

Backwoods Nature Trail

Located in the Southeastern portion of the MOSI campus, the Backwoods is a forest oasis in a sea of urban development. Packed into 25 acres is a notable array of many Central Florida habitats, complete with distinct sandhill, hardwood wetland, mesic pine flatwoods, and upland hardwood hammock communities. Native butterflies, birds, and other wildlife can be observed moving through these plant communities and experiencing a woodland life right in the middle of Tampa. The gopher tortoise is an important resident of the backwoods. Its presence affects the lives of many other creatures. The gopher tortoise creates extensive burrows in the ground that many other animals and insects use for shelter. Over 300 species may depend on the gopher tortoise for their survival.



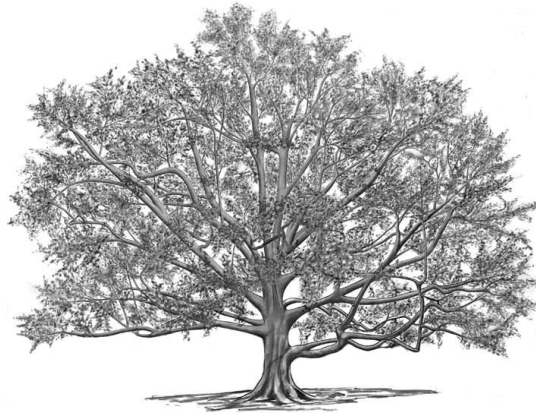
- Trail and tours of these habitats provide guests a renewed appreciation for some of Florida's most sensitive, and most beautiful habitats.
- MOSI's Backwoods Nature Trail hopes to foster a greater respect through education for Florida's rapidly vanishing habitats.
- MOSI's Backwoods Nature Trail is so important because as Florida and Tampa's population continues to grow, many of the remaining natural areas will become developed for human use.

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Backwoods

Nature Trail

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ECOSYSTEMS

Sandhill: Wildflowers, cactus, and open expanses of blazing white sands make up the sandhill systems of the Back Woods. Found on the highest points of the preserve, the deep sands of the sandhills are home to pocket gophers, six-lined racerunners, and the threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*).

Sinkhole: The topography of much of the Back Woods is characterized by deep sands over limestone bedrock known as karst. Acidic rainwater percolating through the sands slowly erodes the limestone creating voids. Collapse of the overlying sediments creates a sinkhole. Sinkholes provide a primary pathway for rainwater to replenish subsurface groundwater; they are an important part of the aquifer system that supplies 95% of Florida's drinking water. The wetlands of the Back Woods have been modified to slow and clean surface waters before they reach the sinkhole and flow down to the Floridan aquifer.

Outdoor Stage: Built and refurbished by Eagle Scouts, stadium style benches face a raised stage in the oak hammock near the sinkhole. Many classes and groups make use of this location.

Upland Oak Hammock: Characterized by large sweeping sand live oaks and other hardwood species. This upland system developed from years of fire suppression in the sandhill allowing the oaks to replace a once pine dominated forest.

Buttonbush Pond: This ephemeral pond was created to stage and remove pollutants from stormwater overflowing from the natural wetland before it reaches the sinkhole and the aquifer. Beautiful buttonbush shrubs with their large white pom pom like flowers and other wetland vegetation surrounding the pond absorb pollution from the stormwater as well as providing habitat for wildlife.

Wetland: The natural wetland in the midst of the preserve is an example of an upland depression wetland. Known as a "bayhead" this forested wetland is characterized by three different species of trees; sweetbay, swamp tupelo, and redbay. This wetland receives all the stormwater from the impervious surfaces at MOSI and is crucial to preventing stormwater pollutants from reaching the groundwater as well as providing essential habitat for the many animal and plant species of the Back Woods

Pine Flatwoods: A savannah of grasses, wildflowers and flowering shrubs make up the understory beneath a canopy of towering longleaf pines in the pine flatwoods. This community lies in the transition between the wetlands and the uplands.

Picnic Area: Not too far off the beaten track, enjoy lunch to the tune of songbirds at the picnic area near the boardwalk.

Wetland Boardwalk: The boardwalk takes you from the central entrance through the middle of a mitigated wetland to the main access trail (Flatwoods Trail). An observation deck in the middle allows visitors to peak into the middle of this naturalized wetland system and view plant and animal species more commonly found in remote areas without getting your feet wet.

