

Nov. 20, 2007

## **New public access opens to Old Miakka Creek Preserve**

Sarasota County has opened a public entrance to Old Miakka Preserve at the east end of Fruitville Road in Sarasota. Pedestrians have been able to access the preserve on foot from Myakka Road since June, but the new entrance includes limited automobile parking and a new loop hiking trail.

Old Miakka Preserve is the name adopted by the Sarasota County Commission on April 25 for the 132-acre preserve acquired through Sarasota County's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program. The preserve is in the northeast portion of the county, less than a half mile east of the intersection of Fruitville Road and Verna Road. The historical Old Miakka neighborhood lies just south of the property.

According to Environmental Specialist Lee Hayes-Byron, the preserve includes unique areas of important scrub habitat, along with mesic flatwoods and hydric hammock along seasonally wet sloughs. It protects habitat in the Myakka River watershed and is located just over a mile from the river.

"There are dramatic elevation changes from high dry scrub to low wetland systems, which creates ideal habitat for high levels of plant and animal biodiversity," Byron explains. "The environmental sensitivity and small size of this preserve will limit activities on the site, but the preserve is now open to hiking and includes a 1.2-mile loop trail."

The new entrance to Old Miakka Preserve is located on Fruitville Road. Visitors can access the entrance by taking I-75 to exit 210, then traveling east on Fruitville Road for 11 miles. When the paved road ends, continue straight on the dirt road and turn right after 0.4 miles at the second gate into the grass parking area.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Natural Resources.