



The Mysterious "Capone Island" Deerfield Island Park

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Nestled along the Intracoastal Waterway at the border of Boca Raton and Deerfield Beach, Florida, rests this 56-acre designated Urban Wilderness Area. Deerfield Island Park, formerly known as Capone Island, is a triangular-shaped body of island bounded by the Hillsboro Canal along its southwest side, the Intracoastal Waterway on the east and the Royal Palm Canal on the north.

In the early 1930's, gangster and mob lord, Al Capone purchased the island for its vast seclusion.

The now heavily populated area was once mainly unsettled and the island provided the perfect setting for him to carry about his activities in secrecy. Legend has it that in 1934 Capone fell in love with Carmella Cantella, a leading lady in the Italian opera, while she toured the Jackson Opera House just outside of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Enamored by her beauty, he ordered his men to kidnap her and it is believed she was held on the island for some time.

Arvida Corp., in 1959, preserved Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club's interest in this mysterious habitat by securing a 50 ft. strip along the north side that lies within Palm Beach County. This action would assure the twenty or so homes in Royal Palm, directly across from Capone Island, uninterrupted enjoyment of the tranquil views and sounds of nature. Further restrictions were imposed limiting the use of the property for single-family residences in exchange for an easement granted by Arvida.

Title to the island in 1965 was and had been for many years in Florida Inland Navigation District, the local agency that cooperates with the federal government in consulting and maintaining the Intracoastal Waterway. By act of legislature, provision was made to declare the island surplus and convey it to the State for recreational purposes. In an agreement dated August 23, 1966, the Florida Inland Navigation District conveyed a 99 year right to the State for use of the island as a park and recreation area.

In 1971, there was a proposed plan to construct a bridge for service vehicles across the Hillsboro Canal on the southwest side of the island linking it with the Deerfield Beach mainland. The state legislature had also granted Florida Atlantic University a five-acre tract within Broward County's proposed recreational park for use as an oceanographic center. Realization of the park and oceanographic center depended upon the construction of the access bridge. Before this could take place, the county had to provide another water route for boat traffic from Cee Bee Marina. The original plan called for deepening the Royal Palm Canal to accommodate increased traffic along this route. This proposal met with strong opposition from the residents of Royal Palm and the City of Boca.

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Sketch from Sun Sentinel article, dated 6/23/71, depicting the proposed access bridge and new canal.



Shuttle transport to the island, located at Sullivan Park in Deerfield Beach.

the island, but again opposition was met as the plan would leave the 50 ft. Arvida owned buffer strip a separate, narrow island. The envisioned usage was never realized and, to date, the park remains accessible only by water vessel.

This heavily wooded area provides a critical habitat for the threatened gopher tortoise and is a nesting place for squirrels, raccoons, and armadillos. It is also used by both migratory and indigenous sea birds as a roosting and feeding place. Over the years, what was once marsh and pineland transformed into a coastal strand mangrove community and some of its land has succumbed to invasive non-native species such as Brazilian Pepper and Australian Pine. Native habitat restoration is underway at the park.

Deerfield Island Park offers a variety of amenities for visitors to enjoy. Among them include a 2000 ft. boardwalk, half mile coquina trail, three quarter mile mangrove trail, an observation platform overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway, picnic areas, shelters and a six-slip marina (available on a first-come, first serve basis). Primitive group camping is available for some nonprofit groups only. There are also nature walks, bird walks and other nature-oriented programs available. For additional information, please contact the Deerfield Island office at (954) 360-1320.