

Welcome to the Savannas Preserve State Park!

Encompassing over 5,100 acres and stretching more than 10 miles from Ft. Pierce to Jensen Beach, the preserve contains portions of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, savanna-like wetlands, and pine flatwoods. It is the largest, most ecologically intact stretch of freshwater marsh in southeast Florida.

Natural Communities

The Savannas consists of six distinct natural communities. These habitats support plants and animals unique to each area.

Pine flatwoods are characterized by an open canopy forest of slash pines and an understory dominated by saw palmetto, gallberry and wiregrass. Bobcats and gopher tortoises may be seen here.

Wet prairies, treeless plains dominated by grasses, St. John's wort, and carnivorous sundews, are interspersed throughout the preserve. Marsh rabbits and sandhill cranes frequent this community.

The *basin marsh* is the most striking feature of the preserve - nearly 1,000 acres run the length of the preserve. This shallow body of water nurtures a mixture of grasses and sedges, such as sawgrass and pickerelweed. Alligators, herons, and bald eagles can be seen here.

Marsh lakes are deeper, more open water areas within the basin marsh. This community is characterized by water lilies, bladderwort, and pickerelweed. Largemouth bass and alligators are common residents.

Photo: Paul Millette



Sand pine scrub is a globally imperiled plant community covering the eastern boundary of the park. It is dominated by an overstory of sand pines and is home to the Florida scrub-jay as well as the prickly apple cactus, which exists nowhere else in the world.

Scrubby flatwoods are in bands adjacent to and west of the sand pine scrub community. The flatwoods are characterized by scattered slash pines, an understory of saw palmetto, scrub oaks, and grasses. Florida scrub-jays, scrub lizards, and gopher tortoises may be observed here.

Photo: Megan Griffin



Florida State Parks

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks

Savannas Preserve State Park

9551 Gumbo Limbo Lane
Jensen Beach, Florida 34957
Park Office: (772) 340-7530
Education Center: (772) 398-2779

www.FloridaStateParks.org/savannas

Park Guidelines

- For your safety, please do not feed or attempt to touch any animals.
- Intoxicants and firearms are prohibited.
- Pets are permitted in this park, but are not allowed in the Education Center. They must be well behaved and kept on a six-foot, hand-held leash at all times. Please check with the park before arriving and inquire about specific pet restrictions.
- Equestrian activities are prohibited in the Atlantic Coastal Ridge (scrub ridge) due to the uniqueness and extreme sensitivity of this endangered natural community.
- The park offers a number of recreational opportunities to visitors with disabilities. Should you need assistance to enable your full participation, please contact the Education Center at (772) 398-2779.
- The park is open 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- The Education Center is open 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday.
- An entrance fee is required.

Southeast Florida

Savannas Preserve State Park

Largest freshwater marsh system on Florida's southeast coast



Photo: Paul Millette



Printed 09/03 on Recycled Paper

...the Real Florida

History & Culture

Archaeological sites, in and adjacent to the preserve, represent native occupation that spanned the Middle Archaic Period (approximately 7,000 years before present) through the Second Seminole War (1835-1842).

These native peoples inhabited the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, relying on the rich fauna and flora of the nearby Indian River.

An influx of American settlers to the Indian River area after the war resulted in increased hostilities between the Seminole and white populations. This eventually resulted in the displacement of the native population.

During the Second Seminole War, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Pierce first used the term "savannah" to describe the series of ponds and marshes found here. In 1879 Captain Thomas Richards planted the first pineapples grown from cuttings transported from Key West. The plants did well in the sandy, well-drained soils and soon several plantations appeared. African-Americans and Bahamians provided plantation labor working the fields in extremely uncomfortable conditions.

By 1895 Jensen Beach had become known as the "Pineapple Capital of the World." The industry collapsed in 1920 due to a variety of financial and agricultural problems. Between 1977 and 1997 Florida purchased several parcels of land to establish the Savannas Preserve State Park.



Real Fun in the Real Florida!

The Savannas Preserve State Park offers visitors a variety of ways to explore and learn about this unique natural area.

Hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riders share several miles of **multi-use trails**. An area on Scenic Park Drive is for equestrians to park their trailers and unload horses. The trailhead, on Jensen Beach Boulevard, is the starting point for a leisurely 1.5-mile hike through the park's pine flatwoods. It has a large **picnic pavilion** and restroom with water.

Canoeing is a great way to explore the Savannas. The canoe launching area, located 3/4 of a mile from the Education Center, affords visitors easy access to the basin marsh. A small picnic pavilion and environmentally-friendly restroom is located nearby.

The **Education Center** features **interactive exhibits** and **displays** on local history, the preserve's six natural communities, rare and endangered plants and animals, non-native plant and animal species threatening the preserve, and how the Florida Park Service is managing the park for future generations to enjoy.

Numerous interpretive activities are available to park visitors including **guided walks** and **canoe trips**. For information on these and other activities, please call the Education Center at (772) 398-2779.

Archaeological evidence of native occupation

1842: Armed Occupation Act provides 160 acres to any male over 18 years, who agrees to build a home and reside for 5 years; European population grows rapidly

1850: Some settlers return after the establishment of Ft. Capron, several miles north of Ft. Pierce; Population grows rapidly

Construction of Florida East Coast Railroad improves accessibility to area

1920: Pineapple industry collapses due to financial and agricultural problems

1993: Florida Park Service assumes management of Savannas

Park Timeline 7,000 Before Present

1600s 1700s 1800s

1900s

1696: Jonathan Dickinson passes through area after being shipwrecked in Hobe Sound

1837: Lt. Col. Benjamin K. Pierce establishes fort that bears his name; first to use the term "savannah" to describe the area

1849: Many settlers flee when trouble arises with nearby Seminole Indians

1879: Capt. Thomas Richards settles property he names "Eden" and pioneers pineapple industry on mainland Florida

1895: Jensen Beach becomes known as "Pineapple Capital of the World"

1977: Initial 9 acres of Savannas is purchased for \$12,500!

2000: Florida State Parks voted #1 in the nation