Myakka Headwaters Preserve Habitat Restoration

Summary

The Myakka River flows from headwaters in Manatee and Hardee counties along a narrow floodplain forest corridor, then enters a series of lakes in Myakka River State Park. Deer Prairie Creek and Big Slough feed the river as it widens and enters Charlotte Harbor. A wide variety of habitats including wetlands, prairies, hammocks, and pinelands are found along its shores.

Many entities including Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (CFGC), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) are working to acquire and restore habitats within the Myakka River basin, especially in Manatee County where there is not as much protection for the River or watershed. CFGC recently acquired 363 acres within Flatford Swamp, the river’s largest forested wetland, located at the headwaters of the Myakka River. This new preserve, Myakka Headwaters Preserve, is home to a diverse array of species including orchids, air plants, and lowland loose strife. This area is also heavily-infested with invasive species that prevent native species from thriving.

The CHNEP is working with SWFWMD and CFGC to fund and manage a project to remove exotic species and install native plants in selected critical areas on the property.

Location: Manatee County, FL
Partners: Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast and the Southwest Florida Water Management District
Status: Upcoming 2022-2023
CHNEP Cost: $56,000
Funding Source: Southwest Florida Water Management District funds managed by CHNEP

2019 CHNEP Plan Activity:
Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Protection
2.2: Encourage management of public lands and public conservation easements to protect, restore, and create native plant and animal communities.
2.1 Encourage and support the permanent conservation of environmentally sensitive lands and critical habitat areas.
Anticipated Results and Benefits

Enhanced Habitat:
The removal of exotic invasive vegetation and the planting of native wetland vegetation will work to restore the natural balance of this area. Invasive species can physically impede the growth of native vegetation and exclude wildlife or prevent growth of plants that may be a food source. Not only will this improve wildlife habitat for gopher tortoises and rare plants within the project area, it will also remove a source of exotic species contamination for the Myakka River.

Protection of Natural Flow Regimes:
The enhancement and protection of this crucial floodplain forest protects part of the natural flow regime of the Myakka River. Aquatic habitat, flood protection, and water quality are all improved by ensuring the headwaters of the Myakka River are protected.

Continued Restoration:
Restoration and management techniques and results of the project will be documented. Discussion may include recommendations for land management, both onsite and at other area restoration sites, based on project results.

CONTACT INFORMATION

1050 Loveland Blvd.
Port Charlotte, FL 33980
(941) 833-6580
CHNEP.org