

Rockdale Pineland Preserve



“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.

- John Muir

Pine Rockland

Pine Rockland is a designated globally imperiled habitat that occurs only in southern Miami-Dade County, the Florida Keys, and some islands of the Bahamas. Over 225 types of native plants occur here and more than 20% of the plant species are found here and nowhere else in the world. Five of these plant species are federally listed as threatened or endangered. These pinelands, interspersed with hardwood hammocks, once covered 180,000 acres of Miami-Dade County. By the time the city of Miami celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1996, only 2% of the pine forest remained, most of it within the protective border of Everglades National Park and within a few state and county preserves. From the air, remaining pineland fragments appear scattered across Miami-Dade's industrial, residential, and agricultural landscape, looking less like a forest than like islands of trees in a sea of urbanization.

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By 1985, the County had identified the 39-acre Rockridge pineland on bustling US #1 as a place worth saving. Staff of the Miami-Dade Dept. of Environmental Resources Management convinced the State to place the site on the list of conservation lands eligible for acquisition, but there was so much land on the list and so little money. Every time a development proposal for the site was presented to the County for review, staff negotiated for the protection of 4 or 5 acres of pineland in conjunction with the development.

The final development proposal for the site was part of a plan to add express bus lanes to US #1. The bus lanes would sweep through the middle of the site, and frontage on US #1 would be developed for businesses. An innocuous little plant changed those plans. The deltoid spurge (see photo) grows only in the lime rock of Rockridge pinelands. Its status as an endangered species precluded the use of the land for road construction. The busway was relocated to the edge of the property and pineland. The EEL Program was able to purchase the property with 50% matching funds from the State's Preservation 2000 program.