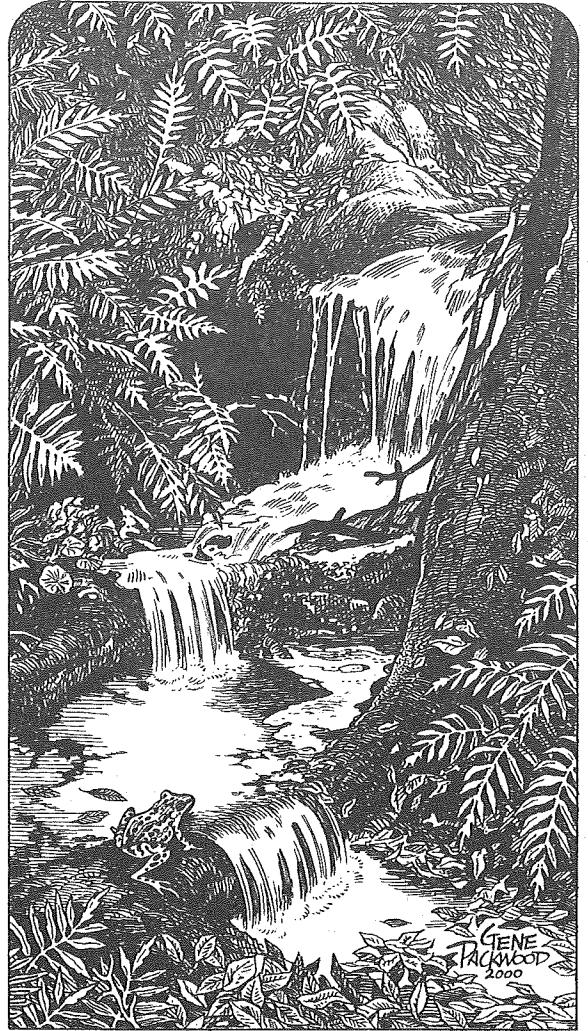


  
**Lake County**  
**WATER AUTHORITY**  
 107 North Lake Avenue • Tavares, FL 32778  
 (352) 343-3777  
[www.lcwa.org](http://www.lcwa.org)

2/09 7500

**HIDDEN**  
**WATERS**  
*preserve*  
**LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA**



Lake County  
**WATER AUTHORITY**

# HIDDEN WATERS *preserve*



The Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) acquired this 90-acre site in 1996 through the LCWA's Land and Preservation Program to protect the seepage slopes, the sinkhole, and the high aquifer recharge areas. The sinkhole and surrounding land were threatened in recent years with illegal dumping of trash and debris. Protection by LCWA will ensure the water quality of the site and provide compatible, passive recreational use for the residents of Lake County.

The Preserve is located southeast of the City of Eustis and was formerly known as the Eichelberger Sink. Previous uses of the land include a golf course in the 1940's and 1950's and a citrus grove during the 1980's, prior to the freezes. During the last 20 years, subdivisions have sprung up around this property, further increasing its value as green space and as an aquifer buffer.

The natural communities have been impacted over the years. As a result, the forested uplands around the wetland system and sinkhole are a remnant of the historic forested uplands that once dominated the site. This mix of habitat types attracts bird species in numbers sufficient enough to land the Preserve on the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission's Statewide Birding Trail List. For more information about the birding trail,

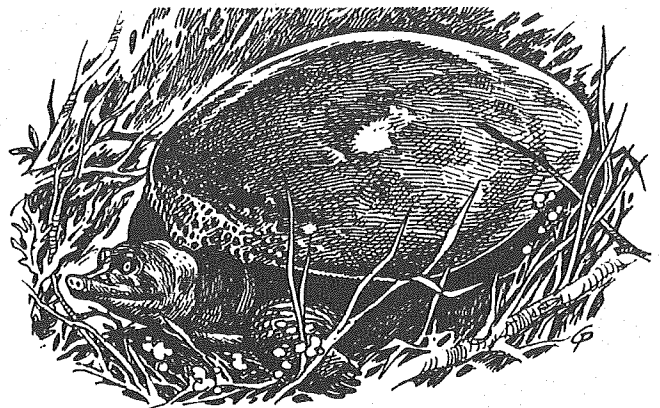
visit <http://floridabirdingtrail.com/>.

Human impacts on the property have allowed the site to be invaded by exotic and aggressive plants such as coral ardisia and camphor. LCWA maintains a control program to combat exotic species of plants that threaten the native vegetation.

## LAKE ALFRED TRAIL – 0.6 mi. (blue)

This trail starts from the Country Club Road parking area and winds around Lake Alfred. This lake was formed over time as water seeped from underground sources and flowed from the northeastern slope. The eroding action of the water shaped the slopes that you see today. The change in elevation is approximately 105 feet. This unique topographical change presents a challenge to area hikers, joggers and power walkers. Wildlife sightings include herons, egrets, ducks, hawks, foxes, raccoons and turtles.

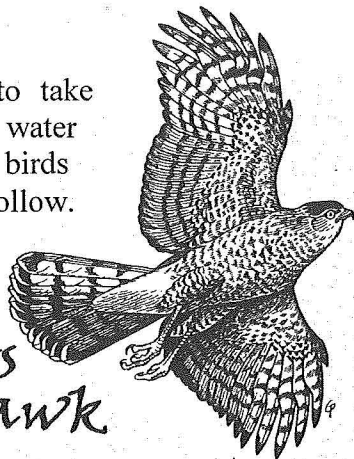
Lake Alfred is very dynamic, rising and lowering with the seasons. High water can flood the trails during the rainy seasons making it difficult for visitors to navigate around the lake. During periods of drought, the lake retreats into the aquifer. This cyclical system allows for the lake bottom to dry up, reducing the buildup of muck and encouraging native



*Softshell Turtle*

aquatic plants to take root when the water returns allowing birds and wildlife to follow.

Coopers  
Hawk



#### **HAMMOCK TRAIL – 0.2 mi. (purple)**

The Hammock Trail continues up the southern slope from Lake Alfred to the upland forest. Warblers and woodpeckers favor this tree-canopied habitat for nesting and feeding on insects. The trees, shrubs and plants found in the Preserve are second growth, which have regenerated since the land was cleared.

#### **RAVINE TRAIL – 0.4mi. (red)**

The Lake Alfred Trail transitions into the Ravine Trail as you move from the sinkhole lake up the eastern slope to the uplands. As one ascends the trail, the sound of running water greets the visitor. Groundwater, flowing horizontally from nearby Lakes Irma and Joanna is thought to be the source of this continual supply. Even during times of drought, the water still flows down this little creek and into the sinkhole lake.

A shady canopy consisting of sweetgum, laurel oak, pignut hickory, and southern magnolia frames the trail. Although caution is in order, visitors have an opportunity to observe the ravine, one of the highlights of this Preserve. During wet periods, water can be seen seeping from the soil at numerous locations, creating smaller creeks along the wooded slope. Erosion has not only shaped this ravine, but has also impacted the adjacent trees. Native plants that thrive in this unique

environment include elderberry, royal fern, netted chain fern, and water oak.

#### **GOPHER TORTOISE TRAIL – 0.2 mi. (orange)**

Starting from the Abrams Street parking area this trail runs to the Prickly Pear Trail, through the sandhill restoration area. As you walk along the trail, you may notice the many burrows in the sand. The well-drained soils found on the higher elevations of the property provide prime habitat for the gopher tortoise. Gopher tortoises are listed as a threatened species in Florida due to habitat loss. Tortoise burrows can provide refuge to more than 350 species of animals, especially during fires.

#### **PRICKLY PEAR TRAIL – 0.3 mi. (yellow)**

The LCWA is in the process of restoring the uplands in this area to a plant community known as sandhill, which is dominated by longleaf pine, turkey oak, and wiregrass.

#### **LONGLEAF PINE TRAIL – 1.5 mi. (green)**

This trail runs around the perimeter of the property just inside the fence line. As part of the restoration program, young longleaf pines were planted. Most old growth longleaf pines have been logged. Many public agencies are re-introducing this stately Florida native back into the environment because of its importance to endangered animals such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and the bald eagle.

**Hidden Waters Preserve** is open daily from 8:00 a.m. until sunset.

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

**Call the Water Authority** for additional recreational opportunities on other Preserves.

