

## Enjoy Nature Nearby

Fall brings a bit of cooler weather and is a great time to explore the outdoors. Osceola County has a variety of natural ecosystems including dry scrub, open grass prairies, pine woods, oak hammocks, swamps, creeks and lakes. Property owners funded the purchase and maintenance of natural areas for environmental protection and passive recreation through the SAVE Osceola property assessment. To date, more than 2500 acres are accessible to the public for hiking, biking, wildlife watching, paddling and in some cases, horseback riding. Many residents have yet to discover our natural treasures so close to home and the fall season is a great opportunity to do so.

Cherokee Point Conservation Area is the most recent natural area to open, located at 2501 Cherokee Road, St. Cloud, FL 34772 at the end of Kissimmee Park Road, south of St. Cloud on Goblet's Cove on the east side of Lake Tohopekaliga. The 183-acre conservation area protects shoreline and important endangered Everglade snail kite nesting and feeding habitat while providing opportunities for the public to enjoy picnic facilities and catch and release fishing in the pond. (<http://tinyurl.com/CherokeePoint>)

Contact Osceola County's Environmental Lands Conservation Program office at 407-742-0200 or [conservation@osceola.org](mailto:conservation@osceola.org) for more information on natural areas for outdoor recreation.

While local natural areas offer opportunities to hike and explore, consider creating wildlife habitat in your own yard. Native plants provide color, shade and form in home landscapes. In addition, native plants in the right place require less watering and fertilizer, thus protecting our lakes and streams. Learn more about recommended plants and gardening for birds, butterflies and pollinators by contacting the UF IFAS Extension Service office at 321-697-3000. Woods Walks, guided hikes in local natural areas, are scheduled to help residents become more familiar with plants and animals commonly found in Osceola County.