

Turtle Rock Preserve, Wetland, and Preserve Buffer Management: A Brief Policy Summary

Turtle Rock Natural Assets Committee has a mandate from the Board of Governors to monitor and manage the community's surface water management system, which includes all preserves, wetlands, and preserve buffers. Turtle Rock Community Association is responsible for the operation, maintenance, and regulatory compliance of all drainage, preservation and conservation/open space areas in accordance with the regulations and requirements of Sarasota County and other permitting agencies.

A primary function of the preserves, wetlands, and preserve buffers is flood control and related water quality management. Preserves, wetlands, and their buffers are also mandated for conservation purposes, including the preservation of designated historical, environmentally sensitive, or archeological areas such as the forested archeological site between the divided lanes of Turtle Rock Boulevard just north of the athletic courts. Finally, preserves, wetlands, and preserve buffers contribute to Turtle Rock's quality of life, with habitat for wildlife and a nature trail (Turtle Trail) for resident enjoyment.

The Natural Assets Committee helps assure the preserves, wetlands, and preserve buffers function as designed by Sarasota County in conjunction with the Palmer Ranch Master Development Plan.

Key to these efforts are fostering the health of native plants, managing water flow in and out of ponds, and periodically removing invasive plants from a 30-foot buffer area bordering the preserves. The Natural Assets Committee is also charged with assuring Turtle Rock's conserved areas are not damaged by human interference.

Nature trail, and resident use of preserves, wetlands, and preserve buffers: Turtle Trail is an approximately 1.5 mile nature trail with its trailhead behind the community center. Residents and their visitors are encouraged to walk the trail at their own risk, adhering to its rules (including but not limited to "leave no trace," dogs leashed at all times, no weapons, no fires, and no motorized vehicles except for mobility aids such as wheelchairs). Residents are also permitted to walk in other portions of the preserves, but may not clear paths or remove brush to do so.

Residents are strictly prohibited from making changes to the preserves, wetlands, or preserve buffers. Specifically, residents may not cut or remove plants or trees (with the exception of removal of branches overhanging resident property, which must be approved by the ARC and performed by a certified arborist). Residents are prohibited from dumping lawn waste, brush, or any other materials in these areas. Residents are not permitted to feed, harm, trap, or otherwise attend to wildlife in any common area, preserve, or waterway. The exception to this prohibition is fishing. Residents are prohibited from having outdoor lighting that spills into or illuminates preserves, wetlands, preserve buffers, ponds, or common areas.

Challenges: Invasive plants such as Brazilian peppers and others are removed from a 30-foot preserve buffer area on a regular basis. The Turtle Trail is kept cleared for resident use, and certain areas adjacent to ponds may be trimmed to allow vendor access for pond management. A vendor licensed for work in preserve, wetland, and preserve buffer areas performs these duties, as required by the county.

Treatment: The committee is mindful of the types and quantities of chemical treatment our vendors use, and such treatment is applied only when needed to control invasive plants. Turtle Rock vendors also employ manual removal of plant matter when appropriate.

*Natural Assets Committee
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