

# Gopher Tortoise A Species of Special Concern

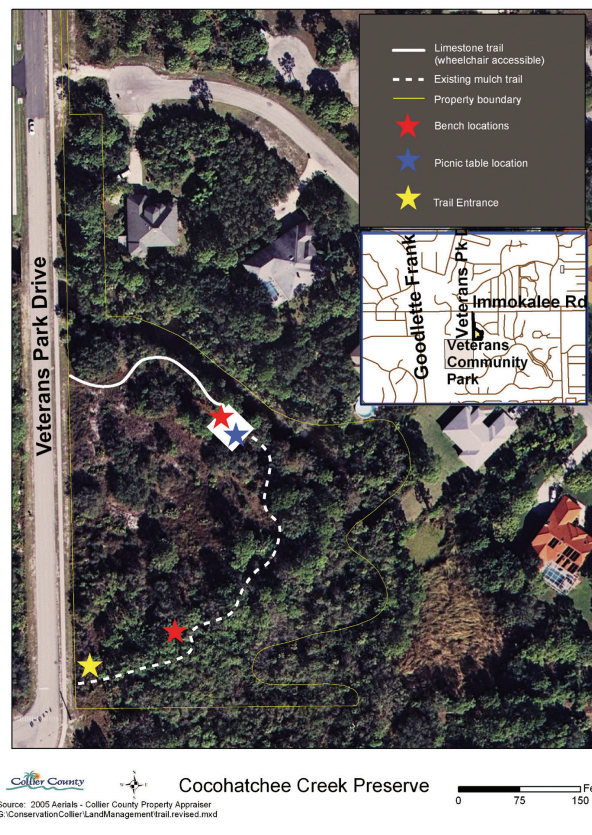


The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) belongs to a group of land tor-

toises that originated in western North America nearly 60 million years ago. Today they are found in upland habitats throughout the coastal plain of the Southeastern United States.

Gopher tortoises live in extensive underground burrows that can be up to 40 feet long and 10 feet underground. These burrows are also refuge to more than 360 species, including some threatened and endangered varieties such as the indigo snake, gopher frog and burrowing owl.

Gopher tortoises eat mainly low growing herbaceous plants and berries, from which they also get all their water! They can live to be up to 60 years old, taking 15 to 20 years to reach maturity. An adult female will typically breed once a year, producing a clutch of 3-15 eggs that will hatch in 80-100 days. Until they are adults, they have many predators, but once they reach maturity, they have few enemies besides humans and domestic dogs.



Collier County Cocohatchee Creek Preserve  
Source: 2005 Aerials - Collier County Property Appraiser  
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All photos taken by staff.



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# Self-Guided Interpretive Walk Cocohatchee Creek Preserve



## A Conservation Collier Property

*Preserving environmentally sensitive  
lands within Collier County for the  
benefit of present and future generations.*

# Cocohatchee Creek Preserve



*Shoe-string fern and Gold-foot fern growing on Cabbage palm*

Cocohatchee Creek Preserve is a 3.64-acre nature preserve along the Cocohatchee Creek, located just off Immokalee Road along Veterans Park Drive, across from the entrance to Veterans Park. This land was chosen for preservation because it contains several types of native habitats and a number of protected plant and wildlife species.

Live oaks and cabbage palm groves along the creek itself are found. Upland areas contain pine flatwood and scrub vegetation communities. A trail, the northern section with wheelchair access, winds along the creek and through the different plant communities.

Halfway, a picnic area has been placed, where visitors can relax along the Cocohatchee Creek under the shade of massive live oaks.

## Preserve Sights

Starting at the southern end of the trail, closest to the parking lot at Veterans Park, visitors will enter the Preserve through the pine flatwood community on a mulched trail. To the right is a marsh and wetland associated with the creek, where laurel oaks and willows predominate. Leather fern and Swamp lilies grow among the sawgrass, wetland sedges and herbaceous groundcover. Wax myrtle, Pond apple and St. John's wort can also be found here. As the trail turns toward the uplands, visitors will pass by a mound covered with Muscadine grape vine, where several Gopher tortoise burrows are located. The tortoises are usually found foraging in the scrub vegetation closer to Veterans Park Drive. Rounding the corner, the trail begins to hug the west bank of the Cocohatchee Creek, passing through a plant community dominated by Laurel and Live oaks and Cabbage palms. The understory here consists of many native shrubs including:

American beauty-berry, Myrsine, Hog plum, Palmetto, and Shiny blue-berry used as food by wildlife. Other common shrubs include Sumac and Persimmon.

To the left is the scrub community, dominated by Live and Scrub oaks. Sparse ground vegetation contains many grasses and flowering plants, including: Goldenaster, Prickly-pear cactus and Butterflyweed.



## Visitor Access

Parking for the Cocohatchee Creek Preserve is at Veterans Park, a short walk from the Preserve. Visitor hours are from 8:00 am to dusk. Restroom and handicapped parking facilities are available at Veterans Park. Approximately half the trail, or 350 feet, starting at the northern entrance, is wheelchair accessible from the sidewalk along the east side of Veteran's Park Drive, ending at a shady picnic area. Because the Preserve is a home for wildlife, pets are not permitted. Domestic dogs, in particular, are a threat to Gopher tortoises. Trash receptacles are provided at the picnic area and bench. Consumption of alcohol is not permitted.

*Please enjoy and remember to  
"take only pictures  
and leave  
only  
footprints."*