

# **Ocean Ridge Sanctuary Public Access Plan**

## **Site Summary**

The sanctuary is a 10.35-acre site consisting of parcels located east and west of State Highway A1A in unincorporated Melbourne Beach, Brevard County, Florida. Although the Ocean Ridge Sanctuary is not directly adjacent to other conservation lands, a number of conservation and recreation properties, that offer access to similar habitats, are located in the vicinity of the Sanctuary. The Ocean Ridge Sanctuary is a Category 3 or Primary Research and Conservation Site as defined in EEL Program's Sanctuary Management Manual and thus is not expected to undergo significant development other than boundary posting. The Ocean Ridge Sanctuary consists of two parcels located on the west side of A1A that are bordered by a gated community and subdivisions to the north, south and west and a 2.82 acres beachfront parcel that is bounded to the north by a condominium and to the south by a small piece of conservation land titled to the State of Florida and managed by the USFWS. The beachfront parcel is bordered to the west by A1A and to the east by the Atlantic Ocean. The majority of the Sanctuary consists of disturbed Coastal Dune and Coastal Strand habitats.

## **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, (catch and release?) 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 there had been an historic Ais Indian Mound located on the sanctuary which has been scattered by clearing that took place from the 1960s to the 1990s. There have been past

requests from neighbors for a trail through the western portion of the site from the gated Ocean Ridge Development to the bike path adjacent to A1A. The EEL Program generally does not provide trails that are not accessible by the general public or for the sole use of a given community. A trail would also provide an access point for the general public to access the gated community from A1A. In addition, a trail would impact the privacy and security of adjacent property owners. There have also been past requests for a beach access on the eastern portion of the Sanctuary. The EEL Program does not provide beach access points on any of the Sanctuaries in the Region. In addition to the cost to build and maintain an ADA accessible beach access the access would need to provide hardened parking and would need to be available to the general public and not for the sole use of a given community. The Ocean Ridge gated community has a private beach access to the South of the State/USFWS parcel on the East side of A1A.

### **Recreational Uses and Amenities**

The Ocean Ridge Sanctuary is a Category 3 or Primary Research and Conservation Site as defined in EEL Program's Sanctuary Management Manual and thus is not expected to undergo significant development other than boundary posting. The small size, configuration and proximity to homes make it unsuitable for public access that would not negatively affect adjacent property owner's privacy. Due to the proximity of other recreational opportunities within a 5-mile radius of the Sanctuary, a trail is not planned. Similar habitats are available for the public to visit at the Coconut Point Sanctuary 1.9 miles south. Connections to all publicly accessible sanctuary trails and beach access points are facilitated through a paved bike path on the west side of SR A1A stretching from the Town of Melbourne Beach to Sebastian Inlet State Park. No ADA access is planned at this time though Universal Access is provided at the Barrier Island Center which is located approximately 10 miles south of the Ocean Ridge Sanctuary.

### **Environmental Education Opportunities**

Given that the site will not be opened for public access Environmental Education Opportunities are limited to research and monitoring by staff and visiting scientists.