, and tarflower. Common animals that utilize this type of habitat include: bobcat, fox squirrel, gray fox, eastern cottontail rabbit, cotton rat, deer, raccoon, and opossum.

Legend

- Trail Head
- Gator Hole Overlook
- Gopher Tortoise Burrows
- Scrub Jay Zone
- Prescribed Burning Zone
- Wilderness Trail (Round-trip)
- Wilderness Trail (Additional loop)
- Overlook
- Information Panel
- Gated Entry Point

Scrub & High Pine

Florida scrub and high pine, xeric, or sandhill, communities are easily recognized by the dominance of evergreen shrubs and frequent patches of bare, white sand. Between the ice ages approximately 2 million years ago, the sea level was higher and a central ridge was all that was left above water. These sandy hills are the remains of dunes that formed along that ancient coastline.

More than two dozen threatened and endangered species are dependent upon these xeric habitats. Fire suppression over the past 80 years has effectively changed the natural processes and composition of many fragments of Florida scrub. A number of rare plants in this ecosystem require the structure of open patches of sand and vegetation that are created under a natural fire regime. These plants will not survive when the shrub layer grows to the point that the open patches are shaded out. Prescribed burning is necessary for maintenance of most scrub communities in Florida. There is no specific fire return interval applicable to all scrubs. The management at Victoria Park is designed to maintain different stages of plant growth across the entire landscape, as each stage offers important structural attributes to different species. Prescription fires mimic patchy natural burn patterns in which areas of burned vegetation are not contiguous.

Wildlife common to the scrub and high pine communities include bobwhite quail, Sherman's fox squirrel, gopher tortoise, threatened Florida scrub jay, white-tailed deer, bobcat and the occasional gray fox.

North Preserve