

# **Maritime Hammock Sanctuary Public Access Plan**

## **Site Summary**

The Maritime Hammock Sanctuary is comprised of 166 acres which lies primarily on the west side of A1A with a small beachside parcel in South Melbourne Beach. The site consists of maritime hammock and tidal swamp communities on the West side of State Road A1A and dune and coastal strand habitats on the east side of State Road A1A. It is bordered by private homes, County, State and Federally managed conservation lands. Apollo 11 Park, owned and managed by Brevard County Parks and Recreation Department, provides beach access and additional parking for the Maritime Hammock trail. A paved bike path on the west side of SR A1A, stretching from the Town of Melbourne Beach to Sebastian Inlet State Park, provides biking opportunities and connection to other recreational assets in the area.

The Sanctuary has ~3.5 miles of trails with three trailheads each of which provides information about the site and maps. In addition, there are 12 interpretive panels scattered throughout the site providing information on the history, management and flora a fauna. The EEL Program runs several camera traps on the Sanctuary to quantify visitation, track animals and to assess inappropriate activities. The trail boasts nearly 5,500 visitors a year. Due to the narrow and winding trail conditions, low branches and wet areas along the trail it is deemed only suitable for hiking. Mountain bikers occasionally use the site and have caused rutting and damage along the trail in addition to occasionally “running up” on hikers at high speed. We have also seen instances of trail widening and clearing to better accommodate mountain bikers. Where the Sanctuary abuts the Indian River Lagoon State Park Preserve (IRLSPP) to the south, where many of the mountain bikers enter the Sanctuary, a bike barrier was constructed which has been somewhat successful. The IRLSPP is set to open up formally for public access in the near future and we are working with them to control bike access to the hiking only sections of the trail. Certain areas of the MH trail may be suitable to mountain bikes, most notably mosquito impoundment dikes and access roads, and these could be incorporated into a larger mountain bike trail system so long as we are able to prevent bikes from accessing certain sections. Any proposed mountain bike sections would be located directly behind private homes so neighbor feedback would be essential.

## **Passive Recreation Definition**

To the extent they do not interfere with biological management goals, EEL sanctuaries provide a range of passive recreation opportunities for the public. As a general guideline for EEL Program management decisions, passive recreation is defined as, “a recreational type of use, level and combination of uses that do not individually, or collectively, degrade the resource values, biological diversity, and aesthetic or environmental qualities of a site.”

Before developing a site public access plan, staff conducts a Public Access Site Assessment. From this assessment, the types and extent of activities can be determined with the goal to balance human use with the protection of natural resources. Items considered during the assessment include, environmental, cultural, recreational and educational resources,

stakeholder interests, potential conflicts, universal access, connections to other recreational resources, and potential management and/or maintenance conflicts and constraints.

Activities that allow for the quiet enjoyment of nature are conducive to EEL Program goals. Common activities on EEL sanctuaries are hiking, biking, kayaking, fishing, and equestrian use. Activities and uses that are generally not allowed on EEL sanctuaries without permit include, but are not limited to: motorized vehicles, smoking, overnight use, commercial use, hunting / shooting sports, removal of plants or animals, relocating plants or animals, remote control and unmanned aerial vehicles, and pets.

### **Public Access Site Assessment**

During the Public Access Site Assessment, it was noted that the Maritime Hammock Sanctuary is a Category II Site as defined in EEL Program's *Sanctuary Management Manual*. The Sanctuary has ~3.5 miles of trails with three trailheads each of which provides information about the site and maps. In addition, there are 12 interpretive panels scattered throughout the site providing information on the history, management and flora/fauna. The EEL Program runs several camera traps on the Sanctuary to quantify visitation, track animals and to assess inappropriate activities. The trail boasts nearly 5,500 visitors a year. Due to the narrow and winding trails, low branches as well as wet and sandy areas along the trail it is deemed only suitable for hiking. Mountain bikers occasionally use the site and have caused rutting and damage along the trail in addition to occasionally "running up" on hikers at high speed. We have also seen instances of trail widening and clearing to better accommodate mountain bikers. Camera traps have occasionally captured individuals using the site after hours and in some cases engaged in illegal activities. Staff are working with law enforcement to address the issue. Camera traps have also documented numerous cases of individuals bringing dogs onto the sanctuary, often off leash, despite numerous signs at the trail heads and along the trail indicating that dogs are not allowed.

The habitats of the site which include many wet areas support hiking and nature observation as permitted activities, but do not support bicycles. There are a number of benches along the trail and a raised overlook over an internal pond. In 2006, an extension to the original trail was added along the shores of the Indian River Lagoon to several man-made ponds which have been repurposed as a stormwater retention system for the adjacent Melbourne Shores neighborhood. These ponds have become a popular location for fishing and wildlife observation including several resident alligators. A trail head was added to allow direct access to the ponds from the Melbourne Shores subdivision to the north. No additional recreational assets are planned.

### **Recreational Uses and Amenities**

Parking for the trail is available at the northern trail head along A1A and is large enough to accommodate several vehicles. The adjacent Apollo 11 park, operated by Brevard County Parks and Recreation, is available across A1A as additional parking and as a beach access. There are no restroom facilities available. Kiosks are located at the three points of access to the trail including two that are available from the bike path that runs along A1A and another at the Melbourne Shores neighborhood access at the western end of Pelican drive. Parking is only

available at the northern access point along A1A. The kiosks include maps and other information of interest to visitors. The trail layout was designed in conjunction with environmental management plans, so as to minimize conflicts and maintenance constraints. The trail traverses coastal strand, maritime hammock and tidal swamp areas that are conducive to hiking, but not bicycling. No ADA access is planned at this time due to the considerable resources required and the environmental impacts to the site.

### **Environmental Education Opportunities**

Access to the trail located within the sanctuary itself, along with the adjacent Apollo 11 beach access, offer opportunities for visitors to walk from the ocean to the lagoon through dune, coastal strand, maritime hammock and tidal swamp habitats. Interpretive trail signage topics available along the trail include information on habitat restoration, invasive plant management, prescribed fire and natural history.