

Trail and wildlife drive guide

Lake Apopka North Shore

About this property

Lake Apopka is the headwaters of the Harris Chain of Lakes. At approximately 48.4 square miles in size, Lake Apopka is the fourth largest lake in Florida and receives water from spring flow, rainfall and stormwater runoff. The Lake Apopka Restoration Act of 1985 and Florida's Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Act in 1987 paved the way for restoration work to begin.

Former farmlands make up the Lake Apopka North Shore, a restoration area where the St. Johns River Water Management District's major activities include marsh and floodplain restoration and the creation of a marsh flow-way that filters Lake Apopka's waters by circulating lake water through restored wetlands, returning cleaner water to the lake. The wildlife drive and trail system are along a portion of the former farm fields.

This public property helps protect water quality, cultural resources, indigenous flora and fauna, and provides water storage and natural resource-based recreation.

The District's main goal of buying land has been to protect water resources. In addition, these lands protect plant and wildlife habitat and provide areas for public recreation and environmental education. The District has selected land for purchase based on the potential for preserving, restoring, enhancing or developing water resources in its 18-county region.

Over the years, most of the funding for land purchases has come from Florida's Save Our Rivers and Preservation 2000 programs established by the Legislature or other funding sources. Beginning in 2000, land was purchased through the Florida Forever program, which had also funded environmental restoration and water resource development.

About the wildlife drive

The Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive is a one-way 11-mile drive that begins at Lust Road and ends on Jones Road in Orange County, Fla., meandering through the eastern portion of the property. The drive is open Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and federal holidays. The drive is closed on other days due to ongoing restoration work. The entrance gate will open at 7 a.m. and close at 3 p.m. to allow visitors time to complete the drive and exit the property by 5 p.m.

For your safety, the speed limit is 10 miles per hour and the maximum vehicle length is 25 feet. Vehicles pulling trailers are not allowed. Directional signs are located along the route and gates will be closed/locked for the public's safety in areas where work is ongoing. Several "pull over" areas provide visitors a chance to stop along the drive.

A portion of the drive intersects with a multi-use trail and visitors are encouraged to carefully watch for hikers, bicycle riders and other users who will be sharing the road.

Wildlife and plant viewing

The Lake Apopka North Shore is widely known for its bird population. The annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) identified 174 species of birds here on the one-day count in 1998, which remains the highest species total for an inland count in the 119-year history of the CBC.

The list of birds found here continues to grow, with 369 species seen on the property. A list of species found here can be downloaded from the District's website at www.sjrwmd.com/lands/recreation/lake-apopka.

Plant species found in the upland portions of the North Shore include Florida bonamia, pygmy fringe tree, scrub buckwheat, Britton's beargrass, scrub plum and clasping warea (all federally listed plants).

The District continues to work to expand populations of listed and rare plants through management actions that include prescribed fire, planting and seeding, and managing public lands to protect natural habitats.

Please respect wildlife and use caution while visiting District lands. These are wild animals. For your safety, do not approach or feed any wild animal.

Trail use

The majority of the trails on lands owned and/or managed by the District are located on existing roads or fire lines, maintained primarily for land management activities. However, at Lake Apopka North Shore, many trails are along levees. Maintenance activities may temporarily cause the surface of these areas to be uneven or to have unstable soils.

Many trails offer no shade or shelter, so be prepared for sun, excessive heat or sudden thunderstorms. Make sure you have plenty of water, snacks, sunscreen and insect repellent. Vehicular access is allowed on portions of this property on certain days. You may also encounter District staff vehicles and heavy equipment on the property, as the Lake Apopka North Shore is an active restoration area. Please use caution.

All trails are designated "multiple use" for hiking, bicycling and horseback riding unless otherwise noted. Multiuse trails will be marked with a 4-inch diamond, with double diamonds indicating a change in direction.

Animal and plant life are protected. Leave only the minimum trace of your travels on the trail and take only memories. Keep pets on a leash.

Audio tour

An audio tour for this property gives visitors an overview of the District's restoration work on the former farmlands that make up the Lake Apopka North Shore, and the plants and animals that can be found here. The tour includes 11 points of interest along the wildlife drive and are indicated by numbered signs. A smartphone or other mobile device with an Internet connection will be needed to stream the audio. Standard carrier data rates apply. To join the audio tour at any time during your visit, go to www.sjrwmd.com/LANS or use the QR code on signage.

Online donations

Like all District properties, the Lake Apopka North Shore, including the Wildlife Drive, is free to visit. However, we often receive questions from individuals interested in contributing directly to the property's upkeep. The District welcomes online donations to support sanitation, recreational maintenance, security, and visitor brochures and maps. If you choose to give, thank you! You may visit the donation page at www.sjrwmd.com/LANS or use the QR code on signage.

Wildlife drive schedule

The wildlife drive entrance gate is open from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and federal holidays. All vehicles must exit the drive by 5 p.m.

Important phone numbers

Land Resources: 386-329-4404

Wildlife Violations: 888-404-3922

Non-emergency after hours: 407-620-8215

Emergency: 911

For more information

To learn more about the District's work at Lake Apopka North Shore and recreational opportunities, visit the District's website.

Restoration work: www.sjrwmd.com

Recreation: www.sjrwmd.com/lands/recreation

St. Johns River Water Management District

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