



**LCWA**  
**Lake County**  
**WATER AUTHORITY**

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 www.lcwa.org

**CROOKED RIVER**  
 preserve  
 LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA



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The **Lake County Water Authority (LCWA)** purchased this 63.4 acre site in 1993 & 1994 through the LCWA's Land Preservation Program. Objectives of this program are to conserve the unique and irreplaceable natural resources by protecting the lands containing such diversity and to utilize these lands for compatible public recreational activities. Protection by the LCWA will ensure the environmental quality of Crooked River and the Preserve, as well as provide compatible recreational use for the residents of Lake County for years to come. Located south of Clermont at the junction of Lake Louisa and Crooked River (a.k.a. Palatlahaha River), the LCWA acquired the property to ensure preservation of a mile of forested wetlands that run along the Crooked River corridor. Prior to the LCWA's acquisition of the property, the site was used to grow citrus. The majority of the upland areas were cleared for citrus, but the wetland areas were left fairly intact. A house was built in the 1930's on the northwestern portion of the property, and was used as a caretaker's residence. Currently it serves as the home for the LCWA's site resident. The ADA restrooms, walkways, and trailhead renovations were funded, in part, through a grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Recreational Trails Program.

The natural communities found onsite have been impacted over the years. As a result, the

uplands observed around the forested wetland system are a remnant of the historic forested uplands that once dominated the site. Six federally listed plant species are found on this Preserve - *pygmy fringe tree*, *paper-like nailwort*, *scrub plum*, *scrub morning glory*, *clasping warea* and *Britton's beargrass*.

The majority of the property is covered by upland species, while close to 15% is occupied by wetland communities. Land alterations and impacts to the communities have allowed the site to be invaded by exotic or *invasive* species of plants. LCWA maintains a program of control and eradication to combat the many species of exotic plants that threaten native vegetation.

**CYPRESS TRAIL – 0.7 mi. (orange)**

This trail starts from the main parking area, near the site resident's home. A shady canopy consisting of oak, sweetgum, and hickory trees welcomes the visitor. The trail borders the forested wetlands and visitors can observe the transitional area between the uplands, located to the northeast and Crooked River and its adjoining wetlands to the southwest. These important transitional areas provide animals with opportunities for nesting, food and travel corridors. As the trail winds towards the drier upland areas, visitors may note the small "shaving brush" vegetation. These are young longleaf pines in the *grass stage*. This seedling tree may stay in this immature form from 5-25 years. During this time the young pine tree is developing its life support system – a taproot into the ground several feet down searching for moisture and storing nutrients. This growth pattern is a survival adaptation to the frequent fires, which were ignited by lightning and swept across the landscape prior to human settlements.

Typical vegetation of the longleaf pine-

## Cypress Knees



turkey oak community, which covers approximately 51 acres of the Preserve, includes *herbaceous* plants such as wiregrass. Additional species along the trail includes the prickly pear cactus, goldenrod, winged sumac, and beautyberry.

From the uplands, the trail continues and leads the visitor once again into the wetland areas of the Preserve. The dominant wetland tree on the property is the bald cypress with many examples of this handsome tree being visible along the shores of Lake Louisa on the southern portion of the Preserve. Cypress trees are water loving and can grow tall and large in diameter. Trees may develop “knees” as an outgrowth of their root systems. Underwater, cypress trunks and knees provide excellent havens for small fish and invertebrates. The tree itself provides protection, food and nesting sites for birds. The giant tree’s desirable heartwood is so resistant to insects and decay that it earned the nickname “wood eternal.”

### TITI TRAIL – 0.1 mi. (yellow)

This short side trail from the Cypress Trail takes visitors from the edge of the dry scrubby area into the transitional zone with the forested wetlands. Visitors will notice a small, attractive shrub named titi, (rhymes with bye-bye). In the late spring and early summer titi blooms with long spikes or *racemes* of tiny white flowers.

This is where titi gets its scientific name *Cyrilla racemiflora*.

### SINK TRAIL – 0.6 mi. (blue)

From the Cypress trail, visitors can also hike the Sink Trail. This trail takes the visitor to one of two sinkhole lakes on the property. Because of Central Florida’s geology, many sinkholes dot the ever-changing landscape. Sinkholes are part of the slow, natural process of erosion in Florida’s limestone terrain.

Walking towards the south end of the Preserve towards Lake Louisa, visitors will experience “old-time” Florida as the laurel and live oak branches curve to form beautiful canopies with draping Spanish moss. Although quite common, Spanish moss is neither Spanish nor a moss. It is an air plant or *epiphyte* that lives on moisture in the air and on dust and particles that the wind and moisture carry to it. Many of these epiphytes such as orchids and bromeliads live in the dimly lit environment of the hammocks. This part of the trail is an especially good place to hear woodpeckers, blue jays, and warblers.

### FERN TRAIL – 0.1 mi. (green)

This short side trail from the Sink Trail takes visitors deeper into the forested wetlands. Hikers will see cypress, buttonbush, dahoon holly and red bay.

**Crooked River Preserve** is open daily from sunrise to sunset. Canoes and kayaks are available by reservation. Call 352-324-6141.

**The following are not allowed** – pets, alcohol, bikes, motorized vehicles and trapping devices; the removal of plants, animals, historical, archeological or cultural resources.

Visit the **Lake County Water Authority** at [www.lcwa.org](http://www.lcwa.org) or on Facebook for additional recreational opportunities on other Preserves.

