Rookery Bay Research Reserve

Finding Solutions

Mangroves and Public Access

Mangroves have long been underappreciated in southwest Florida. Just 50 years ago these vibrant forests were considered "useless swamps" and were often cleared and filled in to make way for high-rise condominiums, marinas and other waterfront developments as quickly as possible.

The 1970s grass roots movement to "save Rookery Bay" for future generations ultimately resulted in nearly 40% of the county's coast becoming conservation lands, but the nature of the mangrove coastline left opportunities for people to access these lands and waters few and far between.

A bayfront property on the northwest corner of Collier Boulevard and Capri Boulevard that was originally permitted and prepped for a high-rise hotel and 50-slip marina ended up being sold to the State of Florida. Despite its condition, the site had the potential to offer much more to the community.

Project Leader
Randy McCormick

Funding
State and federal funding sources

Project Dates
2009 - 2012

Isles of Capri Paddlecraft Park

After years of planning and a lengthy search for state and federal funding, the waterways around Johnson and McIlvane Bays are now accessible to paddlers. Staff at the Reserve proposed restoration plans, obtained permits, planted mangroves, cleaned up the site and laid the foundation for the new Isles of Capri Paddlecraft Park. Opened in March 2012, the park is sub-leased to Collier County Parks & Recreation to manage. The facility features a ramp, picnic pavilions, and restrooms also accessible to pedestrians from the nearby Collier Boulevard boat ramp. The new park provides opportunities for non-motorized vessels such as kayaks, canoes and paddle-boards to safely access quiet backwaters and amazing habitats in a relatively unexplored part of the Reserve.

Rookery Bay, located in southwest Florida, is recognized as one of the few remaining pristine, mangrove-forested estuaries in the U.S. As part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, it serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists. For more information, visit www.rookerybay.org.