

History & Nature

The Preserve provides protection for five aquatic preserves: Pine Island Sound, Matlacha Pass, Gasparilla Sound – Charlotte Harbor, Cape Haze and Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserves.

Mangrove forests dominate the shoreline and provide habitat for coastal birds including herons and egrets. Landward of the mangrove coast, the Preserve is a mix of communities including fresh and saltwater marshes, salt flats, pine flatwoods, coastal hammocks, scrub and scrubby flatwoods. These communities are home to red-shouldered hawks, Eastern diamondback rattlesnakes, wading birds, otters, alligators and migratory birds.

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park is rich in cultural resources from the pre- and post-Columbian cultures. Humans have used the lands surrounding Charlotte Harbor for thousands of years. The earliest most visible evidence of past use at the Preserve are shell middens and mounds left by prehistoric peoples. Archaeological sites on public lands are protected by law.

Acquisition of the Preserve lands began in the 1970s and became a Florida state park in 2004.



Florida State Parks

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park

12301 Burnt Store Road
Punta Gorda, FL 33955
(941)575-5861

FloridaStateParks.org

Park Guidelines

- Trails are open sunrise until sunset, 365 days a year.
- The collection, destruction or disturbance of cultural resources, plants, animals or park property is prohibited.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a hand-held leash no longer than six feet and well-behaved at all times.
- Fishing is allowed throughout the Preserve, except for the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the park office.
- For information about joining the Friends of the Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves, call (941)575-5861.
- Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact the park office.

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**Charlotte Harbor
Preserve
State Park**

“Protecting Florida’s largest and
most productive estuary.”



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National Gold Medal Winner

Florida State Parks - “America’s First Three-Time Winner”

Real Fun in ...the Real FloridaSM

The Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park is comprised of over 43,000 acres in Lee and Charlotte counties. These lands were acquired to provide a natural buffer from urban areas and agricultural lands to help protect the largest and most productive estuary in Florida. More than 80 miles of shoreline is protected.

Fishing, wildlife viewing and hiking are popular activities. Wildlife is abundant and a variety of bird life is readily observable. **Birding** is considered of such quality that some trails have been listed in the south section of the Great Florida Birding Trail. Access is provided at trailheads and gates along the boundary of the Preserve. Open water and expansive tidal marsh communities provide opportunities for **scenic vistas**.

The **Little Pine Island High Marsh Trail** is located on the north side of Pine Island Road between Matlacha and Pine Island. It is two miles long and traverses a salt marsh, salt flats, freshwater marsh and mangrove forest. The **Catfish Creek Trailhead** is located on the east side of County Road 771, about 2.5 miles north of Placida. A pavilion is available for picnics. The 1.75-mile **Old Datsun Trail** is located on Burnt Store Road in Punta Gorda. It winds through oak and sabal palm hammocks, pine flatwoods and isolated wetlands. It is located near the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC), where environmental education programs, interpretive guided hikes and approximately six miles of marked trails can be utilized.

Visitors are welcome to explore other areas of the Preserve, unless posted as closed, but should be aware that these areas are a remote and primitive wilderness. Visitors should take a compass, a map and sufficient water for their trip. No restrooms or drinking water are provided.

Directions

From I-75, take Exit 161 (County Road 768) west for six miles to 12301 Burnt Store Road. The road changes from North Jones Loop Road to Burnt Store Road (County Road 765) upon crossing U.S. 41. The park's administrative office is located on the right.

