

# **Barrier Island Sanctuary Public Access Plan**

## **Site Summary**

The Barrier Island Sanctuary is comprised of 34 acres which spans both the east and west sides of State Road A1A 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 on the east side of State Road A1A. On the western parcels it is bordered by private homes to the north and Federal conservation land to the south. On the eastern parcels it is bordered by a private home to the north and Bonsteel Park, managed by Brevard County Parks and Recreation, to the south. Bonsteel Park is connected to the Sanctuary via a 500ft boardwalk and provides beach access and additional parking. A paved bike path on the west side of SR A1A stretches from the Town of Melbourne Beach to Sebastian Inlet State Park and provides biking opportunities and connection to recreational assets in the area. The sanctuary is also home to the Barrier Island Center, an environmental education center which functions as the primary visitor center for the Archie Carr Wildlife Refuge, which receives ~35,000 visitors annually.

The Sanctuary has a 1-mile loop trail with two trailheads from the A1A bike path each of which has a kiosk which provides information about the site and maps. In addition, there are interpretive panels scattered throughout the site providing information on the history, management, flora and 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 3,200 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.

## **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 Barrier Island Sanctuary is a Category I Site as defined in EEL Program's *Sanctuary Management Manual*. The Sanctuary has a 1 mile of trail with two trail heads with kiosks from the A1A bike path each of which provides information about the site and maps. The trail is also accessible from the Barrier Island Center and Bonsteel Park. The EEL Program runs several camera traps on the Sanctuary to quantify visitation, track animals and to assess inappropriate activities. The trail boasts nearly 3,200 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 relatively small size of the site and trail, sandy and wet soils support hiking and nature observation as permitted activities, but do not support bicycles. There are several benches along the trail which also includes sections of raised boardwalks over wetlands and a small bridge over a mosquito impoundment ditch. An additional information kiosk is located along the shore of the Indian River Lagoon and provides detailed information of the extensive restoration which took place between 2000 and 2004. An eco-explorer trail loop is planned alongside the existing trail to provide passive recreation and educational opportunities to younger visitors.

### **Recreational Uses and Amenities**

Parking for the trail is available at the Barrier Island Center and at the adjacent Bonsteel Park. The Barrier Island Center provides restrooms, water fountains and additional educational resources detailing the local flora and fauna. Kiosks are located at the two points of access to the trail available from the bike path that runs along A1A along with another along the Indian River Lagoon. 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 dune, coastal strand, maritime hammock and tidal swamp habitats that are conducive to hiking, but not bicycling. ADA access is provided at the Barrier Island Center with an accessible beach overlook and access to Bonsteel Park via a raised boardwalk.

## **Environmental Education Opportunities**

Access to the trail and the Barrier Island Center offer opportunities for visitors to walk from the ocean to the lagoon through dune, coastal strand, maritime hammock and mangrove habitats. Interpretive trail signage topics available along the trail include information on habitat restoration, invasive plant management and natural history which supplement the more detailed information available within the Barrier Island Center.