

FIRE PRAIRIE TRAIL in the Big Cypress Off-Road Cycle Tour



Just north and east of Everglades City is the Big Cypress National Preserve. With the completion of the Tamiami Trail in 1928 anyone who could afford a Model-T would travel across the swamp between Naples and Miami. Today, over one million people explore the Preserve. Cycling the Everglades is the best way to truly enjoy the beauty, the wildlife, and the serenity of this area -- both on and off road.

Starting at McLeod Park in Everglades City drive four miles north on SR29 to Carnestown. Take a right at the stoplight at US41 and SR29 and you will be entering the Big Cypress National Preserve. As you drive along the Tamiami Trail (US41) you will be going past several historic and tourist attractions in Ochopee, once a vibrant community and tomato packing plant.

After 6.6 miles, turn left at Turner River Road and visit the H. P. Williams Roadside Park with its boardwalk, picnic tables and restrooms. Along the canal you may see alligators and other wildlife. This small roadside rest area is named for Homer P. Williams, an engineer who worked for Barron Collier during the construction of Tamiami Trail in the 1920s. Fire Prairie Trail is located off of Turner River Road 14.5 miles north of US41.

The Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center has more information about the natural and cultural history of the area. Visit the Big Cypress National Preserve's website at:

<https://www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/big-cypress-swamp-welcome-center.htm>.

The Fire Prairie Trail is within the Big Cypress National Preserve and is accessible for hiking, biking, and birding. It is located on the west side of Turner River Road with a yellow gate. Park along the grass shoulder. The trail is 2.5 miles out and back on the same path for a 5-mile round trip. The first mile or so meanders through shady Cypress wetlands, with water on both sides.

During the rainy season, this area can be muddy & a little slick. After that, the vegetation opens out into sawgrass prairie, with long vistas across the grasslands to surrounding Cypress hammocks. Limited pockets of Sabal Palms, Slash Pines and Palmetto occur wherever there is slightly higher ground. The open prairie is sustained by fire (hence the name) which keeps the prairie from being overtaken by Willows and other tree species. Evidence of fire is noticeable on the trunks of several Sabal Palms along the road.

Like many trails in the Big Cypress, the raised road bed is a remnant product of past oil exploration; through adaptive re-use, the roads have become trails (provide access to remote areas without causing additional damage) and are used for maintenance by NPS. At the terminus of the trail you can see the squared-off area where a drilling rig was once situated.

If you arrive early in the morning, you may spot a range of wildlife, including snakes, and birds – you may even encounter the elusive panther tracks. Also, keep an eye out for fire ants which also seem to appreciate the high & dry trail area.

For serious cyclists, the length of the trail is a bit short to go to the trouble of loading up the bikes, unless you want to combine the trip with a joint trip to Bear Island or just ride along TRR itself. It is a good length for families biking with young children and is a level and easy hiking trail. There is a restroom facility at about the one-mile mark. For more information, visit website:

www.nps.gov/bicy.

The most up-to-date map of designated trails for all units of the preserve is available at:

<https://www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/designated-trail-implementation.htm> or call the Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center at (239) 695-4758.

Everglades City is only a half hour drive from East Naples and/or Marco Island; it is an old Florida pioneer town purchased from the Storter family by Barron Collier in the 1920s. It was also the original county seat until the early 1960s.

There is a wide range of accommodations and restaurants (visit www.mulletrapper.com). Tourists enjoy visiting the original Collier County Court House (now City Hall), the Museum of the Everglades, the famous Rod & Gun Club, and the Smallwood Store & Museum in Chokoloskee as well as participating in many outdoor recreational activities.

On and off-road hiking and cycling in the Everglades is a great way to experience the “real” Florida. The distinctiveness of the Tamiami Trail is that it is not only a regional corridor connecting the two coasts in south Florida but also traverses six of our state and national parks with a variety of off-road spurs to enjoy the wilderness.

For more information about amenities along the Tamiami Trail and additional maps, download a complete list of facilities and hiking/biking map at <https://evergladesrogg.org/tamiami-trail/> or email info@evergladesrogg.org.

Trails along U.S. 41

There are many on and off-road options for hiking and bicycling through the various state and national parks.

Collier-Seminole State Park

An original stand of native royal palm trees, coexisting with one of the world's largest mangrove swamps, distinguishes this park; it is also the site of the historic Tamiami Trail "Walking Dredge".

<http://alturl.com/s6nof>

Ten Thousand Islands NWR

Established in 1996, this refuge protects important mangrove and marsh habitats and is the ultimate interface where land gradually gives way to the sea.

<http://alturl.com/dncvm>

Picayune Strand State Forest

Comprised of 78,000 acres, this is Florida's 4th largest state forest and named after the largest of several cypress strands that once occupied its eastern portion.

<http://alturl.com/ezsm8>

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

Swamps, prairies, tropical hardwood hammocks and pine rock lands with royal palms and bald cypress trees share the forest canopy with native orchids and bromeliad species. <http://alturl.com/j9ckk>

Big Cypress National Preserve

Big Cypress contains a mixture of tropical and temperate plant communities that harbor many protected species, including the elusive Florida panther.

<http://alturl.com/ma366>

Everglades National Park

The Park is dominated by the world renowned "River of Grass" freshwater prairies, tree islands, and many rare and endangered species.

<http://alturl.com/n2q73>

Fire Prairie Trail in the Big Cypress National Preserve Cycle Tour

Distance: 5 miles

Bicycle Type: fat tire or hybrid

Road Conditions: dirt road

Level: beginner / intermediate



14.5 miles to
US41

6.6 miles
to SR29 (Carnestown)

← US41 (Tamiami Trail)

*This map illustrates a bike route through the Everglades area. While every effort is made to provide accurate and timely information, keep in mind the bike routes are intended for informational purposes only. No guarantee is made regarding the bike route safety because conditions change. In addition, we cannot guarantee anyone's safety by conforming to safety tips. Please use good judgment and be responsible for your own safety at all times.
6/1/2017*

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Friends of the River of Grass Greenway

FROGG, a non-profit organization, is committed to establishing the safe use by the general public of US41 across the Everglades between Naples and Miami, focusing on safety and environmental education and stewardship for those hiking, walking, and cycling through south Florida and the Everglades.

www.evergladesrogg.org

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