The Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) acquired this 1,137-acre Preserve in 1994 for the purposes of protecting the water quality and wildlife habitat of Lake Yale and the expansive on-site marsh. This sawgrass marsh is not only the largest natural community within the preserve, but also serves as the largest single source of surface water for Lake Yale. The upland buffer that surrounds the marsh provides protection for the wetland and associated wildlife, as well as, an opportunity for public recreation.

The Preserve is located in the northern portion of Lake County adjacent to the county boundary and in close proximity to the Ocala National Forest in Marion County. Currently the Preserve supports such listed species as gopher tortoises, Florida pine snakes, Florida sandhill cranes, bald eagles, and migratory waterfowl.

Although no significant archeological or historical sites have been officially identified, the Preserve is thought to contain sites due to its proximity to water and wildlife resources.

Trails blazed throughout the property provide the visitor with a variety of natural experiences. Trails can be walked in segments or their entirety.

**BEAR PRAIRIE TRAIL – 3.70 mi. (red)**
This trail takes the visitor through the unimproved pastures, which were historically used for cattle grazing, timber, and citrus production. These pastures, as well as the pastures located in the northeastern portion of the Preserve, are home to protected gopher tortoises. These plant-eating reptiles make their homes in deep burrows that can also provide shelter for up to 300 species of native animals. Ongoing management of these unimproved pastures by staff consists of prescribed fire and an active eradication program for any exotic or invasive species of plants.

**NORTH LOOP TRAIL – 1.45 mi. (yellow)**
As you travel this trail, you may be aware of the cactus-like plants scattered throughout the field. This succulent known as the prickly-pear cactus is a favorite of gopher tortoises. Its reddish fruit is edible and is frequently used in making jellies. As with the Bear Prairie trail, gopher tortoises inhabit this area of the property.

**SAWGRASS CAUSEWAY – 0.85 mi. (orange)**
This main trail provides a breathtaking view of the sawgrass marsh and forested islands scattered throughout the marsh. You may be lucky enough to capture a glimpse of the Florida sandhill cranes that frequent the area. Their unique, rattling call heard during the winter months is evidence of their presence and attraction to the Preserve. As one crosses the causeway toward the upland buffers, trail users may choose to go north onto Bent Pine Trail, south onto Bog-Button Trail and Hammock Trail, or east to the Cactus Trail.

**BENT PINE TRAIL – 2.02 mi. (green)**
This trail leads you to the northeastern section of the property. You may notice on the trail various sand mounds scattered throughout. Pocket gophers have created these mounds, preferring turkey oak and longleaf pine communities. The complicated and extensive underground tunnels provide hiding and living
quarters for these mammals. Their primary diet consists of plant roots. Further north on the trail, you will come to a small pond known for attracting a multitude of ducks during the winter months. Wood ducks and ring-neck ducks have been observed feeding at the pond.

**BOG-BUTTON TRAIL – 0.56 mi. (blue)**
The visitor can hike or horseback ride alongside the marsh and view the transitional area or *ecotone* between the marsh and forested upland. Many animal species use this ecotonal habitat for nesting and perching areas. As you walk, especially during spring and summer you may notice plants with a button-like flower on the trail path. These bog-buttons are found in moist pinelands and marshy areas.

**HAMMOCK TRAIL – 1.03 mi. (purple)**
Live oak and magnolia trees abound on the Hammock Trail. The beautiful tree canopy allows the visitor to experience the natural

![Prickly Pear Cactus](image)

*Prickly Pear Cactus*

![Gopher Tortoise](image)

*Gopher Tortoise*

Florida. Hiking this trail allows the visitor to compare this hammock community with the sawgrass marsh community viewed on the Sawgrass Causeway. One noticeable difference is the wildlife encountered. The sawgrass marsh attracts large, wading birds while hammock attracts smaller birds such as warblers and predators such as owls and hawks. They are experts at flying through the dense foliage as they search for food and nesting sites. Along the trails, you may notice a silvery/white colored moss. This *deer moss* is actually a *lichen*, composed of an algae and a fungus living together for mutual benefit. The sight of these delicate organisms provides a sense of the northern woods.

**Hiking, biking or horseback riding** on the Sawgrass Island Preserve allows the visitor an opportunity to experience a natural area far away from the urbanized environment. There are two *primitive camping sites* located on the Hammock Trail. They consist of a fire ring, picnic table and a post to hang your lantern. **There is no water source, so water must be carried in.** Camping is available by permit only.

The Preserve is maintained as a natural area, with a diversity of animal, plant and insect species. Insect repellent is recommended, especially during the summer months.

*Sawgrass Island Preserve* is open daily from 8:00 a.m. until sunset. Camping is available by permit only.

**The following are not allowed** – motorized vehicles, pets, and trapping devices; removal of plants, animals, archeological or cultural resources.

Visit the Lake County Water Authority website at [www.lcwa.org](http://www.lcwa.org) for additional recreational opportunities on other Preserves.