



## WETLANDS ALL AROUND US

by Gilbert M. Long, Master Gardener

Florida is comprised of a range of ecologically diverse habitats and temperature ranges from USDA hardiness zones 8a to 11b. In addition, the state is bordered on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, creating a marine environment through many of those zones. In south Florida (and in particular southwest Florida), the landscape plants homeowners prefer are those that thrive in hardiness zones 9-11, and yard plants are the main emphasis for gardeners.

However, in Collier County, well over half the available land is wetlands, and the plants that thrive are not your typical household variety plants. See *Figure 1*.

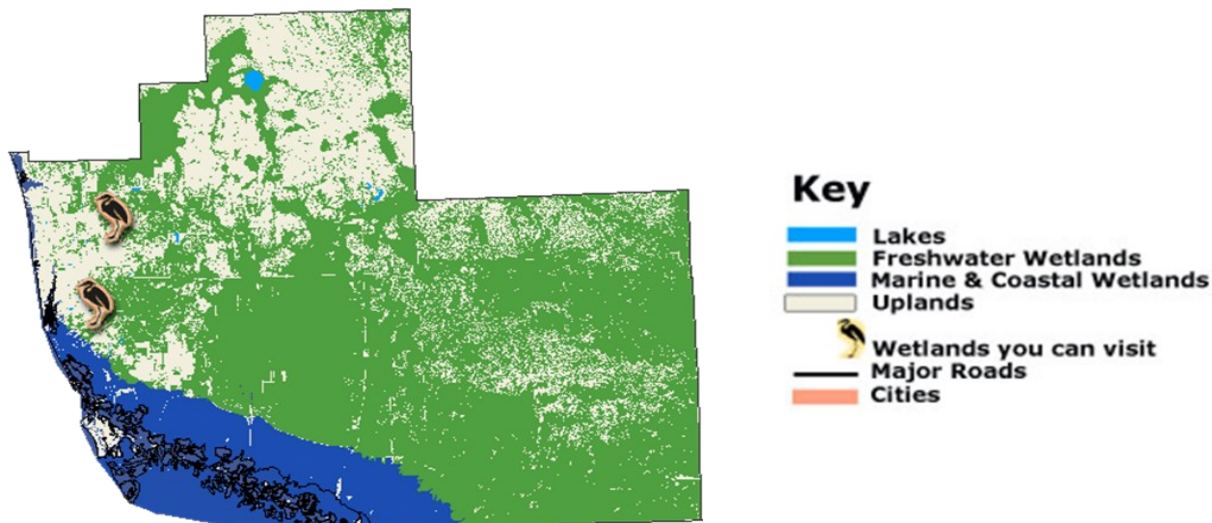


Figure 1. Wetlands in Collier County, FL

Wetlands are defined by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as: “those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or ground water at a frequency and a duration sufficient to support, and under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soils. Soils present in wetlands generally are classified as hydric or alluvial, or possess characteristics that are associated with reducing soil conditions.”

To further clarify and standardize the intent of the definition, a methodology for identifying and delineating wetlands is provided in Rule 62-340 Florida Administrative Code. These rules are complex and are subject to change depending on the United States Environmental Protection Agency rules and interpretations, which have changed repeatedly over the years.

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As you can see on the map above, there are two main types of wetlands in Collier County:

**Mangrove Swamps:**

sub-tropical coastal communities dominated by red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) or black mangrove species (*Avicennia germinans*); northern locations limited by freeze line. These predominate in the 10,000 Islands area south and east of Marco Island.

**Freshwater Marshes:**

most diverse grouping of wetlands, dominated by herbaceous grasses, sedges, broad leafed monocots, and floating leafed aquatics; the classification of Florida's most famous wetland - the Florida Everglades.

The Collier County areas reserved for ecological preservation include:

- **Big Cypress National Preserve**, constituting the eastern half of Collier County, all Everglades
- **Picayune Strand State Forest**, predominantly historic swampland that was partially developed to the detriment of the wetlands
- **Fakahatchee Strand Preserve**, where the Everglades gradually turns into mangrove swamps
- **Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge**, again predominantly Everglades habitat
- **Collier Seminole State Park**, located primarily in the mangrove swamps
- **Rookery Bay Reserve**, mangrove swamp adjacent to Marco Island
- **Bird Rookery Swamp**, emergent freshwater wetlands northwest of the IFAS Extension office

These areas are not regularly occupied by residential housing, since they are designated as natural preserves. However, residential growth in the county will continue to put pressure on these natural resources and will increasingly abut them, creating the need to understand these ecosystems. Those who choose to live in these adjacent areas are encouraged to learn how to properly manage their plant selection and maintenance.

Thus, we are surrounded by wetlands for much of Collier County! It is important to select plants and problem-solve responsibly in areas that border or occupy these wetlands areas.

- <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/InteractiveMap.aspx>
- <http://soils.ifas.ufl.edu/wetlandextension/types.htm>
- <http://dep.state.fl.us/water/wetlands/delineation/>