

NATURE CENTER TRAIL GUIDE



Dry lands, wet lands, and how they are connected

As you walk down the hill from the Bishop Homestead, you will see one of Chinsegut's most distinctive features – the longleaf pine sandhill – which is being restored to its natural splendor.

Because fire had been kept out of this parcel, a thick layer of brush grew up. Sandhill needs gentle fires with short, slow-moving flames to keep the shrubs and oaks in check. Otherwise, these woody plants shade out the grasses and wildflowers that support the sandhill animals. We are lucky that the old longleaf pines are still here, and we are clearing out the brush to let the natural ground cover flourish once again. The clearings, and patches of blackened ground you see are signs of progress toward restoration.

Much of the Nature Trail defines the boundary between longleaf sandhill (on the upland side) and the hardwood forest (at lower elevations) that circle May's Prairie. In Florida, small changes in elevation – 10 to 20 feet – can generate big differences in the landscape.

You can think of the Nature Center tract as a long, narrow saucer. Water collects in the lowest point, which is May's Prairie. Don't



Green tree frog

look for buffalo on this prairie, though. In Florida, many flat, treeless expanses are called prairies, and this particular prairie is a freshwater marsh. Water levels in May's Prairie rise and fall depending on rainfall.

Several frog species and one terrestrial salamander species live here because they need both wetlands and uplands. These animals start life in the shallow waters of May's Prairie, live as adults in the dry uplands, and return to the water to lay eggs. That's why they're called "amphibians" – a word that means "two kinds of life."

Some of these amphibians need hiding places in the dry uplands. The gopher frog, for example, is found in burrows dug by another Chinsegut resident: the gopher tortoise. This reptile requires deep, dry soils for digging burrows, which can go 10 feet or more underground. Gopher tortoises are found only in the uplands. And that's just one example of how dry uplands and wetlands are interdependent.

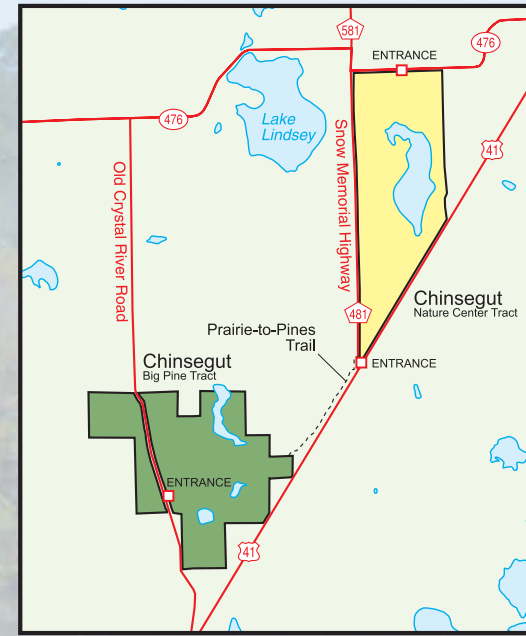


Gopher frog



Gopher tortoise

You may continue your explorations along the Prairie-to-Pines Trail and the nearby Big Pine Tract of Chinsegut WEA.



Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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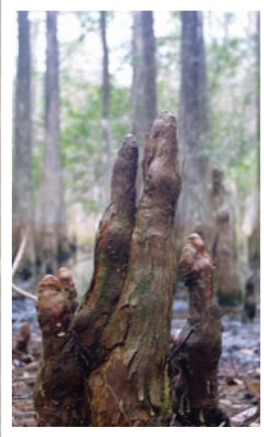


Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
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Welcome to the Nature Center Tract of the Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area



Cypress knees

This land was part of a donation to the government made in 1932 by Colonel Raymond Robins, who named his property Chinsegut (pronounced chin-SEE-gut). He borrowed the word from the Alaskan Inuit and used it to mean “a place to rediscover lost treasures.” We hope you will discover – or rediscover – the rewards of a day in the woods.

You can explore miles of trails through longleaf pine sandhill and hardwood hammocks, and you can watch wildlife from a boardwalk or from a viewing blind overlooking a freshwater marsh.



Green heron

Trail Guide

1 Begin at the Nature Center building, which houses exhibits about the area’s wildlife and natural communities. From inside the building, you can watch birds at the feeders just outside the windows. Ask about upcoming programs, festivals, guided walks, and volunteer opportunities.

2 The trail from the parking lot passes by a chimney and two brick cisterns. These are the remains of the Bishop Homestead, which was settled in the 1850s. Please help us preserve this site by staying outside the posted boundaries.



Chimney ruins

Just beyond the homestead site, the path meets a limerock road. Head down the road to find the trails.

3 The 1.8-mile Nature Trail loops around May’s Prairie. The main trail follows an old roadway, which makes for easy walking.

On the west side of May’s Prairie, about half a mile from the parking lot, you will find a wildlife viewing blind. Watch and listen for sandhill cranes, wood ducks, pied-billed grebes, white ibis, great blue herons, little blue herons, and great egrets. On warm days, you may see turtles or alligators sunning themselves.



Wildlife viewing blind

4 The 2-mile Prairie-to-Pines Trail connects the Nature Center and Big Pine Tracts of Chinsegut WEA. You’ll see a variety of landscapes and cross over a historic dirt-and-concrete bridge as you traverse the rolling terrain of the Brooksville Ridge. Pick up a trail map and follow the yellow blazes.

5 The Big Hickory Spur Trail gives you an intimate glimpse of the prairie’s southern end, where you might spot a green heron, a moorhen, or a kingfisher.

6 The Hammock Spur Trail gives you a broad view of May’s Prairie and, beyond, Chinsegut Hill.



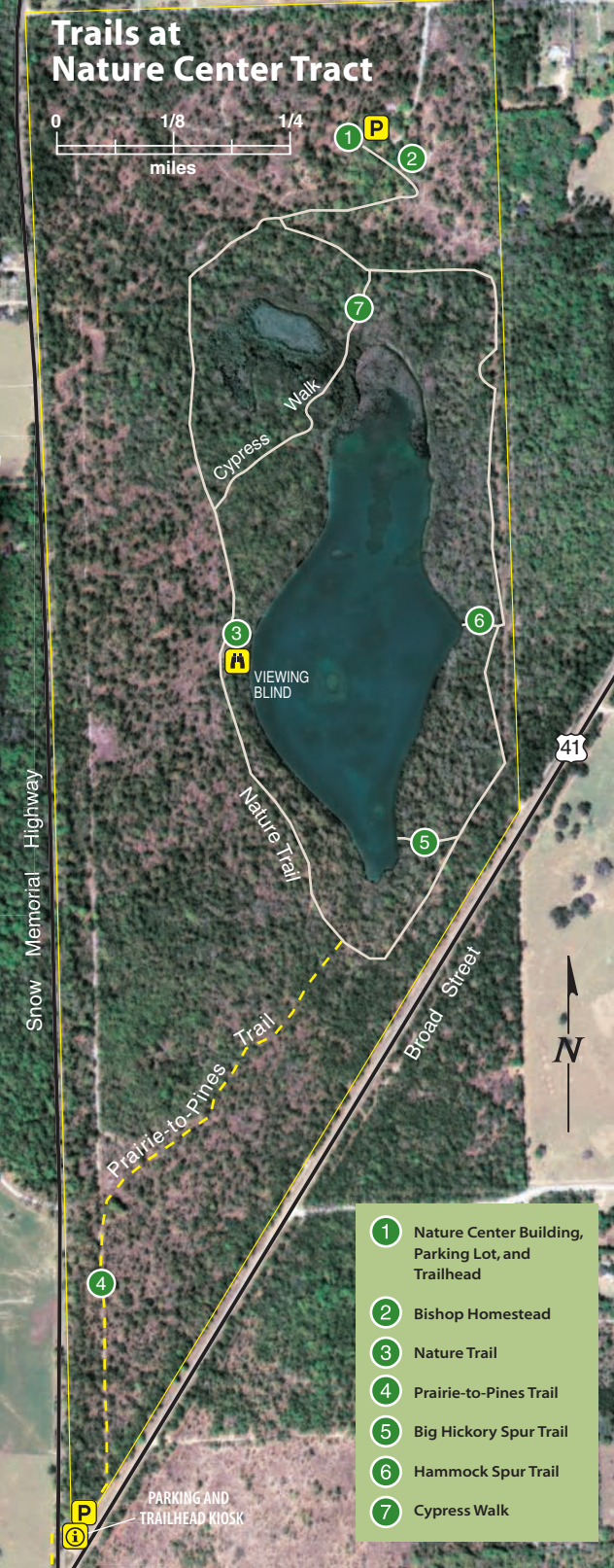
Bladderwort

7 Accessible from either the north or west sides of the Nature Trail, the 0.3-mile Cypress Walk takes you to May’s Prairie. This trail includes a boardwalk through the swamp leading to a platform on the prairie’s edge. The viewing platform provides a bird’s-eye view of the life that thrives in the prairie’s shallow water.



May’s Prairie boardwalk

Trails at Nature Center Tract



- 1 Nature Center Building, Parking Lot, and Trailhead
- 2 Bishop Homestead
- 3 Nature Trail
- 4 Prairie-to-Pines Trail
- 5 Big Hickory Spur Trail
- 6 Hammock Spur Trail
- 7 Cypress Walk