

About The Alligator Creek Preserve

The Alligator Creek Preserve was established in 1987 and is the most well known and most frequently visited nature park of the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, Inc. It is located on Burnt Store Road, a few miles south of downtown Punta Gorda, adjacent to the 30,000+acre Charlotte Harbor State Park Preserve.

This Park is owned by the State of Florida and a portion is leased to the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, Inc. for environmental education and recreation.

The Alligator Creek Preserve is the area's four (4+) miles of nature trails. Year-round volunteers offer interpretive trail walks to the public free of charge. [Click here for a trail map](#), or contact us for more information.

Also at the Alligator Creek Preserve, the Watershed Resource Center offers free resources to anyone looking for scientific information, maps, periodicals, or presentations about a variety of topics, from water quality in Charlotte Harbor to restoration projects in the Peace River watershed.

Administrative Office and Watershed Resource Center Hours

10941 Burnt Store Road
Punta Gorda, FL 33955

Monday-Friday : 8 am-4 pm
Closed: Christmas & New Years Day

Caniff Visitor Center Hours

Monday-Saturday: 9 am - 3 pm
Sunday: 11 am - 3 pm

Gate Hours

Monday - Saturday: 8 am - 3 pm
Sunday: 11am - 3 pm
If its daylight hours and if the gate is shut or locked, please park in the area to the right of the entrance road. Do not block the gate. Use the walk-through that is also to the right of the road. Some holidays the gate may be closed, but it is public land and open to you 365 days a year during daylight hours.

The Charles E. Caniff visitors' reception center, which is raised on stilts, offers an excellent view of native Florida habitat. The Center overlooks an uplands ecosystem, including a pond that is home to alligators, soft shell turtles and fish. The pond area is also a first-rate opportunity to see many of Southwest Florida's bird life. Inside the Center are exhibits describing the natural ecosystems in the area, such as a Native American exhibit, a bald eagle's nest, and several informative books. Other facilities on site include a screened picnic pavilion (available for use and reservation), a Wildlife Observatory, the Animal Clubhouse, a Native Butterfly Garden and the Watershed Resource Center. CHEC's Nature Gift Shop is also located in this building. Stop by the Preserve to learn more about the trails, guided walks, special events, or arrange for a group tour or school outing.

Most of the habitat on the Preserve is Pine Flatwoods, the typical native forests of southwest Florida. Plant species found there include the slash pine, saw palmetto, wiregrass, and beauty berry. Many animal species inhabit these forests including bobcat, yellow rat snake, bald eagle, gopher tortoise, and red-shouldered hawk.

Salt Marshes are tidal wetlands known for their expanses of grasses, rushes and sedges. Typical species in our area include black needle rush, smooth cordgrass, and salt bush. The best opportunity to see this is from the Eagle Point Trail.

Interspersed throughout the Preserve are Oak/Palm Hammocks. These are typically found in higher elevation zones. It is cooler and shadier in a hammock due to the dense canopy of leaves overhead. Plants and animals you might find here include raccoon, bobcat, owls, cabbage palm, and resurrection fern.

Mangrove Swamps inhabit low energy shorelines in coastal areas of SW Florida. Mangrove trees are specially adapted to salt and brackish water. You can get a good look at this habitat from the Eagle Point Trail, and from the Three Lakes Trail. There are 4 types of mangroves to look for, including, red, white, black, and buttonwood. The red mangrove is known for its long prop-roots that hang down into the water forming a maze-like nursery for young and small aquatic creatures. Black mangroves have pneumatophores, finger-like roots that protrude out of the sand. White mangroves are usually found growing inland of red and black and can be distinguished by its oval, bright green leaves. Buttonwoods are found farthest inland towards the uplands. Mangroves provide a unique habitat for many species of fish and invertebrates, and nesting sites for shorebirds, including anhinga, black-crowned night heron, and great blue heron.

Freshwater Ponds and marshes are also found at Alligator Creek Preserve. This habitat is crucial to many species of plants and animals including, the American Alligator, soft-shell turtles, Florida Ducks, water lilies, duckweed, and cattails. Also, the fish in the ponds feed many animals like the Bald Eagle. The best places for viewing these ponds are at the Caniff Visitor Center and at the end of the Eagle Point Trail.

Dogs are allowed on the property, but they must be leashed (6ft. or less). This is for your dogs safety...you may have a well-trained dog; however, we have untrained, unleashed wild animals. And Remember to please bring a plastic bag with you in order to pick up after your dog.

Trails open to public 365 days a year, from dawn to dusk. Gate opens at 8am & closes at 3pm M-F. (If the gate is closed and it is daylight, use the walk through available to the right of the gate.)

Contact the Preserve for more information.

Other Features of the Alligator Creek Preserve

There is more to the Preserve than the trails... See for yourself!

Some of our volunteers maintain a Native Plant Sale at the site during Fall and Spring. Typically priced at \$1.00 to \$5.00, the plants are all native to the area and the sales help fund CHEC's Alligator Creek Preserve functions.

Plants that you might find for sale include:

- Cross Vine
- Coontie
- Coral Honeysuckle
- Beauty Berry
- White Stopper
- Passion Flower Vine

Our McGovern Pavillion is a screened-in room available for reservation. There is no fee to use the building, but must be reserved through the Preserve's Administration Office if you want to reserve it to hold a meeting. The Room does have ceiling fans and picnic tables inside. Among groups that have used this facility in the past include: HAMM Radio Group, Moms & Tots, Boat Club, and Boy Scouts.

There is a Wildlife Observatory on the property.

The Blind can hold 4-5 adults comfortably. It is located near a man-made pond/fountain habitat that is stocked with bird feeders and wildlife feeders. Many people have used this for their photography skills. And of course it's good for just sitting and watching.

The Animal Clubhouse is a fun, educational feature of the Preserve.

It is located by the Education Building, kiddy-corner to the Administration Building. It is a small, portable shed packed with mounted birds, reptiles, mammals, fossils, mounted butterflies and other insects, informational cards for most of the displays, and so on. In this small building is a world of information all pertaining to Southwest Florida's natural environment. So, what you didn't see on the trail, will most likely be inside the Clubhouse.

The Charles E. Caniff Visitor's Center is located at the end of the first Boardwalk. It is a large, stilted building perfectly placed by the large Alligator Pond. From the balcony you see a great deal of what this area's natural world looks like. Inside the building you will find displays, field guides, and a gift shop... historical information and relics of the Calusa Indians - native to this area. We also have an impressive adult & immature bald eagle display.

We are sad to announce that Baba Louie, our feathered friend so often a feature here at CHEC, passed on due to natural causes. He was an Orange-tipped Amazon Parrot from Mexico, and was always eager for a friend to chat with! We'll miss him.

The building is also available to the public for meetings and so forth, and may be reserved through the Preserve's Administration Office.

CHEC's Nature Gift Shop

Unique Southwest Florida Gifts and Books

The shops hours of operation are from 9am-3pm, Monday through Friday, follow the boardwalk from the parking lot up to the the Charles E. Caniff Visitors Building.

Friends of CHEC receive a discount in this store!!!

Eco-books- most of which pertain to wildlife you will find right here in Southwest Florida. There are books of identification, books for children, guides to fishing and other animals, and historical and/or cultural books.

There is also a wealth of free literature available.

If you know someone who wants to learn about this area of Florida, or just loves to learn about nature, you should definitely check out our book supply!

Hand-carved walking sticks

beautifully crafted and sturdy, an ideal gift for avid hikers

Hand-made bird houses,
butterfly houses
& bat houses-
made with love by volunteers out of recycled wood

t-shirts and sweatshirts of ALL sizes...youth to adult.

AbsorbaStone coasters
Perfect for sprucing up your table, while keeping it safe!

Decorative Flags & Poles. Pictured here is the Manatee theme in front of another with a beautiful butterfly theme. These are nice accents to boats, the back lanai, and the front porch.

We also feature works from several local artists, including...

Judy Schnabel...who displays several lovely pieces of her glass work for sale inside the shop. Her work depicts the local area scenery and wildlife, hand-crafted out of recycled glass.

Michael Wilhelm and Clyde Butcher...are two well known nature photographers who specialize in expressing the native beauty of south Florida. We have a selection of prints available from each of these artists.

Stop by the Shop to see all the wonderful things inside...
for yourself or for the perfect gift!

Pets/Alcohol/Other Policies for the Alligator Creek Preserve Site

Dogs are allowed to hike with you. You must comply with the State Park laws:

Keep your dog leashed at all times. The leash must be no longer than 6ft in length. We understand that some dogs are very well behaved and will not chase animals; however, this is for your dogs safety. You may have a well-trained dog; but we have untrained, unleashed wild animals.

Also, please bring a plastic bag with which you will be able to use to pick up after your dog. (Scoop the Poop!)

NO Alcohol is allowed in the park.

There is no camping in the Preserve.

Please no Bike Riding on the trails.

Please no Smoking on the trails.

ALLIGATORS:

Alligators are protected by state and federal laws.

Please do not approach them or disturb.

Take only Pictures and Leave only Footprints!

Collection of any kind is not permitted.