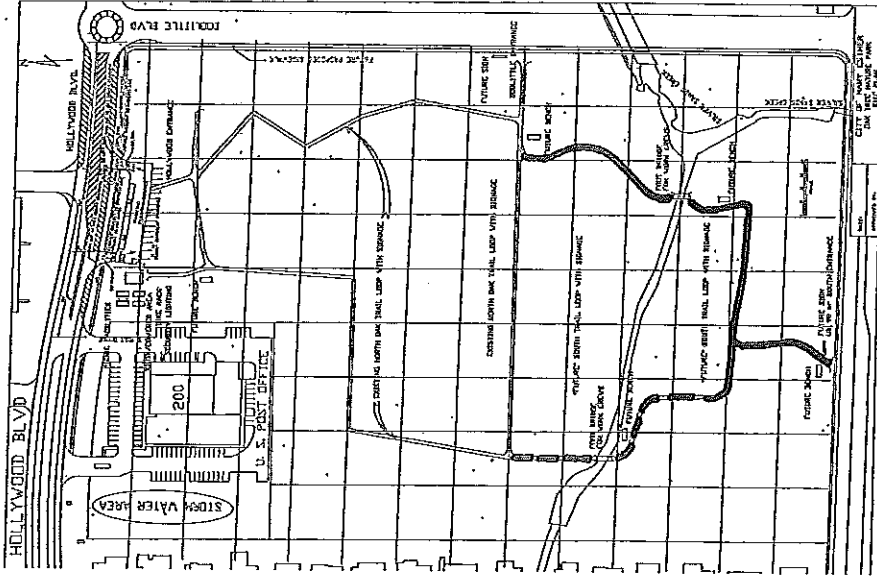


The Oak Tree Nature Park Management Advisory Committee is a volunteer group dedicated to ensuring preservation of the park's natural and cultural resources while creating recreational and educational opportunities in this beautiful natural area. Membership is open to all wishing to join.

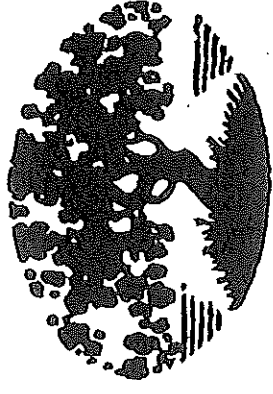
The committee conducts a variety of projects to enhance and improve the park, including invasive species removal, trail clearing work days, interpretative trail design, educational outings, and cleanups to remove trash and excess plant debris. Volunteers are encouraged to participate as their schedules allow and need not attend both meetings and work days. To receive email information on upcoming park events, meeting notices, and copies of meeting minutes, email mathilda@cox.net and ask to be placed on the OTNP mailing list.

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held on the last Wednesday of the month at 5:30 pm in the Mary Esther City Council chambers. For more information, please contact Mathilda Ravine at 243-2298.



A one-mile trail meanders through the park. The parking area is on Hollywood Blvd. The park is open to the public during daylight hours. Please use caution. The park is home to wildlife that can be unpredictable. Always view wildlife from a safe distance.

City of Mary Esther
 195 Christobal Lane
 Mary Esther, FL 32569
 (850) 243-3566

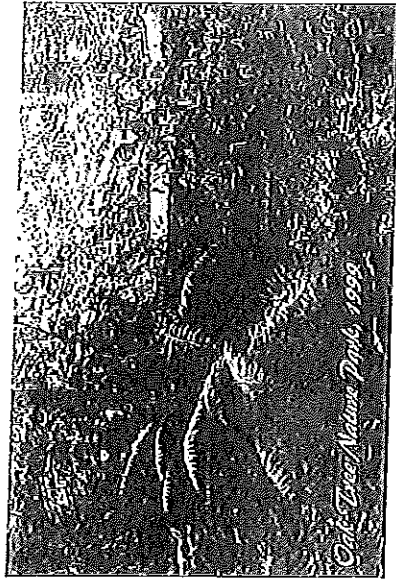


Oak Tree Nature Park

Interpretative trails meander through this 25-acre natural area in the heart of Mary Esther.

City of Mary Esther
 Outdoor Recreational Area

Purchased with Funds from
 The Florida Communities Trust
 Preservation 2000 Program



Oak Tree Nature Park is a 25-acre tract of undeveloped property showcasing the area's native plant communities and providing interpretative hiking trails to allow visitors to enjoy and learn about the great outdoors.

Located in Mary Esther, Florida, the park is bounded by Doolittle Road on the east, Hollywood Boulevard on the north, and Highway 98 to the south. A parking area is located along Hollywood Boulevard where the trailhead is located. Pedestrian access is also available from Doolittle and Hwy 98.

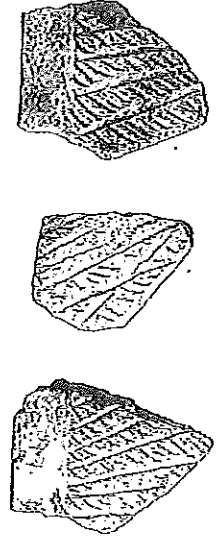
Trail markers identify native plants along the roughly one-mile route. The trail includes a northern loop approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile in length. The northern section is connected to a shorter southern loop with footbridges over Silver Sands Creek. As trail improvement continues, additional signs are planned to provide information on the park's plants and animals as well as the Native Americans who once inhabited the area and the cultural remains they left behind.

The northern trail loop was completed as part of Ryan Braddy's Eagle Scout project with assistance from Boy Scout Troop 509 and volunteers. Planned improvements include a pavilion and picnic area as well as benches along the trail to allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of this natural area.

The park was acquired through two separate grants from the Florida Communities Trust under the Preservation 2000 program. The first 14 acres were acquired in 1998, and eleven additional acres were added in 2001.

Cultural Resources

University of West Florida students and community volunteers surveyed the property for cultural resources under the direction of UWF Archaeology Institute professor Norma Harris. The survey uncovered remains of prehistoric activity from three cultural periods: Archaic (4000-1000 BC), Weeden Island (AD 500-1200), and Pensacola (AD 1200-1700). Evidence of Native American occupation includes a shell midden, pottery sherds, two projectile point/knives, assorted lithics, a jasper bead, shell tools, and faunal remains.



Biological Resources

Graduate students from the University of Florida Milton campus conducted plant and animal surveys under the direction of Dr. Debbie Miller. Five plant communities were identified: scrubby flatwoods, baygall, floodplain forest, xeric hammock, and maritime hammock. The park boasts many types of oaks, magnolia, and hickory trees as well as Florida anise and wild azalea.



Florida Anise blooms in early spring at Oak Tree Nature Park.

A number of animal species visit or make their home in the park, including otter, beaver, alligator, raccoon, opossum, fox, bobcat, and squirrel as well as turtles, frogs, toads, snakes, and a rich variety of insects.

Choctawhatchee Audubon Society, UF students, and volunteers conducted bird surveys during spring and fall migration in 2000 and 2001. Over 103 bird species were identified, including a large number of migratory songbirds as well as wading birds, raptors, and resident songbirds.

The city's water contractor OMI collects monthly water quality samples from Silver Sands Creek, which runs through the park.



Oak Tree Nature Park

feature 5 to 9 serrated oval- to lance-shaped leaflets. Found on dry sandy sites in the eastern U.S., the sand hickory's hard wood is used for fuel, while its nuts are eaten by small animals.

16 Coral bean (*Erythrina herbacea*) is deciduous with compound leaves of three leaflets with pointed tips and a bulge in the middle. In late spring and early summer, long tube-like scarlet blossoms attract hummingbirds. Flowers are followed by large pods that split open to reveal bright red seeds in late summer and fall.



Warning: Seeds are toxic.

17 Red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) is a small, deciduous tree with "mitten-shaped" leaves. The number of lobes on each leaf can vary from zero to three. Its dark red berries provide food for wildlife.

18 The small shrub-like tree to the right of this sign is gum bumelia (*Bumelia lanuginosa*), a deciduous tree that flowers in summer. Seeds ripen in October. A clear viscid gum comes from cut wood, and dried, ground bark is sometimes used as a chewing gum.

19 Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is an evergreen conifer. This aromatic tree has thin, fibrous, reddish-brown bark. The trunk is noticeably tapered, often becoming fluted at the base. This is the most widespread conifer in eastern N. America.

20 Goldenaster (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), also known as silk grass, occurs in dry habitats across the Southeast. The leaves of this herbaceous perennial look like silvery grass blades. Both the stem and leaves are covered in silky hairs. Numerous flowers appear in summer and fall.



an alga that live in a symbiotic relationship called obligate mutualism, meaning neither can live alone. 9 Partridge berry (*Mitchella repens*) is a ground-hugging, vine-like perennial herb that occurs in woodlands throughout most of the eastern U.S. Small pinkish-white flowers bloom in summer and give rise to red berries.

10 Laurel Oak (*Quercus laurifolia*) is tardily deciduous, meaning it drops a few old leaves during winter, but sheds most all at once as new leaves unfurl and flowering begins in early spring. This fast-growing tree is prone to rotting and early death—traits ideal for wildlife. Funguses, beetles, carpenter ants, and grubs feed on decaying wood and provide food for lizards, woodpeckers, and songbirds. Animals find shelter in the tree's cavities, and its large acorn crop provides wildlife food.

11 Highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium elliptii*) flowers in early spring, before the growth of leaves and new shoots. Small, pinkish blooms grow in clusters of 2 to 6. The fruit is a blue-black berry less than 1/2 inch in diameter and is favored by songbirds.

12 Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*) is a deciduous tree with smooth rusty-brown bark that becomes rough and furrowed with age. In the fall sourwood leaves turn brilliant red and scarlet. In spring white blossoms are borne on long drooping stalks called racemes. The flowers attract honeybees.

13 A variety of ferns grow in the floodplain of Silver Sands Creek. The largest, cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), has distinctive fertile fronds that emerge green in spring but soon turn rich cinnamon brown, then die back after shedding their spores in late summer. Large sterile, leafy fronds grow 3 to 5 feet tall around the fertile frond. Fiddleheads are cinnamon brown and turn pale green as they unfold.

14 Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) and sand hickory (15) grow in the floodplain. Sweetbay is a tall, slender tree with smooth gray bark. Its leaves are silvery underneath and give the tree a whitish appearance. It has large white blossoms in spring; its small fruits turn bright red in fall.

15 Sand hickory (*Carya pallida*) is a deciduous tree with ridged gray-brown bark. Compound leaves

Descriptions correlate to the numbered signs found along Oak Tree Nature Park's walking trail.

1 Oak hybrids result from cross-species pollination. Here a live oak-laurel oak hybrid (*Quercus virginiana-Q. laurifolia*) rises over saw palmetto (7). A laurel oak-water oak hybrid (*Quercus laurifolia-Q. nigra*) is to the east. (See also 10, 23 and 30.)

2 False Rosemary (*Conradina canescens*) is a shrubby wildflower native to dunes and scrub areas of the northern Gulf Coast. Small clusters of white to lavender flowers occur from March to November. Winged sumac (26) grows alongside and above.

3 Native to the southeastern U.S. Slash Pine (*Pinus elliotii*) is used for lumber, pulp, and paper and formerly for turpentine production and naval stores. Its name is derived from the method of extracting resin by scoring or slashing the trees.

4 Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) is an evergreen shrub that is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers are on separate plants. Tiny white flowers appear in spring. Female flowers are followed by small red berries that provide food for birds and wildlife. The leaves are emetic (cause vomiting) and purgative. Native Americans created a ceremonial drink from yaupon and used the plant for medicinal purposes.

5 Shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) has short, stalked cones generally in clusters and needles 3 to 5" long. Trees can be 100 feet high, but most are much smaller. Found in 22 states, shortleaf pine has the widest range of any pine in the southeast U.S.

6 Staggerbush (*Lyonia ferruginea*) is an evergreen shrub with several crooked trunks and leaves with rust-colored hairs. White to pinkish, bell-shaped flowers, similar to those of blueberries, are borne in spring on wood of the previous season.

7 Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) is a hardy fan palm whose trunk usually remains below ground or runs along the surface. Leaves 2 to 3 feet across grow on sharply saw-toothed stems about 2 feet long. The berries are used to treat prostate and bladder problems and provide food for wildlife.

8 The gray lichens on the ground are commonly called reindeer moss (*Cladonia evansii*). A lichen is not a single plant, but a combination of a fungus and

21 Saw palmetto (7) and short-leaf pine (5) typical of Florida scrub environment grow here.

22 Wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) leaves are aromatic when crushed. Male flowers are yellow-green catkins, and females are small, inconspicuous bumps that grow into blue berries, close to the stem. The waxy berries are a high energy food for birds in the winter. Pioneers fashioned candles from the berries.

23 Left of this sign is a Chapman oak (*Quercus chapmanii*). Chapman oak provides valuable food and nesting sites for wildlife. White-tailed deer, turkeys, raccoons, and squirrels feed on the acorns. Chapman oak is found in sandy soils from South Carolina to Florida and common near saltwater.

24 Red bay (*Persea borbonia*) is an evergreen tree with bright green, aromatic leaves. It has slender twigs and reddish-brown scaly bark. Its aromatic leaves can be substituted for the common spice, bay leaf, normally obtained from bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), a European species in the same family.

25 In late spring and early summer Titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*) produces tiny white flowers in horizontal whorls of elongated clusters. Titi (rhymes with bye-bye) is native to the southeastern U.S., West Indies, Central America, and northern South America, occurring in wetlands and on stream banks.

26 Winged Sumac (*Rhus copallinum*) has small "wings" on either side of its leaf stems between leaflets of the compound leaves. Tiny greenish-yellow flowers occur in spring, summer and fall in showy clusters. Small red fruits appear in clusters in fall and persist through much of winter. Leaves turn brilliant orange red in fall before dropping. Native Americans used winged sumac roots to treat dysentery and made dye from the berries.

27 Florida anise (*Illicium floridanum*) is a broad-leaved evergreen shrub. When crushed, its smooth, leathery leaves emit an anise-like odor. Maroon flowers, about two inches in diameter, tend to be overlooked in the lush foliage. When ripe, seeds literally explode out of the papery star-shaped fruits. Florida anise occurs in moist wooded areas from the panhandle to southeastern Louisiana and is protected by Florida as a threatened species.

28 Sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) is a spreading deciduous shrub that blooms in summer with showy upright clusters of little white flowers with a sweet, spicy, slightly pungent fragrance. Leaves turn golden yellow in fall.

29 Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is a large, broad-leaved evergreen. Its leathery leaves are dark glossy green above with rusty, velveteen undersides. Southern magnolia has large, showy white flowers, 8 to 12" in diameter. The fruits are cone-like structures with bright red kidney-shaped seeds.

30 To the right is a live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), an evergreen with thick, leathery, oval, dark green leaves. The dark red-brown to gray bark is deeply furrowed. Flowers are 2- to 3-inch catkins. Acorns mature in the fall. The life span of this fast-growing, long-lived tree is measured in centuries.

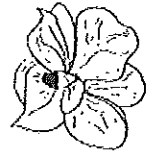
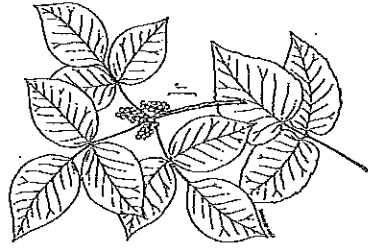
31 Fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*) is an evergreen shrub with shiny dark green leaves and sweetly scented flowers. The bell-shaped flowers are usually pink, but range from nearly white to nearly red. Showy clusters of the small flowers last several weeks.

32 American Olive (*Osmanthus americanus*), also called wild olive or devilwood, is an evergreen small tree/large shrub with shiny leaves and tiny fragrant flowers borne in early spring. The fruits are dark bluish purple when mature and almost spherical.

33 Adam's Needle (*Yucca filamentosa*), also called weak-leaf yucca, has strap-like leaves edged with long curly threads. Showy flowers are carried on an erect central spike. The plant dies after flowering and fruiting, and new plants grow around its edges.

34 Poison ivy

(*Toxicodendron radicans*) grows on a large slash pine (3). "Leaves of three, let it be": this woody vine has leaflets in groups of 3. Birds eat its white berries. The leaves turn brilliant red and purple in fall. **Warning:** Poison ivy can cause a painful skin rash that develops 2-3 days after contact. (Illustration from



USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

35 The swamp or red maple (*Acer rubrum*) is a deciduous native tree characterized by rapid growth, colored flowers and fruit, and spectacular fall colors. It has the greatest north to south distribution of all trees on the east coast. Pioneers made ink and dyes from an extract of its bark.

36 For a description of Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) refer to 14, above.

37 Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*) is a large tree commonly found in swampy areas. It has a straight trunk and rough grayish bark. Native to the Eastern U.S., it can be found growing both on upland sites and on moist, rich soil near swamps and stream edges.

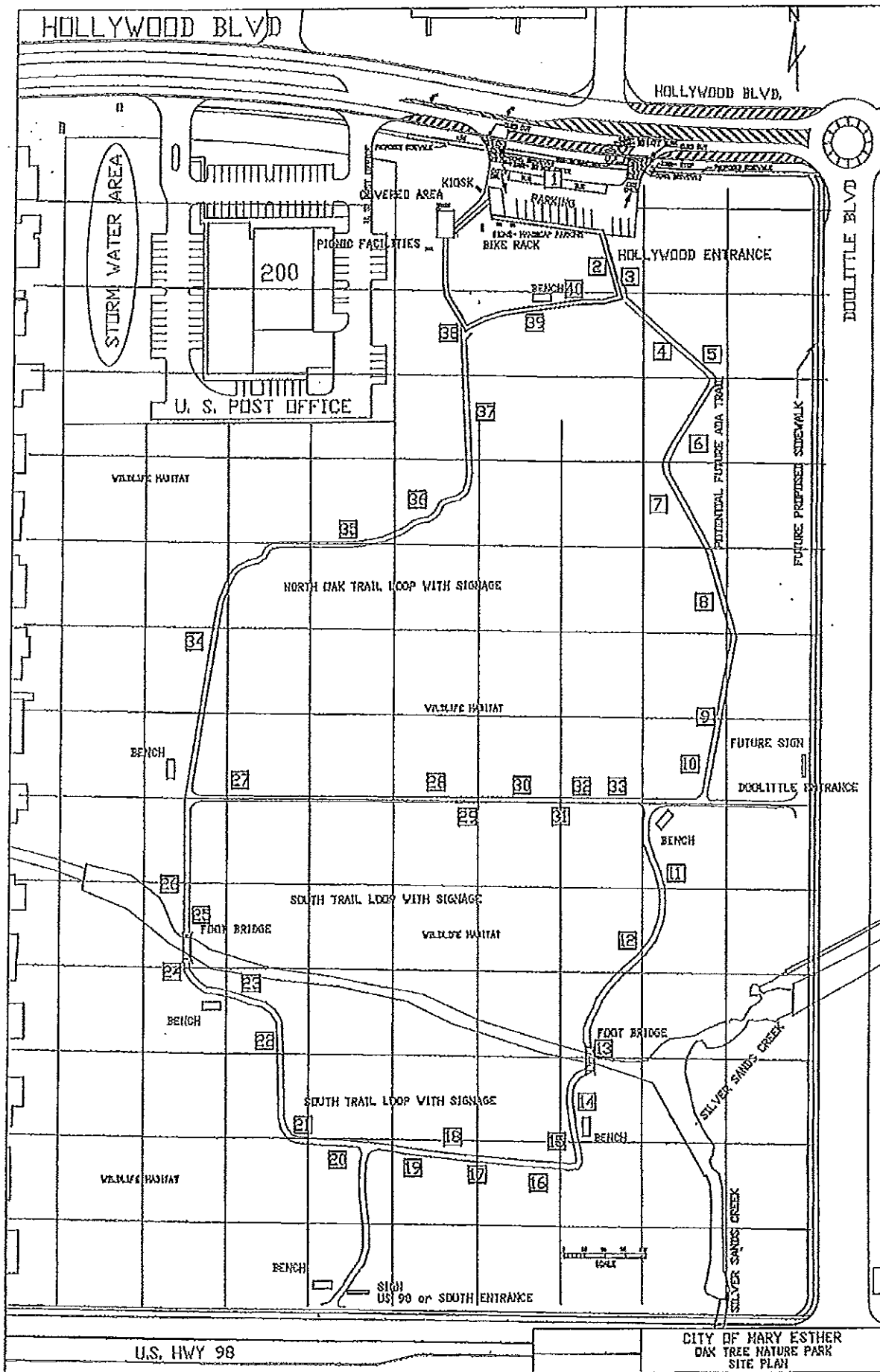
38 Southern blackberry (*Rubus argutus*) grows alongside with southern dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*). The blackberry grows erect on a cane-like stem, while the dewberry is prostrate with lower, trailing vine-like stems. Both are perennial plants.



39 Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is described in 29, above.

40 Evergreen gallberry (*Ilex glabra*) grows amid saw palmetto (7). Look for its smooth, mottled gray brown trunks and oval leaves, shiny and dark green on top, lighter and duller beneath. White flowers appear in late spring in clusters on male plants. Female plants bear single flowers, followed by green berries that ripen to black in early fall. Birds, raccoons, coyotes, and opossums eat the berries. Gallberry is also an important honey plant.

Oak Tree Nature Park is a 25-acre natural recreation area in the City of Mary Esther. The park was purchased with funds from the Florida Communities Trust Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever Programs. The park is open during daylight hours. Please use caution. The park is home to many plants and animals; some can be bothersome or dangerous. Always view wildlife from a safe distance. For more information, contact the City of Mary Esther at (850) 243-3566.

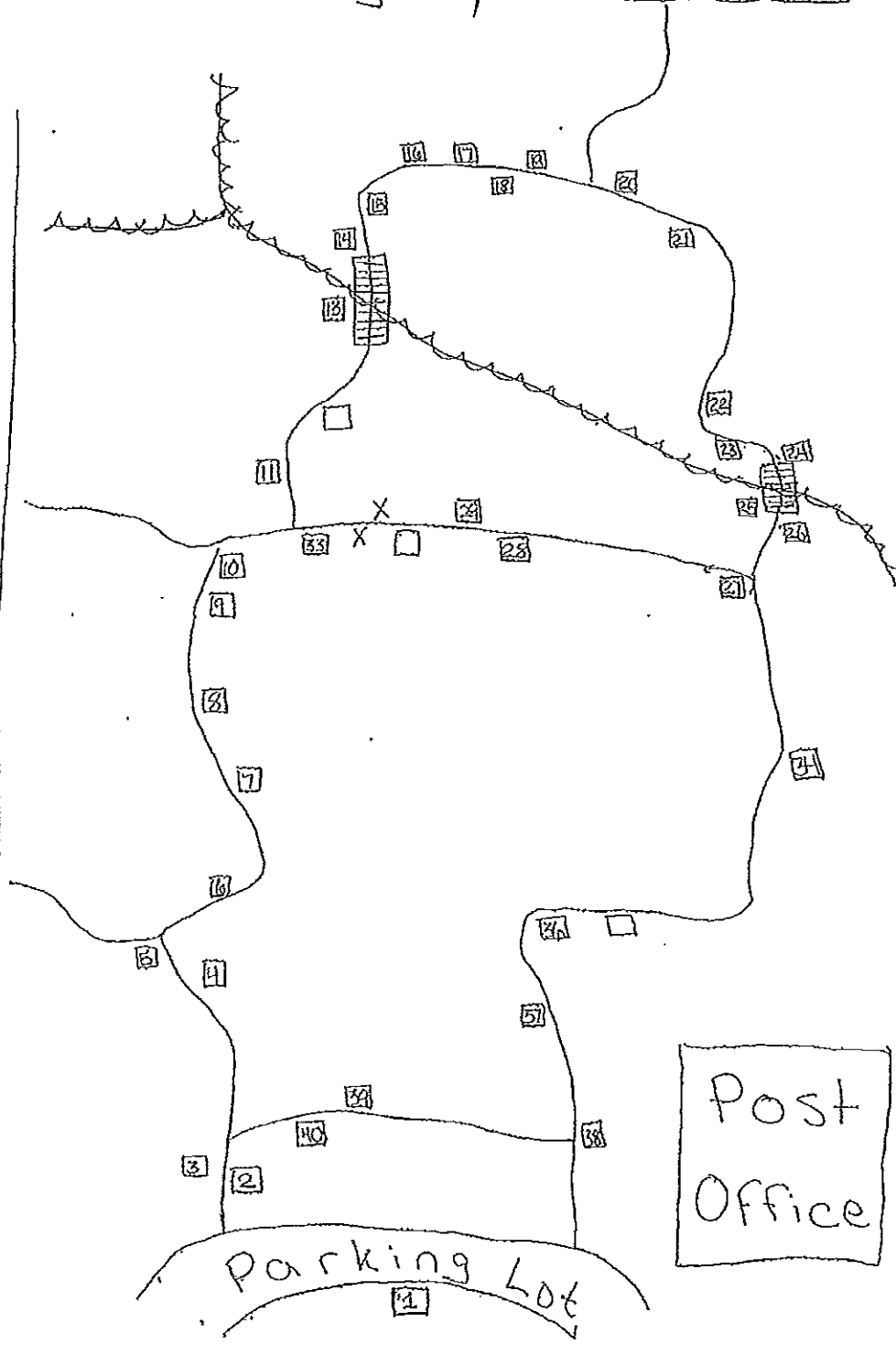


U.S. HWY 98

CITY OF MARY ESTHER
 OAK TREE NATURE PARK
 SITE PLAN

Highway 98

Doolittle



Post Office

Parking Lot

Oak Tree Nature Park Trail

Common Name

Scientific Name

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Hybrid Oaks | 1. Quercus X |
| 2. False Rosemary | 2. Conradina Canescens |
| 3. Slash Pine | 3. Pinus-Elliottii |
| 4. Yaupon Holly | 4. Ilex Vomitoria |
| 5. Sand Pine | 5. Pinus Clausa |
| 6. Staggerbush | 6. Lyonia Ferruginea |
| 7. Saw Palmetto | 7. Serenoa Repens |
| 8. Deer Moss (Lichen) | 8. Cladonia Subtenuis |
| 9. Partridgeberry | 9. Mitchella Repens |
| 10. Laurel Oak | 10. Quercus Laurifolia |
| 11. Deerberry | 11. Vaccinium Stamineum |
| 12. Sourwood | 12. Oxydendrum Arboretum |
| 13. Floodplain Ferns | 13. Osmunda spp., Woodwardia spp |
| 14. Sweet Bay Magnolia | 14. Magnolia Virginiana |
| 15. Hickory | 15. Carya spp |
| 16. Coral Bean | 16. Erythrina Herbacea |
| 17. Mulberry | 17. Morus spp |
| 18. Gum Bumelia | 18. Bumelia Lanuginose |
| 19. Eastern Red Cedar | 19. Juniperus Virginiana |
| 20. Silk Grass | 20. Pityopsis Graminifolia |
| 21. Sweetleaf | 21. Symplocos Tinctoria |
| 22. Wax Myrtle | 22. Myrica Cerifera |
| 23. Chapman Oak | 23. Quercus Chapmannii |
| 24. Red Bay | 24. Persea Borbonia |
| 25. Titi | 25. Cyrilla Racemiflora |
| 26. Winged Sumac | 26. Rhus Copallinum |
| 27. Florida Anise | 27. Illicium Floridanum |
| 28. Buckwheat Tree | 28. Cliftonia Monophylla |
| 29. Southern Magnolia | 29. Magnolia Grandiflora |
| 30. Sand Live Oak | 30. Quercus Geminata |
| 31. Fetterbush | 31. Lyonia Lucida |
| 32. Osmanthus | 32. Osmanthus spp. |
| 33. Beargrass | 33. Yucca Filamantosa |
| 34. Poison Ivy | 34. Toxicodendron Radicans |
| 35. Red Maple | 35. Acer Rubrum |
| 36. Sweet Bay Magnolia | 36. Magnolia Virginiana |
| 37. Tupelo | 37. Nyssa spp. |
| 38. St. Johns Wort | 38. Hypericum Hypericoides |
| 39. Gallberry | 39. Ilex Glabra |