



## Office of University Sustainability

### The FIU Nature Preserve

Being situated adjacent to the Florida Everglades provides Florida International University (FIU) with a unique opportunity to engage a 50,000 student body with the local natural environment.

The FIU Nature Preserve has grown significantly over its 35 year history. Founded in 1978 just six years after FIU first opened its doors, the Nature Preserve is one of FIU's earliest establishments and is a symbol of FIU pride. Embracing the university's core value to be "responsible stewards of the environment," this conservation area serves as a tribute to South Florida's rich natural history. Standing amidst the urban Miami landscape, this natural forest has enabled FIU to become the first certified Tree Campus in the state of Florida.

#### Education

As the only FIU facility wholly dedicated to environmental education, the Nature Preserve provides experiential learning opportunities to our students and employees beyond what any lecture hall or laboratory could provide. With more than 25 courses from 9 different departments using this outdoor classroom each year, this truly is an interdisciplinary facility.

The Nature Preserve is frequently used for the following: university class field trips, faculty and student research; helping students to better understand the ecosystems and organisms that are traditionally taught inside a classroom; providing opportunities for Landscape Architecture and Restoration Ecology class projects to become a reality; and with greater proximity and accessibility to Miami than Everglades National Park, this makes for an ideal field trip location for many Miami-Dade County Public and Private School groups. Below are some examples of courses that frequent the Nature Preserve:

Introductory Botany; Plant Morphology; General Biology II; Ecology of South Florida; Global Environment and Society; Agroecology; Restoration Ecology; Urban Geography; Introductory Hydrology; Environmental Geology; Teaching Elementary Science; The Everglades: From Beginning to End; Climate Change; American Indian Ethnology; Landscape Architecture Theory; Engineering for Global Sustainability; Environmental Journalism; Drawing; and others

#### Natural Resource Conservation

With many pressing environmental issues, this 11-acre urban forest is a prime example of FIU's commitment to be a *Worlds Ahead* leader in conservation biology. More than 450 plant and

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animal species live here within three distinct South Florida ecosystems, one of which, pine rocklands, are ranked as a globally imperiled ecosystem because of extreme rarity. Due to development, less than 3% of the original Miami pine rockland habitat remains today. Pine rocklands are home to 10 federally endangered species and more than 100 state endangered species, many of which can be found inside the FIU Nature Preserve. Immense habitat loss and ongoing threats make conservation of fragmented pine rocklands crucial for endangered species' survival. For its unique array of native flora and fauna, the Nature Preserve has attained the following CERTIFICATIONS:

- Wildlife Habitat (National Wildlife Federation)
- Rare Species Habitat (Florida Natural Areas Inventory)
- Environmental Education Center (Project Learning Tree)
- Butterfly Garden (North American Butterfly Association)
- Florida-Friendly Landscape – Gold Level (University of Florida IFAS)
- Connect To Protect Network Member (Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden)
- Florida Backyard Landscape for Wildlife (Florida Wildlife Extension) – in process
- Stewardship Forest (Florida Forest Service) – in process
- Urban Oasis (Florida Audubon Society) – in process

### Recreation

The preserve's location on the main campus, adjacent to student housing, makes this resource very accessible to the FIU community. Being surrounded on five sides by athletic facilities, it is no wonder why student athletes are some of our most common visitors. All of the 10,000+ annual visitors come to experience what the Nature Preserve has to offer:

- **One mile of hiking trails** provide captivating views of nature and wildlife that cannot be experienced elsewhere on campus.
- **Interpretive trail signs** provide interesting information about South Florida's natural history and how these things relate to everyday life.
- **A half-mile rubber jogging path** made of recycled car tires makes walking and running safer on joints and more enjoyable because of the shade and fresh air provided by trees.
- **Outdoor exercise equipment** enables users to add stretching, jumping, pull-ups, dips, push-ups, and sit-ups to their workout routine.
- **Event venues** surrounded by nature can be rented for meetings, concerts, fitness events, weddings, movie screenings, lectures, and other special occasions.
- **Outdoor lighting** allows users to visit early in the morning or late at night.
- **Covered benches** allow for shaded studying, picnicking, and group meetings.
- **Bike racks** make getting here and parking a breeze.

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### Internship Program

Each year, the FIU Nature Preserve offers paid and unpaid internship opportunities to FIU students. Depending on major and/or career interests, interns may gain experience in the following:

Urban forestry, plant identification, ecosystem restoration, trail maintenance, interpretive education, wildlife biology, arboriculture, event coordination, invasive species management, volunteer program management, horticulture, site/tree risk assessments, outdoor recreation management, collaborative natural resource management, etc.

Interns play an integral role in implementing programs at the FIU Nature Preserve. With some going on to work for Yosemite National Park, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, USDA, Harvard Forest, Zoo Miami, and other private tree companies, we know that our program is beneficial to those that participate.

### Volunteer Program

Volunteers are also an important part of what has made the FIU Nature Preserve so successful. People choose to volunteer here because they enjoy meeting and working alongside passionate FIU students and fellow environmentalists. The majority of our volunteers are FIU students, but still many FIU faculty, staff, and alumni volunteer as well. Nearby middle/high school students and other community residents also donate their time to enhance the FIU Nature Preserve.

Having on-campus volunteer opportunities spaced out among three semesters each year helps students fulfill university service learning requirements and is especially convenient for those students who already live on campus. All volunteer events begin with an introduction to the Florida Everglades and guided tour of the Nature Preserve. Volunteer events are designed to be educational and always include a naturalist skills training component.

- 253 volunteers attended 13 volunteer days in 2010
- 653 volunteers attended 31 volunteer days in 2011
- 704 volunteers attended 48 volunteer days in 2012
- 928 volunteers attended 56 volunteer days in 2013
- 723 volunteers attended 49 volunteer days in 2014
- 809 volunteers attended 47 volunteer days in 2015