



SWEET GUM



BLACK GUM

THE GUM SWAMP BOARDWALK....

...is inside the entrance of the Main Trail across Parish Parkway from Mary's Grotto and down the first path on the right.

We believe the Gum Swamp is the result of clay mining by the Salmen Brick and Lumber Company during the first two decades of the twentieth century. A temporary railroad called a "dummy line" went into these woods from the main rail line that crossed St. Tammany Parish, what later became the Tammany Trace Bike Trail. It was used to remove the timber and brought in a drag-line to scrape away the topsoil to reveal ancient clay deposits that were dug out and taken to Salmen's brick factory in Slidell. If you look to the left at the beginning of the Gum Swamp Boardwalk you can see down what is probably the edge of the railroad embankment.

This low ground forms a basin that holds rainwater and slowly feeds it into Goldfish Bayou on the way to Bayou Liberty. This periodic flooding reduces the number of small plants competing for space on the forest floor and keeps the ground wet enough for a semi-wet pine flatwood and a gum swamp populated by moisture-loving trees like the Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) and Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). You can tell the Black Gum by their flared trunks, wrinkly grey bark and pointed leaves and the Sweet Gum by their five-pointed leaves and spiky, round seedpods they drop all over the place in fall and winter. Both trees are among the first to lose their leaves at the end of summer.

The moisture here gives these woods a unique ecological character. Common species are club mosses (Lycopodiopsida), a kind of tall grass with a round white flower called Lady's Hat Pin (*Syngonanthus flavidulus*), Red Swamp Bay (*Persea borbonia*) and May haw (*Crataegus aestivales*). The animals that like to live in these woods or pay an occasional visit include blue-tailed skink, armadillos, eastern grey squirrels, several snake species, deer and many kinds of birds.

Free maps of our trail system are in the main pavilion.