

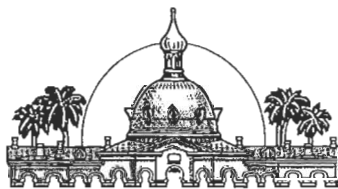
UPPER LITTLE MANATEE RIVER PRESERVE

CONCEPTUAL MANAGEMENT PLAN



Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Department
Resource Management Office
10940 McMullen Road
Riverview, Florida 33569-6226

February 2001



Hillsborough County
Florida

Office of the County Administrator
Daniel A. Kleman

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January 26, 2001

Colleen Kruk, Interim Land Use Manager
Land Use Section/Land Resources Department
Southwest Florida Water Management District
2379 Broad Street
Brooksville, Florida 34609-6899

Dear Ms. Kruk;

Enclosed is a draft of the Upper Little Manatee River conceptual management plan as requested by the District.

Feel free to contact our office with any questions. Also, please consider our offer of an on-site tour to facilitate your understanding of the site and our proposals.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Bowman

Sheryl Bowman, Environmental Scientist
Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Department
Resource Management Office
10940 McMullen Road
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(813) 672-7876
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Enclosure

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I. Introduction

The Upper Little Manatee River Preserve (ULMRP), is located in southern Hillsborough County, upstream of the Little Manatee State Recreation Area and Highway 301. The site consists of several adjacent parcels which were acquired by Hillsborough County and subsequently conveyed to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), which reimbursed the County for 50% of the purchase price.

Hillsborough County has managed the approximately 5869 acre site since acquisition and will continue to manage the site through a lease agreement with the SWFWMD. The ULMRP is being managed in conjunction with other preserve lands in the vicinity such as the Little Manatee River Preserve, the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, Camp Bayou, and the Alafia River Corridor by the Resource Management office of the Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Department. The main office of the section is located in Riverview, Florida, and a branch office is located in Ruskin. Both offices are located just a short drive from the preserve.

The preserve has been protected through public ownership in response to a high level of support from the local environmental community concerned about the impacts of development in and adjacent to the river corridor and Tampa Bay. The main feature of the preserve, the Little Manatee River, has striking scenic qualities and therefore is highly popular for canoeists. The river is a designated Outstanding Florida Waterway by the State of Florida.

As part of the lease agreement, initially executed on July 31, 1996 and later amended, Hillsborough County must develop a conceptual management plan, subject to approval by the SWFWMD. After the approval of the conceptual plan, the existing Little Manatee River Management Plan will be revised, with the ULMRP sites being incorporated.

II. Protected Resources

A. Plant Communities

The ULMRP includes undeveloped uplands, former agricultural lands, and wetlands associated with the Little Manatee River (Figure 1). The river in this section is a narrow channel, which supports freshwater wetland species. Several tributaries find the river in this area: Gully Branch enters on the west side of Leonard Lee Road; South Fork empties near CR 579; and Pierce Branch feeds the river from the northeast near Grange Hall Loop Road. The plant communities found in this area are diverse: uplands include pine flatwoods, sand pine scrub, oak hammock, and mixed hardwood and pine forests. The wetlands consist of freshwater marshes, riverine floodplains, and the aforementioned river tributaries.

B. Wildlife

Inventory

The preserve supports a healthy and diverse wildlife population due to its large size and the quality and diversity of its habitat. A general wildlife survey has been compiled of all wildlife seen by staff to date, with results listed in Appendix A. A more thorough survey will take place at the time the full management plan is prepared.

Listed species

Listed species confirmed to date are as follows (Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 1997):

<u>Genus, species</u>	<u>Common name</u>	<u>Listing status</u>
<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	Florida scrub-jay	threatened
<i>Ajaia ajaia</i>	roseate spoonbill	species of special concern
<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	American alligator	species of special concern
<i>Chrysopsis floridana</i>	Florida golden aster	endangered
<i>Chionanthus pygmaeus</i>	pygmy fringetree	endangered
<i>Drymerchon corais couperi</i>	Eastern indigo snake	threatened
<i>Encyclia tampensis</i>	butterfly orchid	commercially exploited
<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	white ibis	species of special concern
<i>Garberia heterophylla</i>	garberia	threatened
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	species of special concern
<i>Grus canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	threatened
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	bald eagle	threatened
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	woodstork	endangered
<i>Sciurus niger shermani</i>	Sherman's fox squirrel	species of special concern
<i>Speotyto cunicularia</i>	burrowing owl	species of special concern

A special section on the management of each listed species shall appear in the full management plan. Resource Management staff is coordinating with other applicable agencies in this management effort.

C. Cultural

Archaeological

Locations of archaeological sites are not known. It is proposed that survey work be accomplished so that the sites, if any, are properly documented and protected. Survey work should take place prior to the initiation of site clearing activities such as firelane installation, or trail clearing.

Historical

Remains of old railroad bridges exist in and around the site; one of the more impressive structures is the single-span railroad bridge with trestle approaches, built over the Little Manatee River in 1903. (see Appendix B). In addition, a portion of the town of Willow, a small sawmill community that was abandoned in the 1930's, is located on County-owned land adjacent to SWFWMD holdings.

III. Site Management

A. Habitat Management

Management leases

A management agreement or an in-kind services lease in three areas (see Figure 2) will be sought in order to gain assistance with routine management functions such as fenceline and road maintenance, prescribed burns, vegetation management, and site security.

Upper Little Manatee River

- land cover types

10/1/01

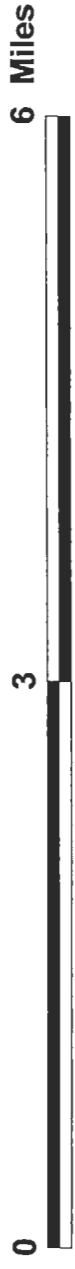
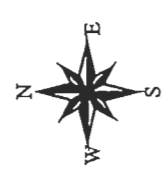


FIGURE 2

Upper Little Manatee River

-cattle lease locations and boundary map



Listed species

As part of the management plan, all listed wildlife will be surveyed and compiled into a master list. Confirmed areas will be delineated, mapped, and protected. Specific habitat and management recommendations will be made for each species.

Habitat Restoration

A number of areas have been farmed or cleared in the past. Most of these will need active management and planting with native species. Natural plant community restoration will take place in the areas depicted as "Fallow Field," "Improved Pasture," and "Semi-Improved Pasture" in Figure 1.

Known areas in which restoration is planned include the following:

- *Gully Branch Creek to the river – smooth erosion gullies, replant, and remove agricultural plastic from water and vegetation.
- *Saffold Road - remove citrus trees, trash, and dispose of 500-1000 tires.
- *CR 579 on Hillsborough/Manatee County Line – restore improved pasture to natural habitat.
- *Field north of Flowers Road – restore to natural habitat
- *East side of Leonard Lee Road, north of river – restore to natural habitat.

Water Quality Improvements

Several government agencies and private businesses are concerned with the improvement of water quality in the Little Manatee River. The Department of Environmental Protection regularly samples stations in and near the preserve; results are posted at <http://cmhas.eng.usf.edu/projects/lilman/>. Also, Hillsborough County is in the process of writing a watershed management plan for the Little Manatee River Basin.

Water quality in the river may be affected by direct and indirect runoff from agricultural lands. There are a couple of areas in the preserve in which water enters the river from nearby croplands. This situation should be addressed through coordination with other agencies such as Hillsborough County Public Works/Stormwater Management, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District/SWIM department.

In addition to natural community replanting, groundwater restoration will take place through the proper abandonment of wells (costs to be determined).

Exotic plant and animal control

Known major exotic problems encountered to date include feral hogs and cogongrass. Smaller amounts of exotic pest plants including Brazilian pepper, air potato, lead tree, chinaberry, and tropical soda apple are also present. Feral hogs will be trapped and removed by staff, a leasee, or a private contractor. Pest plants will be chemically treated and/or roots disced where appropriate.

Prescribed burns

Prescribed fire is being used in the preserve to maintain fire-adapted natural plant communities and to enhance wildlife populations. Much of the property within the ULMRP has been divided and labeled with burn unit numbers. Objectives and burn plans are

presently being written for each unit. Firelanes are under construction. Existing firelanes are being maintained; access to some areas of the preserve is difficult.

B. Site Security

Site security is a major problem in Hillsborough County. The ULMRP has been impacted by activities such as illegal dumping, trespass from vehicles and horses, and vandalism of facilities.

Security has been initiated with the development of a residence on the south side of the river near Leonard Lee Road. It is anticipated that additional measures are needed to deal with the large area involved. These measures include the replacement of old fences, signs, gates, and locks, as well as the possibility of another security residence. Assistance from adjacent landowners has been requested on Willow Road. It is anticipated that agricultural leases will also serve to deter problems.

C. Public Access

There are a number of recreational opportunities on the river, provided at sites such as the Little Manatee River State Park and the Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center. Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation typically allows recreational opportunities, which are compatible with the goal of protecting the site's existing natural resources. However, because of fiscal constraints, HCPRD finds it preferable not to replicate already existing facilities located close by. The following are activities, which are both compatible and fiscally possible:

Hiking

Hillsborough County has a policy that allows public access for day use (foot traffic) to most sites through approved access points. There are a number of walk-through access points already in place (Figure 3). Preserve visitors are permitted to use existing dirt roads for hiking. However, there are no existing amenities available in the preserve, and none are anticipated in the near future.

Canoeing

The Little Manatee River has a striking beauty, which makes it exceptionally popular for canoeists. Large masses of the purple Carolina aster bloom along the banks in November, fringe trees and high bush blueberry dominate the month of March, and resemble white fluff. A commercially run canoe outpost on Highway 301, south of SR 674 utilizes the Upper Little Manatee (a drop off point is at Leonard Lee Road) during select seasons when the water is not too high or too low. Users typically exit the river at the outpost or at the Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center, located at the south end of 24th Street in Ruskin.

Hillsborough County is presently working with the canoe outpost to improve the access point at Leonard Lee Road.

Future considerations

The following option has been presented to various Hillsborough County representatives over a period of several years. It is considered compatible with the goals of site

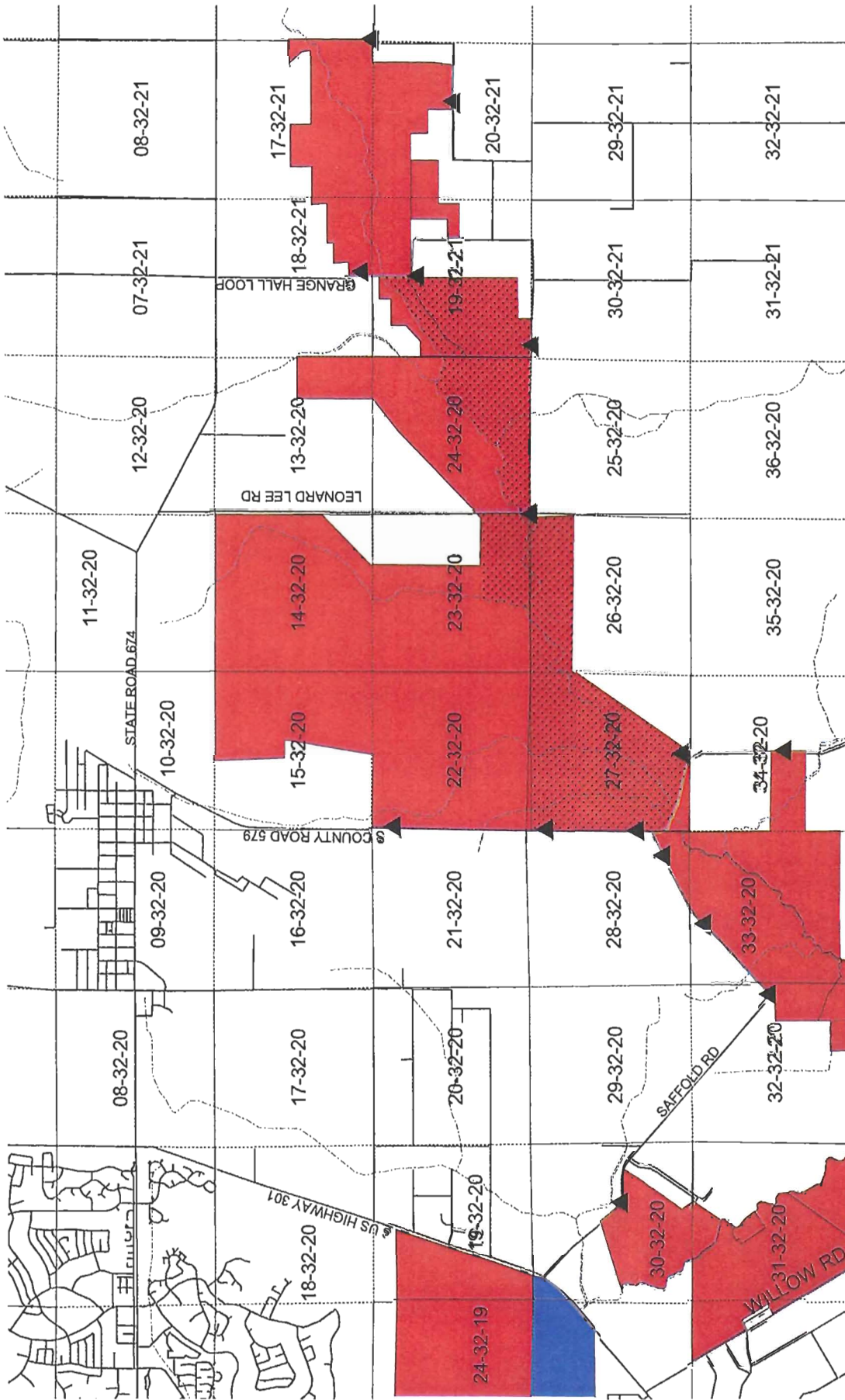
FIGURE 3

Upper Little Manatee River Corridor - Site Security Map

Legend

- ACQUIRED ELAPP
- OTHER PUBLIC LAND
- OTHER PRESERVATION
- Patrol Area

- Rivers and Creeks
- Roads
- Sections
- Gates



preservation, but is contingent on additional land acquisition, permanent site security measures, and funding for facilities.

Talks have taken place between Hillsborough County representatives and the Florida Gulf Coast Railroad Museum, Inc. concerning a possible extension of the excursion trains north into the county. This proposal (see Appendix B) which would require rehabilitation of the track and bridge over the river, would be feasible of the county were to acquire additional lands on the north side of the river, if funding becomes available for a continuous presence by park staff. and consensus is reached with the property owner, Tampa Electric Company.

IV. Cost Estimate

Listed cost estimates are for a period of five years and are based on materials and labor costs, but do not include capital equipment expenses.

Prescribed burning.....	\$100,000
Security Residence	20,000
Exotic Plant Removal.....	30,000
Fence Installation	50,000
Hydroaxe	In kind service
Miscellaneous Maintenance	5,000
Signs and Interpretive Display	3,000
Public Access/Recreation.....	1,000
Access for staff/public over South Fork Creek	TBD
Habitat Management & Restoration	TBD
(Purchase agreement included \$450,000 for restoration)	
Well abandonment.....	TBD
Total	\$209,000

V. Appendices

Appendix A – Wildlife Found in the Upper Little Manatee River Preserve

Plants

- Acer rubrum* – red maple
- Acrosticum danaeifolium* – giant leather fern
- Aletris lutea* – yellow colic root
- Ambrosia artemisiifolia* – common ragweed
- Ampelopsis arborea* – peppervine
- Andropogon* sp. – bluestem
- Apios americana* – groundnut
- Aristida beyrichiana* – wiregrass
- Asclepias pedicellata* – Savannah milkweed
- Asclepias tuberosa* – butterfly weed
- Asiminia reticulata* – netted pawpaw
- Aster adnatus* – scaleleaf aster
- Aster walteri* – Walter’s aster
- Baccharis halimifolia* – saltbush
- Balduina angustifolia* – coastalplain honeycombhead
- Baptisia lanceolata* – gopherweed

Bejaria racemosa – tarflower
Berlandiera subacaulis – Florida greeneyes
Bidens mitis – beggar-ticks
Blechnum serrulatum – toothed midsorus fern/swamp fern
Boehmeria cylindrica – false nettle
Buchnera americana – blueheart
Callicarpa americana – American beautyberry/beautybush
Campsis radicans – trumpet-creeper
Carphophorus corymbosus – Florida paintbrush
Carya glabra – pignut hickory
Cephalanthus occidentalis – buttonbush
Chamaecrista fasciculata – partridge-pea
Chapmannia floridana – alicia
Chionanthus virginicus – white fringetree
Chrysopsis floridana – Florida golden aster (endangered)
Chrysopsis subulata – goldenaster
Cladium jamaicense – swamp sawgrass
Clematis crispa – swamp leather-flower
Cnidocolus stimulosus – tread-softly
Commelina diffusa – day-flower
Commelina erecta – day-flower
Coreopsis leavenworthii – Leavenworth's tickseed
Crinum americanum – string-lily/seven-sisters/swamp lily
Crotalaria rotundifolia – rabbit bells
Crotalaria sp. – rattle-box
Cuphea carthagenensis – Colombian waxweed *
Cuthbertia ornata – Florida scrub roseling
Cyperus sp. – flatsedge
Dalea carnea – dalea
Dioscorea bulbifera – air potato *
Diospyros virginiana – persimmon
Eclipta prostrata – false daisy
Elephantopus elatus – Florida elephant's foot
Encyclia tampensis – Florida butterfly orchid (commercially exploited)
Erechtites hieracifolia – fireweed/American burnweed
Erigeron sp. – fleabane
Eulophia alta – wild coco (threatened)
Eupatorium capillifolium – dog fennel
Eupatorium mohrii – Mohr's thoroughwort
Eupatorium rotundifolium – false hoarhound
Euphorbia polyphylla – spurge
Euthamia tenuifolia – flat-topped goldenrod
Fraxinus caroliniana – Carolina ash
Froelichia floridana – cottonweed
Galactia elliotii – Elliott's milkpea
Galactia regularis – milkpea
Galactia volubilis – downy milkpea
Galium tinctorium – bedstraw

Garberia heterophylla – garberia (threatened and endemic)
Gelsemium sempervirens – yellow jessamine/Carolina jessamine
Hedyotis procumbens – innocence
Helianthemum carolinianum – Carolina frostweed
Helianthemum corymbosum – pinebarren frostweed
Helianthus angustifolius – longleaf sunflower/narrow-leaved sunflower
Hydrocotyle bonariensis – water pennywort
Hypericum cistifolium – St. John's-wort
Hypericum crux-andreae – St. Peter's-wort
Hypericum hypericoides – St. Andrew's-cross
Hypericum reductum – Atlantic St. John's wort
Hypericum tetrapetalum – fourpetal St. John's-wort
Hypolepis repens – bramblefern
Hypoxis curtissii – common yellow stargrass
Hypoxis juncea – fringed yellow stargrass
Hyptis alata – musky mint/bushmint
Ilex ambigua var. *ambigua* – Carolina holly
Ilex cassine – dahoon holly
Ilex glabra – gallberry
Imperata cylindrica – cogongrass *
Indigofera caroliniana – Carolina indigo/wild indigo
Ipomoea cairica – bush morning-glory *
Iris virginica – Virginia iris
Juncus effusus – soft rush
Juniperus virginiana – red cedar
Lachnanthes caroliniana – Carolina redroot
Lechea sp. – pinweed
Leucaena leucocephala – white leadtree *
Licania michauxii – gopher apple
Liquidambar styraciflua – sweetgum
Lobelia cardinalis – cardinal flower (threatened)
Lobelia paludosa – white lobelia
Lonicera sempervirens – coral honeysuckle
Ludwigia peruviana – primrose willow *
Lupinus diffusus – lupine
Lygodesmia aphylla – rose-rush
Lygodium japonicum – Japanese climbing fern *
Lygodium microphyllum – small-leaf climbing fern/old world climbing fern *
Lyonia mariana – staggerbush
Macrothelypteris torresiana – mariana maiden fern *
Magnolia virginiana – sweetbay
Mecardonia acuminata – axilflower
Melia azedarach – chinaberry *
Melothria pendula – wild cucumber/creeping cucumber
Mikania scandens – hempweed/hempvine
Mitchella repens – partridge berry
Myrica cerifera – wax myrtle/southern bayberry
Nephrolepis exaltata – sword fern

Nuphar lutea – spatterdock
Nymphaea odorata – fragrant waterlily
Opuntia humifusa – prickly-pear cactus
Osmunda cinnamomea – cinnamon fern (commercially exploited)
Osmunda regalis – royal fern (commercially exploited)
Palafoxia feayi – Feay's palafox
Palafoxia integrifolia – coastalplain palafox
Panicum hemitomon – maidencane
Panicum repens – torpedo grass *
Parthenocissus quinquefolia – Virginia creeper
Paspalum notatum – bahia grass *
Passiflora suberosa – corksystem passionflower
Peltandra sagittifolia – spoonflower
Penstemon multiflorus – manyflower beardtongue
Phlebodium aureum – golden polypody
Phoebanthus grandiflorus – Florida false sunflower
Phyla nodiflora – frog-fruit
Phytolacca americana – pokeberry
Piloblephis rigida – wild pennyroyal
Pinus clausa – sand pine
Pinus elliotii – slash pine
Pinus palustris – longleaf pine
Piptochaetium avenaceum – blackseed needlegrass
Pityopsis graminifolia – narrowleaf silkgrass
Pleopeltis polypodioides var. *michauxiana* – resurrection fern
Pluchea rosea – rosy camphorweed
Polygala grandiflora – large-flower polygala
Polygala rugelii – yellow bachelor's button
Polygala setacea – coastalplain milkwort
Polygonum punctatum – dotted smartweed
Polyprenum procumbens – rustweed
Pontederia cordata – pickerelweed
Prunus caroliniana – cherry laurel
Prunus serotina – black cherry
Psidium cattleianum – strawberry guava *
Psidium guajava – common guava *
Pteridium aquilinum var. *caudatum* – lacy bracken fern
Pteridium aquilinum var. *pseudocaudatum* – tailed bracken fern
Pterocaulon pycnostachyum – blackroot
Quercus chapmanii – Chapman's oak
Quercus geminata – sand live oak
Quercus laevis – turkey oak
Quercus laurifolia – laurel oak
Quercus nigra – water oak
Quercus pumila – running oak
Quercus virginiana – Virginia live oak
Rhexia nuttallii – Nuttall's meadowbeauty
Rhododendron viscosum – swamp honeysuckle

Rhus copallina – winged sumac
Ricinus communis castor bean *
Rubus betulifolius – blackberry
Sabal etonia – scrub palmetto
Sabal palmetto – cabbage palm
Sagittaria sp. – arrowhead
Salix caroliniana – coastal plain willow
Schizachyrium sp. – blue stem
Schrankia microphylla – sensitive briar
Scoparia dulcis – sweet broom/goat weed
Scutellaria arenicola skullcap
Serenoa repens – saw palmetto
Sesbania punicea – purple sesban/rattlebox *
Sideroxylon tenax – tough bully
Smilax auriculata – greenbrier/catbrier
Smilax bona-nox – saw greenbrier
Smilax glauca – wild sarsaparilla vine
Smilax pumila – sarsaparilla vine
Solidago fistulosa – goldenrod
Solidago odora var. *chapmanii* – goldenrod
Sorghastrum secundum – lopsided indiagrass
Spartina bakeri – sand cordgrass
Sporobolus junceus – pineywoods dropseed
Stillingia sylvatica – queen's delight/queen's root
Stylisma humistrata – southern dawnflower
Styrax americana – storax/snowbell
Syngonanthus flavidulus – hatpins/shoe buttons/bantam-buttons
Taxodium distichum – bald cypress
Tephrosia sp. – hoarypea/goat's rue/devil's shoestring
Thelypteris dentata – downy maiden fern/downy shield *
Thelypteris hispidula var. *versicolor* – hairy maiden fern
Thelypteris interrupta – hottentot fern
Thelypteris kunthii – southern shield fern/widespread maiden fern
Thelypteris serrata – toothed lattice-vein fern
Tillandsia recurvata – ballmoss
Tillandsia usneoides – Spanish moss
Tillandsia utriculata – giant airplant (endangered)
Toxicodendron radicans – poison ivy
Typha domingensis – southern cattail
Urena lobata – Caesar-weed
Vaccinium arboreum – sparkleberry
Vaccinium darrowii – Darrow's blueberry
Vaccinium myrsinites – shiny blueberry
Vaccinium stamineum – deerberry
Viburnum nudum – possumhaw
Viburnum obovatum – blackhaw/Walter's viburnum
Vicia sp. – vetch
Vitis rotundifolia – grapevine/muscadine/southern fox grape/scuppernong

Woodwardia areolata – netted chain fern
Woodwardia virginica – Virginia chain fern
Xanthosoma sagittifolium – arrowleaf elephantear *
Ximenia americana – hog plum
Xyris sp. – yelloweyed grass
Yucca filamentosa – Adam’s needle
Zigadenus densus – crowpoison/Osceola’s plume

Non-vascular plants

Cladonia sp. – reindeer lichen
Cladonia leporina – British soldier moss

Birds

Agelaius phoeniceus – redwing black bird
Ajaia ajaia – roseate spoonbill (species of special concern)
Aphelocoma coerulescens – Florida scrub jay (threatened)
Ardea herodias – great blue heron
Athene cunicularia – burrowing owl (species of special concern)
Buteo brachyurus – short-tailed hawk
Buteo jamaicensis – red-tailed hawk
Buteo lineatus – red-shouldered hawk
Cardinalis cardinalis – northern cardinal
Cathartes aura – turkey vulture
Charadrius vociferus – killdeer
Chordeiles minor – common nighthawk
Circus cyaneus – marsh hawk
Colaptes auratus – common flicker
Colinus virginianus – common bobwhite quail
Columbina passerina – ground dove
Coragyps atratus – black vulture
Corvus brachyrhynchos – American crow
Cyanocitta cristata – bluejay
Dendroica palmarum – palm warbler
Dolichonyx oryzivorus – bobolink
Dryocopus pileatus – pileated woodpecker
Elanoides forficatus – swallow-tailed kite
Eudocimus albus – white ibis (species of special concern)
Falco sparverius – American kestrel
Geothlypis trichas – common yellow-throat
Grus canadensis pratensis – Florida sandhill crane (threatened)
Haliaeetus leucocephalus – bald eagle (threatened)
Hirundo rustica – barn swallow
Iridoprocne bicolor – tree swallow
Lanius ludovicianus – loggerhead shrike
Megaceryle alcyon – belted kingfisher
Meleagris gallopavo – wild turkey
Mycteria americana – woodstork (endangered)
Myriarchus crinitus – great crested flycatcher

Parula americana – parula warbler
Parus bicolor – tufted titmouse
Pipilo erythrophthalmus – eastern towhee
Strix varia – barred owl
Sturnella magna – eastern meadowlark
Thryothorus ludovicianus – Carolina wren
Toxostoma rufum – brown thrasher
Turdus migratorius – American robin
Vireo griseus – white-eyed vireo

Invertebrates

Argiope aurantia – black and yellow argiope spider
Ascia monuste phileta – great southern white butterfly
Centruroides hentzi – scorpion
Dasymutilla occidentalis – velvet ant
Eurema lisa – little sulfur butterfly
Eurytides marcellus – zebra swallowtail butterfly
Gasteracantha cancriform – crab-like orb weaver spider
Heliconius charitonius – zebra longwing butterfly
Junonia coenia – buckeye butterfly
Leptotes cassius theonus – Cassius blue butterfly
Mantis religiosa – praying mantis
Nephila clavipes – golden silk spider
Orthemis ferruginea – roseate skimmer
Papilio cresphontes – giant swallowtail butterfly
Papilio palamedes – Palamedes swallowtail butterfly
Peucezia viridans – green lynx spider
Vanessa virginianensis – American painted lady butterfly

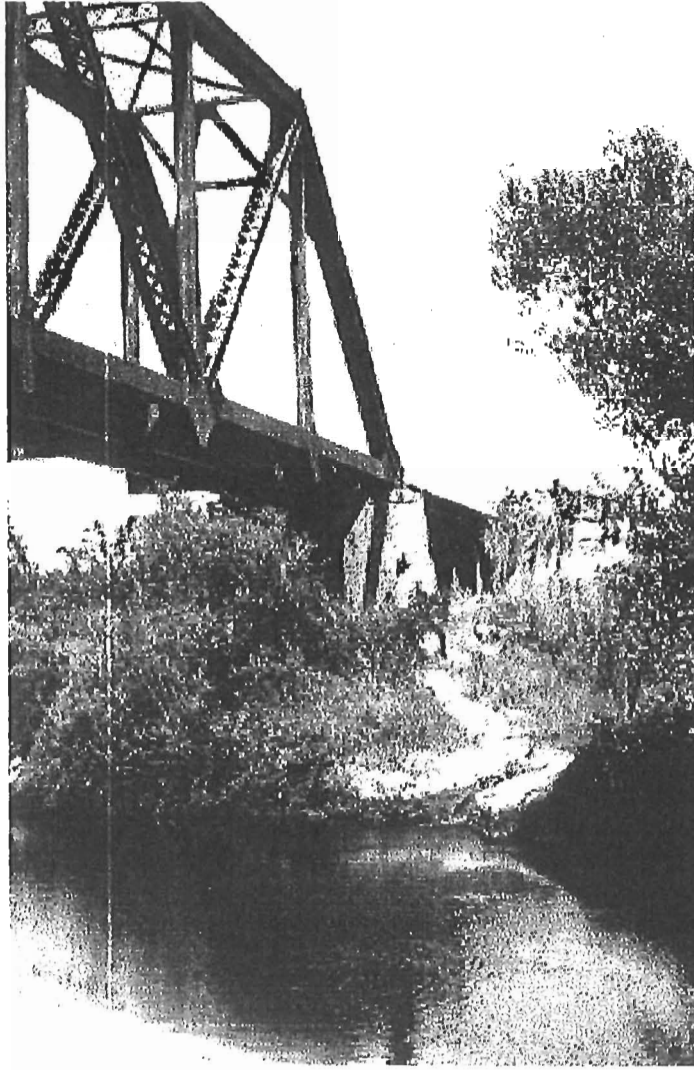
Mammals

Lutra canadensis – river otter
Lynx rufus – bobcat
Odocoileus virginianus – white-tailed deer
Procyon lotor – raccoon
Sciurus carolinensis – gray squirrel
Sciurus niger shermanii – Sherman's fox squirrel (species of special concern)

Reptiles/Amphibians

Alligator mississippiensis – American alligator (species of special concern)
Cnemidophorus sexlineatus – six-lined racerunner lizard
Coluber constrictor priapus – southern black racer snake
Drymarchon corais couperi – Eastern indigo snake (threatened)
Elaphe guttata guttata – red rat snake
Eumeces inexpectatus – southeastern five-lined skink
Gopherus polyphemus – gopher tortoise (species of special concern)
Hyla squirella – squirrel tree frog
Nerodia fasciata fasciata – banded water snake
Ophisaurus sp. – glass lizard

Rana catesbeiana – bullfrog
Rhineura floridana – Florida worm lizard (endemic)
Sceloporus undulatus hyacinthinus – fence lizard
Scincella lateralis – ground skink



Little Manatee Bridge Park

A Proposal

Florida Gulf Coast Railroad Museum, Inc.
July, 2000

Appendix B Little Manatee Bridge Park Proposal

FLORIDA GULF COAST RAILROAD MUSEUM, INC.

PROPOSED LITTLE MANATEE RIVER PARK

July 28, 2000

The Florida Gulf Coast Railroad Museum proposes the creation of a public park along the Little Manatee River in southern Hillsborough County. We believe that the creation of a park in that area would have several benefits for citizens of Hillsborough County. The proposed park would be unique in that it would be served by excursion trains run by the museum as well as providing visitors with access to undisturbed animal and plant life not found elsewhere. Further, the park would include an historic bridge built in 1903 that has been virtually unchanged since its construction.

Creation of this park will require the cooperation of the Hillsborough County parks Department, Tampa Electric Company (TECO) and the Florida Gulf Coast RR Museum.

BACKGROUND

The museum purchased land along the railroad right of way in 1992. This right of way, beginning at the Hillsborough County - Manatee County line, extends southwesterly for 1400 feet and crosses Willow Road at Willow, Florida in Manatee County. It has direct rail access to 16 miles of right of way into Ellenton Junction, Florida. There is additional right of way available from Ellenton Junction to the Gamble Mansion, state operated museum dating from the Civil War.

TECO owns the railroad right of way northward from the county line for 21 miles. Included in that purchase is the portion from the county line to Saffold Road which encompasses the bridge over the Little Manatee River. Much of the rail remains although rehabilitation is needed before it can be used. TECO is not using their right of way at the present time.

The Hillsborough County parks Department has acquired land along the river over a period of years. The land is currently banked for a wilderness preserve but the public has no access to it.

There have been problems with trespassers and vandals on these lands over the years. Due to the remote location, almost no policing of the area is possible. Trespassers regularly use trail bikes, motorcycles, 4 wheeled vehicles, and horses to enter the property. Efforts to prevent their entry have included installation of gates, fences, and road blocks of steel rail and railroad ties inserted lengthwise into the ground to form barricades. All have been removed or destroyed. It appears that the only way to police the area is with park rangers or sheriff's deputies. None are presently employed there so the problem persists.

PROPOSED NEW USES

The museum proposes that a partnership be created to fully utilize the lands described above for the creation of visitor facilities, including walking and horseback trails and picnic facilities, wildlife and plant study programs, and trains which would carry visitors to and from the park. We believe that the presence of regular visitors and park rangers will discourage vandals and at the same time turn this problem area into a public asset. Also, canoe boaters could visit the park as many do now, renting canoes from the Canoe Outpost on the river at US 301.

PRESENT CONDITIONS

Currently, there is a beautiful setting of the river flowing through lush vegetation, intersected by the railroad right of way that runs from Saffold Road, across the river, into Manatee County. The museum's trains have been running every weekend since October, 1993 between Parrish to Willow, stopping a mile short of the river. At present, no museum visitors have access to the bridge or surrounding area.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

With access to the right of way now owned by TECO and rehabilitation of the track and bridge, the museum trains could cross the bridge and run to a new station located between Saffold Road and the river. The station could serve as a joint facility for park management, park rangers, and as a boarding place for trains. Additionally, hiking trails and horseback trails could run from the station to areas deemed appropriate by park officials. The bridge could become the focal point of the park as well as provide access to the south side of the river for hikers, park vehicles, and the trains. Public entrance to the park would be from the north at Saffold Road via a new entrance road.

SECURITY

The railroad museum's crossing at Willow Road would be closed at all times when the trains are not running by locking its gate over the track. Regular ranger presence and patrols would further reduce vandal entry so that the entire facility could be protected. Gates across the new entry road on the north end would also close when the park is closed and the on-site ranger would provide added protection.

BENEFITS

Public access to its own assets

Unique trail and hiking opportunities

Museum trains would connect park with other areas

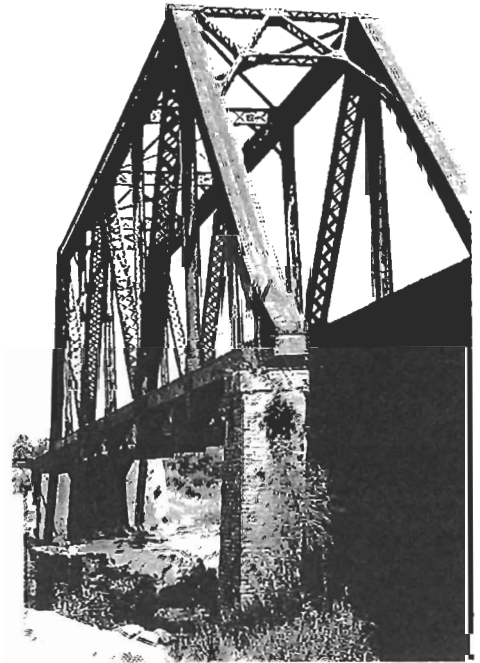
Elimination of trespassing vandals

Historic Little Manatee River Railroad Bridge

Unchanged from original 1903 construction

A rare opportunity to preserve and utilize a unique structure from Hillsborough County's early transportation expansion.

Spanning the Little Manatee River, the bridge can be the focal point of nature trails, a wilderness preserve, and scenic train excursions.

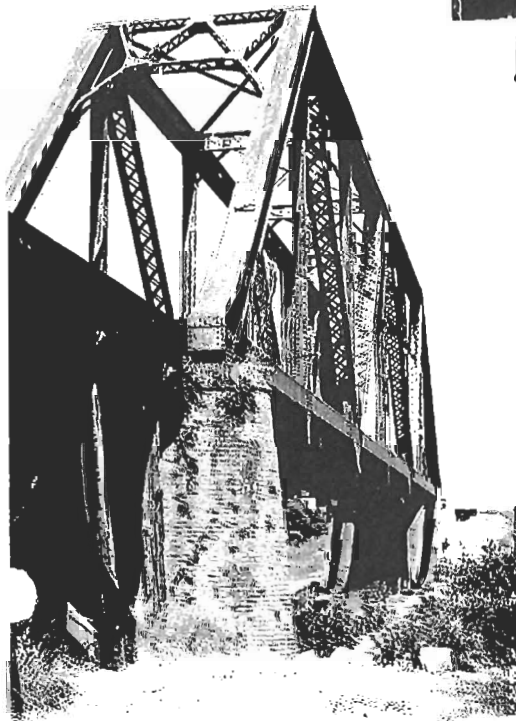


Picturesque setting on Little Manatee River in Southern Hillsborough County. Bridge could accommodate both hikers and trains with minor adjustments.

Single span bridge has trestle approaches on both ends.



Right of way connects with Florida Gulf Coast Railroad Museum at Manatee County Line. Bridge would be highlight of trips on museum train.



Note rare brick facing on pilings. This may be the only bridge of its kind in Florida. Built in 1903 for the Seaboard Air Line RR, the bridge is in remarkable condition. Preserved and restored, it would be functional for use by trains, park vehicles, and hikers.

