

Proposal for Singletrack Biking/Hiking Trail in Churchill Ranch ESLPP



This document is online at:
www.bikeveniceflorida.com in the Churchill Ranch Section

Note that on April 6, 2017 Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Staff and ESLOC approved this proposal to build the Churchill Ranch Trail. SCORR is progressing on the “Build Timeline.”

**SChristian 3/17/17 Initial Release
5/11/16 Revised Release**

Proposal Summary

The Sarasota County Off Road Riders (SCORR) is requesting permission to design, build & maintain a natural surfaced singletrack biking/hiking trail in portions of the Churchill Ranch ESLPP.

Throughout urban and suburban communities, there is growing demand for natural trails for both hiking and biking. The development of a single track trail in Churchill Ranch property will help meet this demand and contribute to making Sarasota County an even more desirable place to live and do business.

The proposed 5-mile long singletrack trail system will be designed and built for the primary purpose of providing local citizens with an opportunity to experience mountain biking locally. The trail will also be intentionally designed to be mixed-use and therefore will be accessible to and appreciated by people participating in a variety of outdoor activities, including biking, running and hiking.

When completed, the trail system will consist of approximately five miles of natural, mixed-use singletrack trail suitable for beginner-level mountain bikers and other outdoor recreation (see “Defining Singletrack” section for more information). The proposed trail system will also connect with the existing 7.5 mile long Boldlygo singletrack trail at the T. Mabry Carlton Jr. Reserve.

SCORR has agreed to design, build and maintain the proposed trail system in the Churchill Ranch at no cost to Sarasota County. SCORR’s knowledge, resources and volunteer network have helped them create a track record of success in building and maintaining a variety of singletrack trail systems on public lands throughout Sarasota County.

SCORR will provide volunteer labor to build and maintain trails in the Churchill Ranch and will perform any necessary fundraising needed for trail signage and an information kiosk at the trailhead. SCORR will provide ongoing trail maintenance at no cost to Sarasota County.

This document:

1. Introduces key stakeholders for the proposed trail system.
2. Defines ‘singletrack’ trail and outlines the benefits of this type of trail.
3. Describes the growing demand for natural trails in Sarasota County.
4. Provides specific details and a conceptual map of the proposed trail system in the Churchill Ranch.
5. Outlines benefits of a singletrack trail system in Churchill Ranch.
6. Addresses potential concerns about the proposed trail system.
7. Proposes a timeline for the installation of the trail system.
8. Describes existing SCORR singletrack trails.
9. Provides photographic examples of building, maintaining and enjoying SCORR’s singletrack trails.

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Defining Singletrack Trail

The term “mountain bike trail” is used to describe a lot of different types of trails, everything from a smooth, mellow & wide unpaved bike path to the extremely steep, rocky trails that traverse down the sides of mountains.

The proposed mountain bike trail system in the Churchill Ranch will consist of approximately five miles of natural, mixed-use singletrack trail suitable for beginner and intermediate-level mountain bikers (including children) and other activities such as hiking and running.

Definition: Singletrack trails are low-impact trails that consist of local dirt, sediments, and terrain features found in the immediate vicinity of the trail. Singletrack trails tend to wind around obstacles such as trees, large rocks and bushes. Singletrack trails typically blend into the surrounding environment and have a very small footprint in terms of both the amount of space occupied and the actual ecological impact.

Construction: Singletrack trail construction begins by clearing the trail ‘corridor’ of brush, foliage and low-hanging limbs that are in the immediate path of the trail. This ‘corridor’ (the area cleared of brush) of a singletrack trail is typically 2-6 ft. wide by 8 ft. tall and focuses on minimizing ecological impact. After the trail corridor is cleared, the ‘tread’ of the trail is created by clearing a narrow area of leaves, grass, moss, etc. to expose the dirt below. Typically, the ‘tread’ of a singletrack trail is 12 to 18 inches wide and is natural dirt or grass surface. SCORR uses hand tools during the majority of trail construction process.

Maintenance: Singletrack requires regular maintenance to keep the corridor clear of foliage and the tread clear of leaves/debris, but maintenance costs are remarkably low, and seldom involves specialized tools or equipment. Usually, a weed whacker, a leaf blower (or rake) and a hand saw are all that is required to perform singletrack trail maintenance.

Contrasts with Doubletrack Track Trails: In contrast to singletrack trails, doubletrack trails are wider (usually wide enough for four-wheeled vehicles), but require more labor to build and maintain. Singletrack trails are preferred by mountain bikers (and many trail runners and hikers) because they provide a more immersive experience in nature and the tight twists and turns of singletrack offer greater technical challenge.

To see example photos of singletrack and off-road riding in Sarasota County see pages 17 through 20 at the end of this document.

Key Stakeholders

1) SCORR—A volunteer-based organization dedicated to building sustainable trails and creating environmentally responsible off road recreational opportunities in Sarasota County. SCORR builds and maintains the trails with the guidelines set forth by the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) (www.imba.org) founded in 1988. IMBA's network includes 35,000 individual members and at least 750 chapters throughout all 50 U.S. states, most Canadian provinces and 30 other countries. IMBA's efforts include the following:

- Teaching environmentally responsible trail building and trail etiquette practices.
- Encouraging grassroots advocacy, innovative trail management, and volunteer trail work participation.
- Promoting cooperation among different trail user groups.

SCORR has built and maintains existing singletrack bike/hike trails in Sarasota County, including trails at:

- The 7.5 mile long Boldlygo Trail at the Carlton Reserve
- The 5.5 mile long Live Long & Prosper and POLR trail system at the Carlton Ranch
- The 5 mile long Palmetto Trail at Myakka State Forest

2) City of Venice “Bicycle Friendly Community “ initiative—The City of Venice has been designated a “Silver Level” Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. Off-road natural bicycle trails are a consideration when awarding the Bicycle Friendly Community designation.

3) RUN 941—Off-road running events are conducted by the RUN 941 organization on a regular basis. These events use the Boldlygo singletrack trail and other natural trails at the Carlton Reserve and other open spaces.

4) Bike Venice Florida—Promotes local on road and off road cycling via their website (www.bikeveniceflorida.com) and their Facebook Page (Bike Venice Florida). One of the attributes of the local cycling scene is the variety of riding venues.

5) Zoomers Southwest Florida Running and Triathlon Club—Members of the Zoomers often use the existing natural trails for training runs.

6) Friends of the Carlton Reserve—FOCR is engaged in a number of activities that coincide with SCORR's goals.

7) Local Bike Shops—Bike shops benefit from the increased demand for off road bicycles.



Demand for Natural Trails

Based on local, regional and national trends, demand for mixed-use, natural trails is growing, especially in expanding urban and suburban environments, and Sarasota County is no exception.

As a growing number of people live, work and recreate in urban/suburban communities, there is a corresponding growth in the demand for natural areas and natural trails within these communities.

It is in Sarasota County's best interest to establish policies for allowing, managing, and maintaining mixed-use, natural trails in and around the county. The development of natural trails is essential in helping make Sarasota County a desirable place to live and/or run a business, and will help keep Sarasota County competitive with surrounding communities.

Popular singletrack trail spots in Florida

Santos Trail Network— In 1993 local volunteers from the Ocala Mountain Bike Association began building trails on land that is part of the Cross Florida Greenways. Today there are over 85 miles of trails with riding levels for everyone, from children to seniors. These trails are a destination for riders from all over Florida and from all over the nation.

Alafia River State Park trail system—Alafia is one of the most favored off-road biking choices in Florida. This singletrack trail system is built on the rugged terrain of what was once a phosphate mining site and as a result some of the trails have a high level of difficulty. Currently there are about 20 miles of trails at Alafia.

Balm Boyette—This 4900 acre Hillsborough County owned preserve just south of Brandon has no budgeted money and all trails are maintained by SWAMP (SouthWest Association bike Pedalers), at their expense. There are about 25 miles of singletrack plus about 12 miles of doubletrack used to access and connect the trails.

Caloosahatchee Regional Park—11.5 miles of singletrack trails near Alva, FL have been built and are maintained by the Mudcutters. They also have an additional 7.5 miles near Immokalee, FL at Pepper Ranch.

Venice Police bicycle training on Boldlygo

The Venice Police have a fleet of bicycles for their officers. They practice their bicycle handling skills on the Boldlygo Trail at the Carlton Reserve.

Emergence of Mountain Biking as a Youth Sport

Within the last several years, at least 13 states, including Georgia, have established high school mountain bike leagues. Currently there is not a league in Florida but the existing trails at the Carlton Reserve in addition to the proposed Churchill Ranch Trail could serve as the impetus to get local schools involved in a regional initiative.

Bicycling and Running Events

Numerous biking and running events are held on Boldlygo, the existing singletrack trail in the Carlton Reserve. SCORR's annual fund raising event "Piggy's Revenge " is held every year in early January at the Carlton Reserve. The 2017 event had 300 participants.

Benefits of a Singletrack Trail System in Churchill Ranch

- **Promotes healthy, active, outdoor recreation:** Getting outside isn't just fun. It's essential to our well-being. Countless studies show that both exercise and spending time outdoors help promote physical and mental health. Access to singletrack trails in the Churchill Ranch will help community members to engage in activities that contribute positively to their health and quality of life.
- **Multi-use versatility:** The versatility of singletrack trails makes them appreciated by a wide assortment of user groups and skill levels. Singletrack trails increase the accessibility of natural areas for wide a variety of nature-based, activities, such as hiking, bird-watching and trail running. Singletrack trails within the Churchill Ranch will also increase the appeal of the Carlton Reserve by providing an additional destination adjacent to the park.
- **Economic Benefits:** Singletrack attracts new residents, improves retention of residents in community and facilitates commerce at local businesses. Local retailers with opportunity to directly benefit from singletrack trails in south Sarasota County:
 - Real Bikes Venice and Englewood (Bicycles & Accessories)
 - Bicycles International (Bicycles & Accessories)
- **City of Venice Police Department bicycle training venue**
- **Low Installation & Maintenance Costs:** SCORR will build and maintain trails at no cost to Sarasota County.
- **Low Ecological Impact:** Singletrack trails are an intentionally-designed immersive experience in nature. A key purpose of these trails is to provide access to the beauty of nature. Additionally, singletrack trails can help improve the ecological health of natural public areas by providing greater access to hard-to-reach areas and allow public employees and volunteers to remove invasive plant species.
- **Small footprint:** Singletrack trails tend to wind around on themselves, which allows for a substantial amount of recreational trail within relatively small areas. The layout of the singletrack trail system in the Churchill Ranch will be intentionally designed to have minimal negative impact on other recreational spaces in the park.
- **Utilize Existing Assets:** The natural areas within the Churchill Ranch are a natural getaway in a community that is seeing ever expanding development. These areas are a great asset to the community, and will become even more important as the County continues to grow. Currently, without trails to access these areas, they are difficult to fully appreciate and represent an under-utilized asset to the community. A singletrack trail system in the Churchill Ranch will provide the community with an alternate access to the wooded and prairie sections of the park.
- **Lower Crime:** Unused space in a community can serve as a haven for illicit activities. The installation of trails draws unwanted attention to those conducting illicit activities and often causes them to pursue their activities elsewhere. Many communities find that by building recreational trails through urban/suburban woodlands, they bring more people into the woods, and reduce the amount undesirable and illicit activities that occur in those areas.

Proposed Trail System for Churchill Ranch

The following page contains a conceptual map of a possible route for singletrack trails in Churchill Ranch.

This map was designed with the intention of communicating the general idea of the proposed trail system, and should not be considered the actual route of the completed trail system.

The primary intention of this conceptual map is to demonstrate that the trail will be located in the wooded and prairie sections of the park and will have minimal impact on the developed portions.

Since singletrack trail conforms to the natural terrain, it is very difficult to provide an accurate map of the trail prior to the on-the-ground design.

Once the design phase of trail development begins, it will be possible to create an accurate map of the actual route of the trail and submit the map to Sarasota County before beginning actual construction of the trail.

Additionally, until the design process is completed, it is difficult to determine the distance of trail that can be built within the Churchill Ranch but the goal is approximately five miles of singletrack within the park boundaries.

The proposal also includes a spur trail and walk thru gate into the adjacent SWFMWD Schewe Ranch property. A trail along the western border of the Schewe will allow users to access Border Road east of the Eulow private property parcel that abuts the Carlton Ranch.

Installation Cost

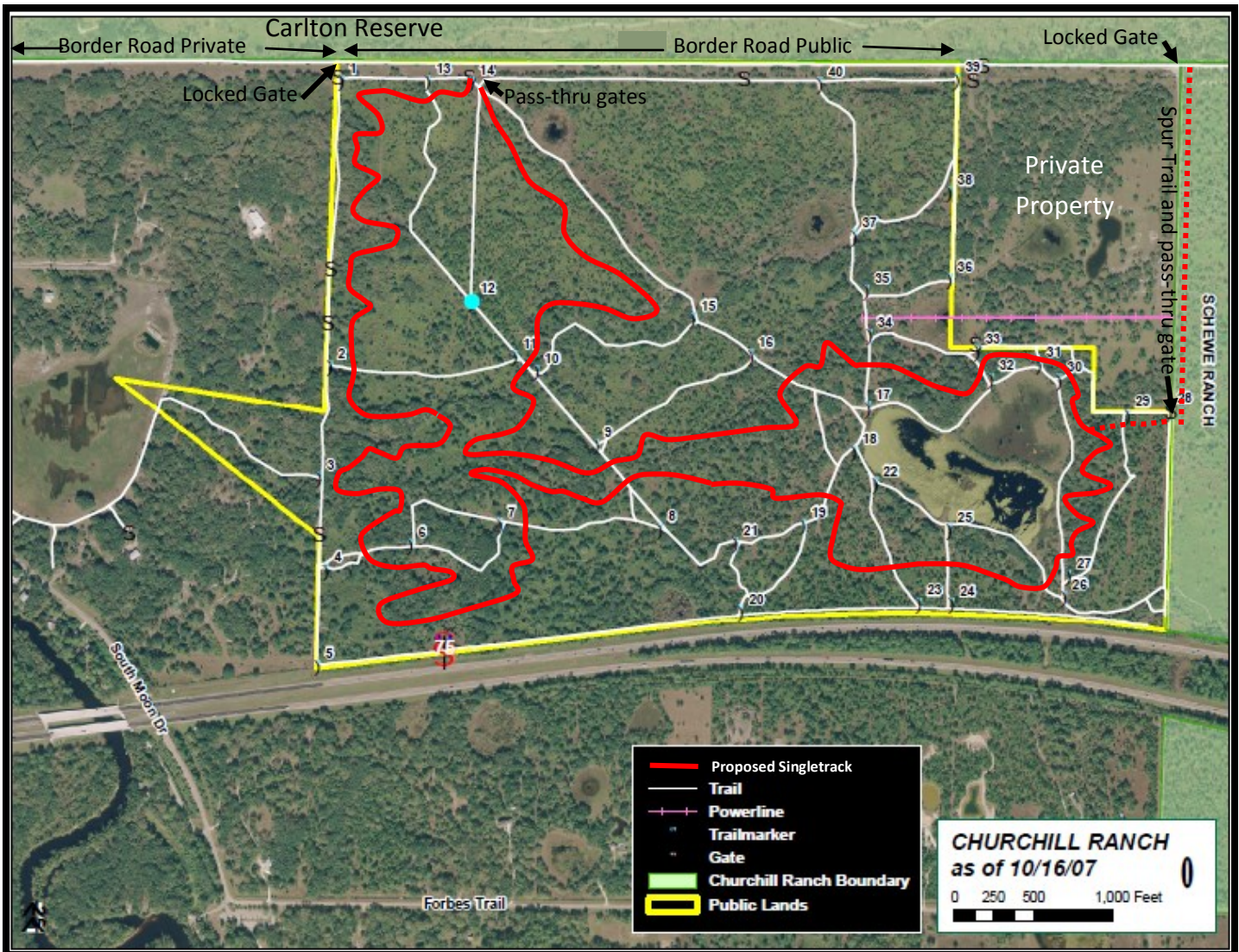
Singletrack trail installation is a labor-intensive activity that, when contracted by a private trail building organization, can cost tens of thousands of dollars per mile of trail. The premier trail building firm in the USA (Trail Solutions) charges approximately \$11,000 per mile to design and build beginner-level trails. SCORR has agreed to provide a similar level of service at no cost to Sarasota County.

SCORR's primary fund raising mechanism is their annual "Piggy's Revenge" off road cycling event that is held in January. These funds allow SCORR to pay for professional consultation, when needed, and provide ongoing trail maintenance at no cost to Sarasota County.

Difficulty level

Mountain bike trail systems often utilize a difficulty rating system similar to those used in cross country and downhill skiing. According to the scale used by IMBA, the proposed trail system in Churchill Ranch will have a difficulty rating in the Green Circle ("Easy") to Blue Square ("More Difficult") range.

Proposed location of singletrack trail at Churchill ESLLP



The primary intention of this conceptual map is to demonstrate that the trail will be located in the wooded and prairie sections of the park and will have minimal impact on the developed portions. Since singletrack trail conforms to the natural terrain, it is very difficult to provide an accurate map of the trail prior to the on-the-ground design. A pass-thru gate and a spur trail (designated by a dotted red line) are also proposed to avoid a locked gate into the private property parcel on Border Road .

Necessary Signage

SCORR will utilize sponsorships, and other fundraising vehicles to pay for the costs of trail marking and signage. SCORR will use signs identical in design to the ones used on the adjacent Boldlygo trail system. The proposed trail system in Churchill Ranch will require a variety of types of signs. At a minimum, SCORR will utilize signs to address the following:

Trailhead: A kiosk will provide users with a large-scale map of the trail system and guidelines regarding the use of the trails, such as:

- **Multi-use trails:** These trails are intended for mountain biking, hiking and running. People of all ages and abilities use these trails. Be mindful, be careful and be respectful of other users.
- **Yield Appropriately:** Strive to make each pass a safe and courteous one— a friendly greeting or bell ring are good methods of letting others know of your presence on the trail. Try to anticipate other trail users as you ride around corners. Bicyclists should yield to other users.
- **Trails Closed When Wet:** Riding, running or walking on wet trails will damage trails. Wait approximately 24 hours after significant rain before using the trail. Trails may be closed during the summer rainy season. When in doubt, check the SCORR website to see the current status of local trails: www.scorriders.com
- **Control Your Bicycle:** Inattention for even a moment could put yourself and others at risk. Pay special attention at intersections. Ride within your limits.
- **Non-Motorized Trail:** This trail system is for non-motorized traffic only.
- **Animal Rules:** No horses. No dogs. Respect wildlife. Animals are easily startled by an unannounced approach, a sudden movement or a loud noise. Give animals enough room and time to adjust to you.
- **Directional use:** This is singletrack trail. Travel is permitted in both clockwise and counter-clockwise directions.
- **Major Intersections:** Warning signs will be posted where the trail approaches significant intersections. “Back to Parking” signs will be posted to direct users back to the parking lot at the Carlton Reserve. Since major intersections could also be used as entrance points to the trail system, signs will be posted at these locations directing users to the trailhead where they can access additional information about the trail.
- **Unexpected or potentially-dangerous obstacles:** Signs will be placed well in advance of any unexpected or potentially-dangerous obstacles in the path of the trail thus giving bike riders opportunity to slow down and dismount if necessary.

Proposed Timeline

April 2017: Introduce Singletrack Proposal to Sarasota County

May 2017: Approval by Sarasota County

June 2017: Trail route finalized and approved

July 2017: Begin construction of trails with volunteer workforce (weather dependent)

Ongoing after construction begins: Sections open for use as construction is completed including signs.

December 2017: Trail construction completed

December 2017: Signs and trail kiosk installed

January 2018: Grand opening event coincident with Piggy's Revenge 2018

From completion of the trail building phase onward:

- SCORR performs routine trail maintenance.
- SCORR will post "Trail Closed" signs when wet conditions exist that prevent trail usage.
- On-going, open communication between SCORR and Sarasota County.
- SCORR requests approval from Parks & Rec. for any major trail improvement or expansion projects
- Sarasota County contacts SCORR with issues regarding the trails (complaints, etc.) and provides opportunity for SCORR to help resolve those issues.

Concerns Regarding Singletrack Trails

A number of concerns arise surrounding the installation and use of singletrack. This section seeks to provide accurate and research-based information about those concerns:

- **Trail Costs:**

One concern is whether Sarasota County will need to pay for trail construction and maintenance. SCORR will arrange trail design, complete construction utilizing a volunteer workforce and perform routine trail maintenance. Where necessary (for example for trailhead kiosk and trail signs) SCORR will acquire funding through grants and/or fundraising.

- **Environmental Concerns:**

There are some misconceptions that trail construction damages trees or creates erosion. SCORR agrees to abide by IMBA trail building standards to prevent damage to the environment. IMBA standards have been scientifically tested and have been proven to minimize ecological impact.

- **Impacts to Wildlife:**

Some fear that the use of the trail will scare away the wildlife. Singletrack trails marginally impact the environment and research suggests that this disruption has minimal effect on wildlife; often wildlife will actually utilize the trails.

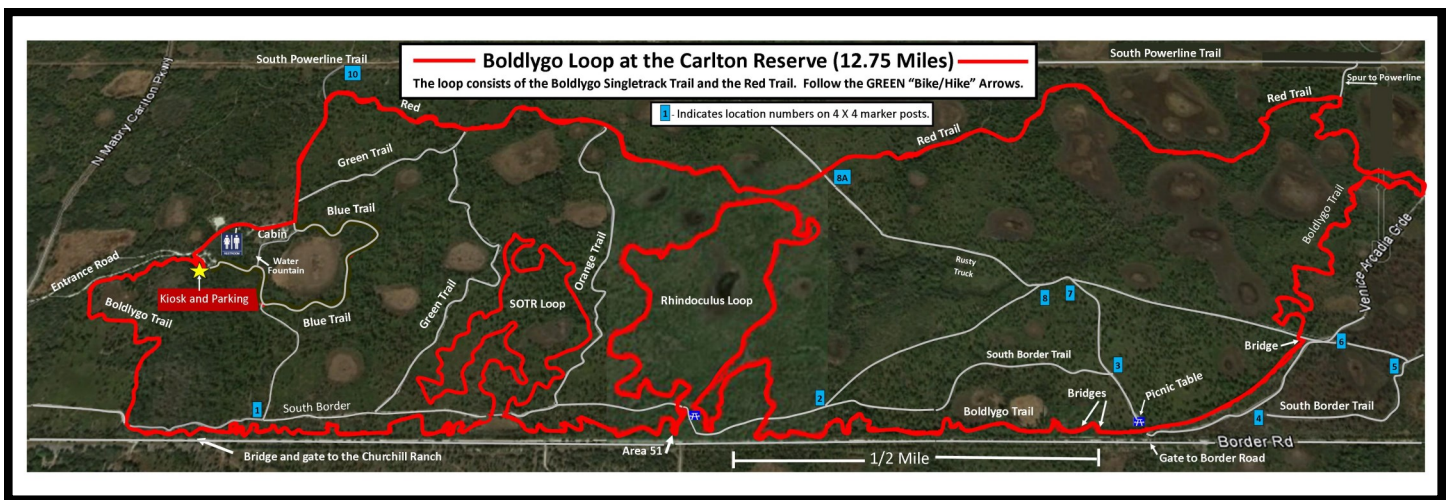
- **Automobile Parking & Bicycle Accessibility:**

The existing automobile parking lot at the Carlton Reserve will provide more than enough space for trail users who choose to drive to access the trails. The trailhead for the Churchill Ranch will be a 1 mile ride/hike on existing trails from the public parking area at the Carlton Reserve. Additionally, there are existing paved bike lanes on local roads which provide local cyclists with the opportunity to ride from home to access the singletrack trails in the Carlton Reserve and the Churchill Ranch. SCORR will provide additional information on the existing Boldlygo Trail kiosk to inform users of the Churchill Trail and how to access it.

Existing singletrack trails that SCORR has built and maintains.

The Carlton Complex of Sarasota County, Florida, includes the T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve consisting of 24,500 acres of environmental lands, and the Carlton Ranch Fee Parcel bordering Carlton Reserve immediately to the east and containing another 4700 acres. The main entrance to Carlton Reserve (1800 Mabry Carlton Pkwy, Venice, FL) is just off Border Road in Venice. The Carlton Ranch is accessible from Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park (MCEP) (6968 Reistertown Road, North Port), or at its northern boundary from an entrance on SR 72. It is also accessible via the Carlton Reserve along its shared border. The Carlton Complex contains more than 100 miles of double track trails. It is also home to 13 miles of single-track biking/hiking trails that have been built and are maintained by SCORR in cooperation with Sarasota County - Boldlygo, the Live Long and Prosper trails, and POLR (Path of Least Resistance).

Boldlygo - Our most popular singletrack trail, starts at the Carlton Reserve parking area. Check out the map on the kiosk and then dive right in. Over 7.5 miles of fun, twisty riding make it the centerpiece of the trail network. There are signs to guide you forward, bailout points along the way, bypass trails, and picnic tables for taking a break. Riding out on the Boldlygo trail and returning on the marked Carlton Red trail will give you an 11 mile loop (with plenty of opportunities to add miles along the way!). Just follow the arrows on the Red trail back to the parking lot. You can find the Boldlygo trail on MapmyRide.com and on [Strava](https://www.strava.com).

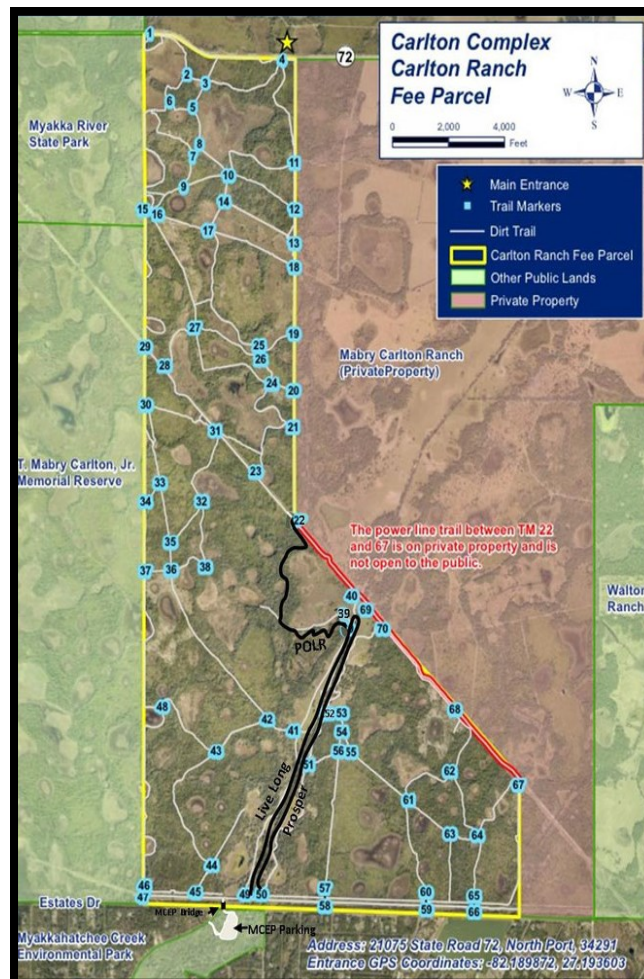


This Boldlygo map was updated on 5.11.17 to show the SOTR Loop and to more clearly indicate connector trails and location markers

Existing SCORR singletrack trails continued.

Live Long and Prosper Trails - These technical singletrack trails extend along the banks of the Big Slough Canal, which is a man-made canal dating to the 1940's. They are located in the Carlton Ranch, which borders Carlton Reserve to the east as part of the Carlton Complex. Live Long, extending along the western bank of the slough, is a fun and challenging technical ride in mature oak and palm canopy on mogul hills and dips, all dating back to the construction of the canal. It is generally of intermediate difficulty, and features jumps, twists, tight turns, roots, logs, ledges and sections seemingly overhanging the bank of the slough. Prosper, running along the eastern side of the slough, is slightly less technical (still of intermediate difficulty), and a somewhat faster ride with features similar to Live Long. You can ride (or hike) each of these trails out and back separately for a total of nearly 8 miles of sweet singletrack. Or for the more adventuresome, when water levels are suitably low (use your judgment!), the water crossing at the end of Live Long can be ridden for a return via the Prosper trail, for a four mile single loop ride.

POLR (Path of Least Resistance) - The POLR trail begins near the north end of Live Long (about 200 yards to the southwest). It provides a 1.5 mile singletrack connection to the North Power Line Trail (NPLT). POLR can either be ridden as an out and back or as part of a loop including double track trails that connect back to the SPLT. The POLR trail winds thru oak and pine canopy. Be aware that the trail passes through wild pig territory. You may catch a glimpse of them and though they are not generally aggressive toward people, you may encounter the damage that they can do to the trails.



Existing SCORR singletrack trails continued.

Palmetto Trail—This singletrack is a 5 mile dash to the Myakka River (10 miles out and back) through the heart of the Myakka State Forest. The trail twists and turns under tall pines and through palmetto beds for a fun and enjoyably challenging ride, culminating with a wilderness view of the river. Allow 1.5 hours (depending on your speed). Start at the parking lot for the entrance to Myakka State Forest at 8938 E. River Road, Venice, FL 34293-7629. A modest donation of \$2 at the trailhead helps the rangers maintain the state forest. There are signs that will get you started and guide you out and back.

Palmetto Singletrack Trail (5 Miles in length one way) at the Myakka State Forest



**Built by SCORR members with no cost to the Myakka State Forest.
Completed May 2014. Accessible off of East River Road, 1 mile
south of US 41 in North Port, FL.**

Contact Information:

For additional information, please contact:

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This proposal can be found online at www.bikeveniceflorida.com in the Churchill Ranch section.

Current SCORR Board of Directors:

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Walt Rossman

Steve Christian

Acknowledgements:

This proposal was created using a variety of resources and reference materials from online sources and otherwise. We make no claim that the content of this document is original or unique. Specifically, much of content & organization for this proposal was taken from the Sun Prairie Bicycle Advisory Group and Capital Off Road Pathfinders proposal for a singletrack trail at Sheehan Park in Sun Prairie, WS. We acknowledge their contribution to this document and thank them for their cooperation.

Photos of SCORR singletrack trails and activities



The Enchanted Forest on POLR



Boldlygo with Charles Hines



Rolling on Live Long



All Smiles



A workday is a family affair



Prosper just north of MCEP



Palmetto Trailhead briefing at Myakka State Forest



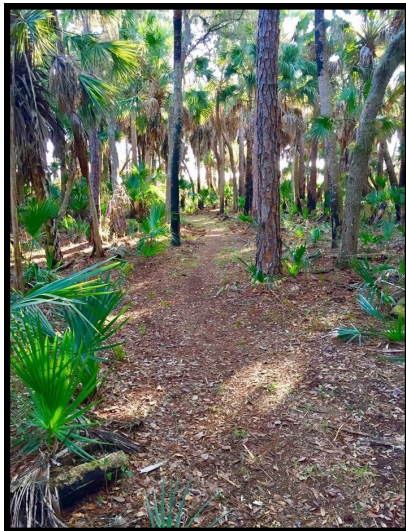
Natural trails are for everybody



Palmetto Trail at Myakka State Forest



Building bridges



Red Trail through a hammock



A trail had been hiding in those Palmettos



The trail is taking shape



Before....



After....



Trail-building support and Boldlygo kiosk



Entering Area 51 on Boldlygo



Singletracking on Prosper



Taking a well deserved break



A singletrack celebration at Piggy's Revenge



Fat tires rule



Chasing a friend



It's all a blur



Kids love riding singletrack in the woods